

Panel # 343/ Paper #1:

The Riung Conservation Area in Flores, Indonesia: Lessons from Failure in Improving Governance, Managing Conflicts, and Inducing Institutional Reform¹

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Background and Context

The Riung Conservation area is located on the North Coast of the Ngada District on the island of Flores, in the Nusa Tenggara region of Eastern Indonesia. The area is a mosaic of forests interspersed with grasslands and a patchwork of small farms sloping downwards to the sea. The coastal zone of Riung is dotted with a number of small islands harboring outstanding reefs and marine life. Since the early 1980's several protected areas have been designated in Riung including a terrestrial nature reserve, a protection forest, a marine nature reserve, and a marine recreational park. Riung's unique geography is one of the reasons that conservationist's are eager to protect its biodiversity. The local government is also interested in developing this area into a tourist resort.

A number of original tribes settled the uplands at one time, but have since been resettled along the coast. Several fishing communities from Sulawesi and Selayar have also migrated to the area in more recent times. Facing recurring droughts and harvest failures, in the late 1980's, communities along the coast began converting forested areas back into gardens in order to ensure their survival. Ever since, government agencies responsible for the protection and management of these protected areas have tried to enforce existing laws to curb the encroachment. Squeezed between the coastal and terrestrial reserves, these communities have had little choice but to clash with government.

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The Research and Mediation Process

This conflict was brought to the attention of the Nusa Tenggara Community Development Consortium (NTCDC), a multi-stakeholder network, by Sannusa, a local NGO working in the area. The NTCDC, through Koppesda⁴, then initiated an area wide participatory action research (PAR) and conflict resolution effort involving all stakeholders, including the seven villages in the area and several key agencies of the district government. The Ngada District Planning Board (*Bappeda*) was formally appointed to coordinate this initiative. The aim of this effort was to identify natural resource conflicts and to prepare the stakeholders to negotiate comprehensive solutions. In the process, a myriad of conflicts beyond the initial dispute around the land-clearings in the protected forest were uncovered, including many horizontal conflicts within the government and among the communities.

A team consisting of staff of several offices of the Ngada district government, local and international NGOs, and a university researcher facilitated the field research. The communities responded enthusiastically and eagerly participated in the research process, which began at the hamlet level and gradually scaled-up to the area wide level. The research was quite successful in several ways; it mapped out the stakeholders and most of the natural resource conflicts, it elevated the stakeholders' awareness about the conflicts and about each other, it built the necessary information base for negotiation and planning, and it helped the communities organize a representative team to face the government. Based on the results of the research, the mediation process was initiated in a week-long negotiation and planning workshop.

The research and mediation process was successful in generating agreements on most of the contentious issues, with the exception of the original conflict on land-clearings, and implementation plans were formulated during a multi-stakeholder meeting in August 2000. However, despite a well designed participatory process involving all stakeholders, more than two years after the agreements were signed only a few agreements were actually implemented. During this time, responsibility to coordinate follow-up to the agreements was shifted from the District Planning Board to the newly formed District Environmental Protection Agency (*Bappedalda*).

⁴ Koppesda was a team formed by the NTCDC to coordinate its research on natural resource issues. Members of this team later established this team as an independent NGO.

In the context of the recent policy changes in Indonesia toward decentralization and local autonomy, it was expected that the project would provide the district government with the opportunity to adopt a more collaborative bottom-up approach, in effect reforming their institutions from the top-down and centralistic approach of the New Order Government. Why was it then that the implementation of the agreements was so weak and the government went back to business as usual? While the agreements provided many opportunities for communities to make significant gains in the recognition of their access rights to natural resources, why did they also neglect to initiate follow-up? These questions have concerned the key agencies involved in this effort and are the focus of analysis of this paper.

The Current Situation

Based on the latest reports, the management of the land-clearings under dispute is currently less intensive than it was before the mediation process, and there is a trend toward abandoning the land-clearings altogether and only to harvest some of the cash crops such as candlenut. This change in land use is apparently due to the distance of the land-clearings to the villages, and likely to the closing canopy of cash crops preventing more intensive food production. Presently only a few farmers are squatting in the land-clearings to plant food crops because their cash crops still need tending. Farmers who left the land-clearings are now reported to be occupying government lands in the nature reserve area closer to their village settlements. There are also reports that migrants from outside the area have now started to occupy these government lands as well.

Law enforcement by the conservation agency that has jurisdiction over these areas, is very weak. There is some speculation that the recent encroachment was stimulated by the possibility of the redefinition of the nature reserve's boundaries, which was discussed during the mediation process. Besides this key issue, many of the problems outside the land-clearings also remain unresolved. For instance, conflicts regarding the green belt area along the coast, the marine nature reserve, the government plans for tourism, and many issues concerning government development programs in the area remain unresolved although the process to address these issues at the field level had been agreed upon.

