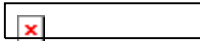


# Indigenous people and co-management: implications for conflict management

By Alfonso Peter Castro<sup>1</sup>  
& Erik Nielsen<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

Co-management agreements among indigenous people, state agencies, and other stakeholders offer substantial promise as a way of dealing with natural resource conflicts in a participatory and equitable manner. However, experience shows that co-management regimes can set into motion new conflicts or cause old ones to escalate. In practice the result may not be power sharing but rather a strengthening of the state's control over resource policy, management, and allocation. Instead of contributing to local empowerment, such arrangements may further marginalize communities and resource users. We use case material, primarily from northern Canada and South Asia, to explore the pervasive role of conflict in generating, shaping, and influencing the performance of co-management regimes. The paper analyzes the divergent interests and motives of state agencies in planning and implementing co-management arrangements. It highlights the cultural, political, and legal obstacles encountered by indigenous people and other rural communities in trying to negotiate co-management arrangements. We also explore the conflicts that can arise in co-management regimes where local participation in decision making is very limited. General lessons and recommendations are drawn from our analysis.

**Author Keywords:** Co-management; Indigenous people; Natural resource conflicts; Conflict management; Negotiations; Participation; Community forestry; Canada; India; Bangladesh