During this past year (2004), that is almost four years after the agreements were reached, the District Environmental Protection Agency (*Bappedala*) finally reconvened a meeting of the

stakeholders involved in the initial mediation process to discuss what to do. During this meeting, the agreements were not reviewed but were left as they stand. Instead, the participants reviewed all the agreed upon activities, decided on new priorities, and formulated new implementation plans. The weak implementation over the last four years was acknowledged, but all parties avoided discussing reasons for the lack of follow-up. While avoiding the danger of laying blame should be commended, the lack of critical reflection on past failures might well mean that the same mistakes will be repeated again in the coming years. Whether implementation will be more successful still remains to be seen.

Analysis and Reflection

The research and mediation process lasted eight months at a cost of approximately 250 million rupiahs (about US\$ 23,000 in 2000⁵) excluding staff time and the time of community members. While an evaluation conducted directly after the process showed that participants were satisfied and had learned much, the key stakeholders quickly lapsed back into their daily routines. In short, like the surgeon who was successful carrying out her surgery but lost the patient, the research and mediation process was implemented true to its design with participation of nearly all of the key stakeholders but failed short of achieving most of its main objectives. The nearly complete lack of follow-up to a well thought out process design leading to the agreements has stimulated much debate among the agencies and individuals involved in the effort and continues to be a tremendous source of learning. The following reflection on this case is a search for a better understanding of the possible reasons for these failures.

A Critical Review of the Agreements, and the Research and Mediation Process

Negotiations among the stakeholders were conducted during a week long workshop in February 2000. The process design enabled representatives from forest margin communities and government agencies to meet in thematic discussion groups interspersed with plenary sessions and separate internal meetings of the representative teams. A 62-point agreement was formulated in a document that was to be signed by all parties. However, shortly before the signing ceremony, several government representatives refused to sign the agreement, claiming that both the community representatives and they themselves had no legal authority to do so. In

⁵ Due to the inflation triggered by the Asian economic crisis, the exchange rate at the time reached Rp.11.000/ 1 US \$

the end, a compromise was reached to sign the document as an agreement among participants of the workshop, in effect only granting the fact that the event had taken place.

Table 1. Conflicts Identified in Riung Conservation Area

Land rights and tribal issues	Wolotadho Nature Reserve	Land clearings within the protected forests	Seventeen Islands Marine Recreation Park, Riung Marine Nature Reserve	Development of tourism and green-belt area	Economics, agriculture, livestock, and plantations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tribal area boundary disputes among tribes/ clans • Administrative boundaries cutting across tribal boundaries • Leadership disputes among clans/factions within the tribes • Certification, sale, and donation of tribal land to outsiders without consent from the tribe • Construction of public buildings on tribal lands without the consent of the tribes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wolotadho is not recognized by local people - Wewotadho is proposed • Boundary markers deviating from official government map • Reserve boundaries include agricultural land and residential areas • Construction of public infrastructure projects within the nature reserve • Illegal logging and hunting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protected forest declared as state-land by the Government, claimed as tribal land by the people of Riung • Gardens do not follow agreed upon soil and water conservation practices • Expansion of existing land clearings and opening of new ones • Competition among different tribes in the opening of new land clearings • Burning of grasslands by the people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illegal fishing in the nature reserve; Use of explosives and poisons • Declining fish catch; competition among fishermen; • Use of fish-traps – promoted by the Fisheries Service, but forbidden by the Conservation Service • Harvesting coral and mangrove for natural dyes • Unfair competition of boat owners and local guides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local residents uninformed about tourism development plans; concerns about limited local benefits, fear of displacement • Temporary markers for area planning placed without people's consent or understanding • Residential areas included in the "green belt" area where no permanent buildings are allowed • Land certification in the "green belt" officially not allowed, but exceptions made 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loose cattle destroying gardens • Distribution of irrigation water during dry season • Imposition and failure of various government projects • Lack of agricultural extension services • Dysfunctional farmer groups and cooperatives • Unfair distribution of agricultural credit • Outstanding agricultural loans • No veterinary assistance from the Livestock Service during disease outbreaks

The agreement was deliberately formulated not to include any specific time frames so that implementation could be planned more realistically according to the availability of resources, and thus not put pressure on government to make firm commitments. Although the implementation plans were quite ambitious, and perhaps not realistic, the plans were documented separately and not included in the agreement. Furthermore, all points in the agreement were discussed with representatives of all the parties. In a critical review of the agreements, it is clear that most of the agreements provided increased opportunities for the government to achieve many of their sectoral program goals more effectively, albeit perhaps not exactly in the way they had planned. While some points in the agreement did not directly resolve all of the related issues, programmatic steps for further collaboration in resolving those

issues were outlined. Despite the fact that the 62 point agreement covered a wide range of issues and was quite comprehensive, it should have provided a basis and the necessary benefits for multi-party collaboration.

The research and mediation process, which became the road map for the program outlined the general stages and steps for helping the parties develop an adequate information base for negotiation and planning, prepare the stakeholders, and gradually bring them together to a negotiation and planning forum. This process was designed based on many considerations, including general conflict resolution principles to anticipate many of the different possible constraints. Despite such a carefully planned mediation process however, the refusal of government to sign the agreement was perhaps one of the first signs of a breakdown that led to weak implementation. Unfortunately, at the time this was not interpreted as such. A number of constraints encountered in the process are now seen in a new light as having had a major influence on the outcomes and implementation of the agreements.

1) Bureaucratic & Political Constraints: Internal Weaknesses in the District Government.

The sectoral agencies of the Ngada district government responsible for the various programs related to natural resources (forestry, agriculture, public works, land administration, tourism, conservation) in the Riung area were the main stakeholders from the government's side. In working with the district government some of the considerations related to the political and bureaucratic constraints within the local government.

The research and mediation process could only succeed with the support of the local government, and to involve all stakeholders and gain the commitment of the various government agencies, political support was needed. This had become clear during a previous attempt by Sannusa to involve government agencies in a similar process involving only one village, the coastal village of Sambinasi bordering the marine nature reserve.

Another constraint anticipated was the sectoral fragmentation of the district government itself. The planning and coordination of each sector, and in general the coordination across sectors in the planning process of the government was generally weak, and even before the field

research was conducted it was already clear that many of the conflicts were rooted in the jurisdictional conflicts and policy inconsistencies among the various government agencies.

To overcome these constraints, the two initiating NGOs – Sannusa and Koppesda – with the help of the chief of the district Forest Service lobbied the District Planning Board. They were successful in gaining the support of the Secretary of the District Planning Board, who in turn helped the group set up a meeting with the *Bupati* (District Head). The Bupati was quite supportive and decided to issue a formal decree to form a core group consisting of the heads of relevant agencies to oversee the initiative. He also appointed the District Planning Board as the implementing agency, and other members of the research and mediation team.

This decree provided a political umbrella for the effort, a directive for all government agencies to participate in the process, and a mandate for the implementing team to start its work. The appointment of the District Planning Board as the agency responsible for the project was perceived as a means to overcome the existing policy gaps among the different sectoral agencies as this agency is formally responsible for the coordination of district level planning.

Confident that this decree provided adequate political support, the team began to organize the research team and process. The first activity was the training of the field team, and the Bupati personally attended the opening ceremony of the initial training. As part of this training, the team developed a participatory research design, which was then implemented in the seven villages.

During the research process it soon became apparent that the decree of the district head was not adequate. First, despite their formal appointment by the *Bupati* as the highest authority in the district, some of the research members dropped out early, giving for a reason that their primary responsibilities with their own agencies needed attention. When the research coordinator brought up the problem with the project leader, he was reluctant to take any action. This reluctance was related to the fact that he ranked lower in the hierarchy than the agency heads whose staff dropped out.

During the various coordination meetings, which were called by the District Planning Board, members of the core team often failed to attend and instead they sent lower ranking staff to attend in their place. Apparently, the invitations signed by the appointed project leader, a section head within the District Planning Board, were not perceived as very important. To over-

come this, the project leader had to obtain the signature of the head of his office. When this also proved ineffective, he tried to obtain the signature of the Secretary of the District Government, the second highest ranking official in the district. However, when the agency heads found out that the project leader would chair the meeting, again they would send lower ranking staff without decision making authority. As it turned out, the staff attending the meetings failed to effectively report to their supervisors.

To make matters worse, near the end of the field research and before the final negotiations, the Bupati came to the end of his term, and the District Parliament (DPRD) elected a new Bupati. Due to opposition of some political factions within the local parliament he was not immediately inaugurated, and the District Secretary had to function as the temporary caretaker. While the District Secretary was knowledgeable and personally supportive of the research and mediation project, he had little authority over the District agency Heads.

When the politics were resolved and the new Bupati was inaugurated, the team presented the general outlines of the project and requested him to lead the government's negotiation team. Stating that, as the head of the district he should be impartial, he refused to represent the local government and even denied the existence of conflicts between the government and the people.

The result of all this was that during the process leading up to the negotiations, there was a lack of internal discussion and communication within the District Government prior to the negotiations. Slightly before the negotiations, the District Planning Board did call a meeting of the district level agencies to discuss the initial findings of the field research; however, only a few district agency heads showed up while other agencies sent second tier staff. Their response to the problems and conflicts presented was only that they had to report back to their superiors. Thus no meaningful discussion among the agencies occurred.

It was only during the negotiation workshop when horizontal conflicts among the government agencies could no longer be avoided that the agency heads started to discuss the issues among themselves. But by that time it was already too late. Under stress by the limited time and the pressure of the communities' demands they had to respond individually without prior coordination among themselves. Given that local government staff formally participated in the research process and in the negotiation and planning workshop as representatives of their respective agencies, the agreement and implementation plans were also the result of their

agencies. However, as previously stated the agreement was not signed as a legally binding document, and while it was argued that it would be morally binding, nearly all of the agencies failed to follow through. Thus, the negotiations ended in a superficial agreement and not a legally binding one or one based on mutual commitment.

Apparently, the participation of the government officials in the negotiations was not genuine as it was merely based on the district head's formal decree and not on any real awareness that through negotiations they might be able to reach a better agreement that might actually be beneficial to their agencies. Thus it could be said that the agreements and plans were perceived merely as the result of some sort of exercise in research, negotiation, and planning, and thus not legally binding nor bearing any significant consequences on agency programs.

After the negotiations, the agreement was further elaborated into more operational plans, and it was agreed that the District Planning Board would coordinate their implementation by integrating them into existing government plans. This, however was never followed-up adequately. As with many bureaucracies, when activities are not included in official plans, it is unlikely that they will be carried out. The failure of the District Planning Board to facilitate the integration of the agreements into the respective plans of the different agencies is an indication of the weak political position of the District Planning Board vis-à-vis the sectoral agencies.

In short, the formal decree of the District Head turned out to be more of an administrative formality, which did not translate into real political support with actual commitment from the sectoral agencies. In hindsight, there might have been various ways of achieving wider political support and an alternative that could have been considered was to increase the profile of the conflicts and the awareness of the government about the conflicts either through more intensive lobbying and communication with the district government agencies, or through more direct political pressure from the people of Riung and/or the local parliament (DPRD).

2) Waiting for Outside Initiatives: Internal Weaknesses of the Communities in Riung

All seven village communities in Riung were affected by the various protected area demarcations in the past. The problem, as they perceived it, was that government conservation policies were responsible for their loss of access to ancestral agricultural lands. While they complained internally among themselves, there had been no actual opposition to these

government policies since the first protected area was declared in 1982. Hence, the conflicts remained latent. It was only after the local NGO (Sannusa) started to work in the area promoting agroforestry that the people brought up the problem of tenure rights. It was Sannusa who then brought these conflicts to the attention of the NTCDC, which in turn initiated this research and mediation initiative.

Thus it was clear that the communities were quite weak in dealing with conflicts with outside agencies, and the PAR (participatory action research) stage of the initiative was thus aimed at strengthening the communities through awareness building and community organizing. For this purpose the field research was set in motion at the hamlet level. After moving from hamlet to hamlet collecting information about natural resource management issues and reflecting on the conditions identified, a village plenary meeting was held to consolidate the information and discuss the key issues. The facilitation process in each village lasted two weeks. Then, representatives from all seven villages were brought together in a three-day area wide plenary meeting to agree on their common issues, and to elect and organize a representative team to participate in the negotiations with the government.

The community representatives of Riung were quite enthusiastic about the project and participation in the activities was quite high. Thus, the PAR process was reasonably successful in empowering the community representatives to negotiate effectively with government representatives during the mediation workshop. Despite the refusal of government officials to sign the agreements as a legally-binding document, the community representatives were quite pleased with the agreements reached.

Before returning to their villages, the community representatives held an internal meeting to organize themselves. They elected a coordinator and a contact person for each village, who would be responsible for coordinating the planned follow-up activities. However, after they returned to their respective villages they did not take any significant initiative toward implementing the agreements. In fact, they mostly waited on government and the NGO working in the area to take the first steps. When nothing happened, they also returned to business as usual, complaining among themselves but with no strong response to the lack of implementation of the agreement. Thus it became clear that while the participatory process was successful in facilitating the formation and preparation of a representative team as a well coordinated and united front in the negotiations with the government, it was far from adequate to empower them

to organize themselves to implement their part of the agreements and or pressure the government to fulfill its commitments.

While the PAR approach has proven to be an effective approach, it has become clear that the duration of the project was too short to achieve more lasting results. The two weeks spent in each village and the one week inter-village meeting was adequate to create a foundation for the communities' negotiating team, but it was less than adequate for developing a basis for long-term action.

3) The Weaknesses of the Research and Mediation Team

The historical background of the Indonesian New Order government has been that of a centralistic top-down administration and the elimination of political opposition. While the New Order government tumbled in 1998 and political and legal changes toward regional autonomy were implemented only later in 2001, suspicion toward outsiders was still high, especially of NGOs. To be able to play the role of a mediator, the team had to be trusted by all the stakeholders, to overcome such suspicions.

The initiating NGOs gained the trust of key government officials through informal lobbying early in the process. In order to gain further acceptance from government agencies, the Research and Mediation Team recruited members from the various government agencies and local NGOs. The rationale for this integrated team was to gain the trust of the stakeholders, especially the government agencies, as they would gain representatives within the team.

While the team was generally well accepted by all stakeholders, many of the team's members from the government often failed to effectively communicate the developments of the project with their respective agencies. Besides being constrained by differences in rank, it became clear that the dual role of agency staff in representing their respective agencies and representing the team was never fully understood and carried out.

The main role of the team was to facilitate the process based on selected methodologies of participatory action research and conflict resolution. The team initially perceived its role mainly as a resource for developing the methodology, and the strength of the team was mainly based on its understanding of those methodologies and its ability to facilitate the process accordingly. In addition, the dominant driving force within the team was individuals coming

from the outside. The university researcher who was assigned to be the team coordinator was selected based on his background in participatory methodologies. The key researchers were selected from Koppesda because of their experience with similar efforts in other sites in the Nusa Tenggara area through the NTCDC.

While the team had the trust of both the government and the communities, it did not initially perceive its role as an intervener in the internal affairs of the stakeholders and did not seek a mandate to do so. Thus, when the internal weaknesses of the stakeholders hampered the process making it clear that there was a need for intervention within the internal domain of the stakeholders, the team was not ready to do so. Even when the team coordinator attempted to take on a consultative role to discuss internal weaknesses with the stakeholders, it was too little, too late, and constrained by being an outsider.

Another constraint facing the team was the local politics affecting the process. With the change of the *Bupati* and subsequent reassignment of several key officials who were familiar and supported the project, the team lost some of its political support. The research and mediation team perceived the case of Riung mainly as a set of methodological issues, and thus failed to respond adequately to the political changes taking place.

Finally, the negotiations were perceived as the last phase of the project and thus the end of the team's role. After the final evaluation and reflection meeting conducted after the negotiations, members of the team went back to their respective agencies and never gathered again as a team. While there was some discussion about keeping the team intact for further follow-up, the idea was never brought up again.

4) The Reality of Power Relations Among The Stakeholders

One of the well known basic tenets of conflict resolution is to consider the asymmetry in power among the negotiation parties. Power imbalances, so we are warned, might lead to the imposition of skewed and unjust agreements by one party over the other, and thus weaken the party's commitment to negotiation. The stronger party feels that it does not need to negotiate, and the weaker party perceives that negotiation is risky. The initial perception of the research and mediation team was that the government was quite strong while the communities were weak. This perception was shared by the government officials and community members

themselves, and it might well be that the district government officials were not convinced about the need to negotiate with the communities. Considering this perception of the power balance, the field-level participatory action research was designed to empower the communities.

During the field research it became quite clear that despite the communities' perception of the power of government and their complaints about being denied access to the natural resources, the communities had continued to farm the land clearings in the protected forest areas. They had even opened up new land-clearings and continued to gain access to the marine reserve. The research also showed that the government had been quite weak in its enforcement of the law. Over the years the Conservation Agency had caught several people for illegal logging, burning of grass lands, and poaching, but only a few of these were arrested and prosecuted. The government felt quite helpless to stop this encroachment. While some people were arrested for illegal logging and a few people were prosecuted, obviously the government could not arrest all the people who had opened farms in the forest. Clearly, the perception of the government being strong and the communities being weak proved to be misleading for all stakeholders, including the research and mediation team.

Through the research process, the communities came to realize that they were not as weak as they had thought and that the government was not as strong as it perceived itself to be. During the negotiation process however, the misleading perceptions did not totally dissipate and still had significant influence on the outcomes. When the existing perceptions about power were challenged during the research process, it brought about a reversal of attitudes which became apparent during the negotiations; the community representatives assertively brought up their issues and forcefully argued for their suggested solutions while the government was put on the defensive. On the other hand, when the community representatives returned to their respective communities, and when faced with the challenge of actual implementation, their confidence dissipated once again.

In order to level the playing field, the team would have needed some power of its own. In this case, the team did indeed obtain some power, which it derived, or rather borrowed, from the parties. The decree of the *Bupati* and the enthusiasm of the communities gave the team power vis-à-vis the government, while the same decree and the relation of the team with the government gave the team power vis-à-vis the communities. It was this power that enabled the team not only to facilitate the research and mediation process but also push it forward. However,

as mentioned before, the team did not have adequate power to overcome the internal weaknesses of the respective stakeholders.

Thus it has become acutely clear that a more lasting power balance, based on a more realistic understanding of one's own power and the power of the other stakeholders, would have been needed to reach appropriate and feasible agreements, and this would have likely required a longer-term program intervention.

5) Internal Weaknesses of the Local Non-governmental Organizations: Leadership, Ideological, and Managerial Constraints

Reaching agreements between all the parties is an important step toward conflict resolution, but even more important is to ensure that the agreements will be implemented. Given the above mentioned weaknesses of the parties, there was clearly a need for continued support and facilitation beyond the research and mediation project. One assumption made in this regard was that the local NGO that invited the NTCDC to start-up this research and mediation effort would provide the necessary support for follow-up. In anticipation that other local NGOs could be part of the follow-up afterwards, four other local NGOs were involved in the research and mediation process. However, at the time, the programs of these NGOs were mostly small scale village based technical programs in agroforestry and economic development. Thus, to follow up on an area wide ecosystem management program, which might result from the program, they would have had to scale-up their programs, develop and re-plan their management strategy, and learn new knowledge and skills. While this would obviously be a significant challenge, another assumption made was that by virtue of their motivation and agility, the NGOs would be able to live up to these challenges and expectations.

To develop some of the necessary knowledge and skills, the research and mediation project was designed as a collaborative experiment based on the principles of PAR (participatory action research) with the expectation that it would be a significant learning opportunity for all parties involved. Besides this, the project started out with a general training, and representatives from all the NGOs participated. During the process, the research coordinator had several discussions about those issues with Sannusa. After the agreements were reached the latter got together with the research coordinator and developed plans to facilitate further

collaboration among the parties in the implementation of the agreements. These plans included a staff development component for all stakeholders, and especially for the staff of the NGO itself.

However, the NGOs' involvement did not meet the team's expectations. While the process was still on-going, two of the NGOs withdrew their participation from the team to attend to activities at other locations in the district. Two of the NGOs participated throughout the process, but after the final negotiations they could no longer commit their staff to assist the project. From among the NGOs, only Sannusa remained committed to following-up. The plans that came out of the agreements, however were never realized.

Initially they were side tracked by other activities, then their leader left the organization for further study and the remaining staff lost commitment and direction. Seeing that implementation was not moving forward after two years, they argued that a stronger, more confrontational approach would yield more results. The area wide program based on the agreement was thus never pushed through.

How could this dependency on local NGOs have been avoided? How could the team have known that the NGOs would change their approach? A more realistic assessment of the potential NGOs (and other stakeholders) might have warned the team, and the other stakeholders, about the possible pitfalls.

6) Lack of Funds

Lastly there is the issue of funding of the project. It is obvious that for any initiative such as this funding is needed, and when the initiating agencies lobbied the government to gain the support for the project, one of the issues discussed was financial support. The government however, was unable to contribute because it had no more budget funds for the current fiscal year. The local NGOs also did not have funds for this initiative, and collecting funds from the communities was considered even less of a realistic option. Thus funding was obtained through the NTCDC, and the research and mediation project was nearly totally funded using outside sources.⁶

⁶ The contributing agencies were World Neighbors, Cornell International Institute for Food, Agriculture and Development – Cornell University, and the Ford Foundation.

Had there been government funding counterpart, would the government have shown greater commitment in the implementation of the agreement? Actual funding might not have been sufficient to ensure government commitment to the process and its outcomes. As is often the case, counterpart funding is often only seen as a gesture of good will, and not necessarily a pledge of long-term commitment. However, had the NTCDC's significant funding been used as a leverage to gain more meaningful political and financial commitment from the government, perhaps with some skillful diplomacy and negotiation during the preparatory stage, this outside funding could have had an impact beyond the duration of the research and mediation activities. This could have been a real test of the government's true commitment. Without a clear funding counterpart of its own, leveraged from a common need to resolve the problems in Riung, the local government may have regarded this effort merely as an outsider driven process. The NTCDC and NGOs have often forsaken opportunities to develop collaborative approaches that take into account investments in kind and in cash from all stakeholders. Given the difficulty of working through government bureaucracy, it has often been more convenient for NGOs and the NTCDC to raise and manage their own funding.

SUMMARY of LESSONS LEARNED

At the end of the research and mediation process in the year 2000, the mediation team held a meeting to reflect on the process, and draw some lessons learned from their experience. At that time they felt very positive and the reflective exercise mostly confirmed their impressions that while not ideal, the process was reasonably fair and that the agreements would be a strong foundation for collaboration among the parties, especially the Ngada district government and the people of Riung. Also, the team took pride in a job well done and were confident that the well documented methodology in Riung would be a valuable reference for other efforts elsewhere.

However, the failure of all stakeholders in the implementation of nearly all points in the agreement for all of the reasons mentioned above, has made clear that the research and mediation team made many mistakes. Some interrelated lessons that could be drawn from the failures of this project are:

1) The Need for More in Depth Assessment of the Readiness of Parties to Negotiate

After seven months of preparation, the negotiation phase was started. While the communities were able to field a strong negotiation team, as it turned out their strength was only temporary and dissipated upon their return to their villages; they were not able to implement their part of the agreements and neither could they persuade the government to do their part. Also, despite its seemingly strong bureaucracy, the district government was still disorganized and was not able, or not willing, to take the necessary action. Furthermore, it was expected that the local NGO in the area, would continue facilitating future collaboration among the parties, but as it turned out they were also not able to do so.

A more detailed and in-depth assessment of the parties before the process was started might have revealed those internal weaknesses to be a major consideration in the overall design of this research and mediation process.

2) The Need to Dispel the Myths of Power

One important aspect that needs to be identified through the preparatory assessment is the existing power relationships among stakeholders. While this is a basic tenet of conflict resolution, the team was misled by its more conventional thinking about power and assumed that the communities were the weaker party who needed to be empowered to face the government as the stronger party. The fact that community members complained of their weakness in facing the government while continuing to work in the protected areas in defiance of government policies, and that law enforcement was weak, should have made it clear that the government was not as powerful as they might have believed and the communities not as weak as they had perceived. Both sides had unrealistic perceptions of their power, which was a hindrance in guiding the stakeholders in transparent and fair negotiations.

Thus in the participatory research process there is a need to place more emphasis on internal processes that would allow each of the stakeholders to identify internal weaknesses. Through this analysis the parties would gain a more realistic understanding of their power and know how to overcome their weaknesses in dealing with the other stakeholders, and thus with the challenges of implementing collaborative plans.

3) The Need for Empowerment of All the Parties

As mentioned above, both parties failed to implement the agreements because of their internal weaknesses and because of their inability to demand compliance from each other. Thus efforts at genuine empowerment in terms of developing social capital (organizational, managerial, and technical ability to implement agreements) and political power (the ability to demand commitment and compliance of other stakeholders) needs to be part of any conflict resolution process.

As such, empowerment clearly needs adequate time and to a certain degree continued assistance and facilitation from a party other than the direct stakeholders. Outside agencies taking on the responsibility for this assistance and facilitation should be aware that a long-term commitment is needed. Handing over this convening and facilitation role to a local agency, which has the potential to learn fast and develop its capacity, such as a local NGO, might be feasible if such a potential agency is present in the area. If not, the empowerment of such a local

agency to develop its capability for follow up, might still fall on the shoulders of the outside initiating agencies.

4) The Importance of Adequate Time to Deal with Bureaucratic Constraints

Administrative procedures quite often prevented timely implementation of specific activities. While in the long-term it is clear that these procedures need to be reformed, in the short-term, the fact that many lower ranking government officials did not want to take risks in by-passing established procedures should be acknowledged as a given and dealt with accordingly. All those administrative procedures obviously need patience, and sufficient time needs to be made available in the scheduling of the conflict resolution process.

5) The Need to Raise the Profile of the Conflicts

One of the initial assumptions was that commitment should be developed through personal awareness, and that the involvement of government officials in the participatory research process was a way to achieve this. While the government officials who were part of the research team indeed became aware about the many conflicts government policies had created, their communication of the field observations to their respective agencies was often not convincing and lacking in depth. This was because knowledge of the many conflicts can only be gained from direct personal experience, and since the conflict area is far from the district capital this made it all the more difficult for government officials to understand the conflicts. Thus, rationally persuading them through the presentation of research findings was not effective in motivating them to take interest and action.

The government's weak commitment toward conflict resolution and implementation of the agreements might be partly due to the lack of pressure. It might well be that the low intensity of the conflicts lead to the low commitment and awareness. Consequently, the profile of conflicts needs to be heightened before any conflict resolution process is attempted. In other words, when personal and institutional commitment through awareness or government policy can not be relied upon, rather than relying on personal commitment of the research and mediation process it might be better to persuade the government to commit itself by creating a political need. This might be achieved by heightening the profile of the conflicts through various

strategies such as involving a wider array of stakeholders (the local parliament, outside agencies), advocacy and intensive lobbying, using the press, or even direct public confrontation/demonstrations.

6) Agreements are a Beginning and Not the End

The enthusiasm generated by the agreements clouded the obvious fact that while reaching agreements is an important step toward the resolution of existing conflicts, it is the concrete actions of implementing the agreements, which actually solves the problems. Agreements should be perceived as the beginning of collaborative action rather than the end of negotiations. As such, while the resolution of the identified conflicts might serve to motivate the stakeholders to participate, the process should continue beyond conflict resolution and more emphasis should be placed on the development of mechanisms for implementing long-term plans and on building the capacity of stakeholders to implement these plans.

7) The Need of for Adaptive Planning and Management

The Government's adherence to its existing plans might be bureaucratically correct, but it proved to be a major obstacle to the implementation of the agreements. This means that agreements need to be incorporated in each of the stakeholders' plans, even if this means a shift in programmatic focus or changes in objectives.

Obviously, changing the ingrained bureaucratic patterns to enable more adaptive planning and management is a challenge in itself, and the emerging question is whether, and to what extent, experiments such as this research and mediation project could be a contribution toward that change. The many policy conflicts among government agencies which were uncovered through the participatory research should have made clear the need for better policy coordination mechanisms and perhaps conflict resolution processes. Also, the conflict resolution process where the diverse stakeholders intensely interacted with each other should have made clear to the stakeholders the need for institutional reform. However, no collective awareness strong enough to transform local institutions emerged. Perhaps stronger outside influences are needed for this.

8) *The Need for Awareness of Conflict Resolution as a Political Intervention and the Research and Mediation Team as a Political Player*

Another naïve assumption made was that the research and mediation project would succeed on its merits alone; that is, that it was essentially a methodological problem. While the need for political support was recognized, the formal legitimacy provided by the decree of the district head and the formal authority of the District Planning Board was considered sufficient, which clearly was not the case.

To succeed in a lengthy mediation process with multiple stakeholders, the research and mediation team should have been aware that the conflict resolution process in an intervention in the local politics, in fact trying to change the existing power relationships. To do this effectively, the research and mediation team should have gained adequate power. The team's power should be derived from the opposing parties, and members of the team should learn how to use this power wisely and effectively. Perhaps to gain adequate power, the team needed to widen the involvement of potentially influential allies such as the local parliament, the press, or potentially influential outside agencies.

9) *Keeping Sight of the Wider Context of Natural Resource Management*

The research and mediation project was a response to a specific set of conflicts about access to land, timber, and non-timber forest products, but during the field research a myriad of other conflicts emerged. Thus the program became more preoccupied with conflict resolution processes while losing sight of the broader natural resource management objectives. While the general concepts of sustainable development and ecosystem management were presented and accepted as a common platform on which agreements could be built, apparently this acceptance was limited to the cognitive level. Perhaps an exercise in collaboratively envisioning the ideal state of the area such as in a *Future Search* meeting would have been more helpful in this regard.

The emergence of specific conflicts could be exploited to stimulate the growth of a common awareness for the need for collaboration in the sustainable management of the natural resources of the area. Such awareness could perhaps be the base for the formation of a multi-stakeholder community of natural resource managers. The conflict resolution should be perceived as a mechanism for the CPR building.

10) Environmental Conflict Resolution as a Long-term Natural Resource Management Program

Overcoming internal weaknesses, strengthening social capital, empowering the stakeholders, continuing support beyond the agreements, building a multi-stakeholder community of natural resource managers, are all long-term propositions, which clearly can not be achieved in the duration and context of a short-term project. The project approach of the research and mediation initiative in Riung imposed many limitations on what could be done in the short life-span of the project. Thus, in the context of Riung and the Ngada District where none of the stakeholders were ready, environmental conflict resolution should have been initiated as a long-term program, or as mentioned above, in the context of a wider conceptualized natural resource management program.

While it could be argued that the resolution of the current conflicts might be a basis for further collaboration among the stakeholders, it would only be true if the conflict resolution process sufficiently empowered them to do so. Thus conflict resolution, empowerment, and natural resource management should be integrated into a more comprehensive long-term program.

Conclusions:

The above analysis has tried to revisit the research and mediation process facilitated in the Riung Conservation Area in order to shed light on the reasons behind the unsuccessful implementation of the negotiated agreements and thus the failure to bring about anticipated changes in natural resource governance and institutional reforms in Riung. Although the research and mediation process was designed to be very participatory and inclusive of all key stakeholders, it now seems clear that it was also designed on the assumption that policy-related conflicts could be resolved even in the face of serious internal or horizontal conflicts afflicting the parties.

The research and mediation process was basically designed to empower forest margin communities to negotiate the resolution of vertical conflicts with the government. The design was based on the assumption that local communities were the weaker party in the face of a powerful government. During the participatory action research process, it later became clear that the government was actually in a weaker position given its inability to curb agricultural encroachment into the forest, and that communities had more power than they initially perceived. Thus an additional process was designed to empower government officials and prepare them for negotiations with forest margin communities. While the mediation was reasonably successful in crafting agreements between government and forest margin communities concerning key natural resource management issues, it failed to assess the real power and capacity of both government and communities to implement the agreements.

Given the critical internal weaknesses and conflicts facing both parties and the political changes of that period (1998-2001), it is unclear whether a better process design could have brought about more lasting changes. One key consideration in such a situation should have been to better assess the internal capacity of the parties and extend the time frame for preparing the parties to help them deal more effectively with their own internal conflicts. Another consideration would have been to extend assistance to the parties well into the implementation phase. In other words, bringing about lasting changes in natural resource governance and institutional reform in a context such as Riung, is necessarily an ambitious endeavor requiring commitment over a longer time frame.

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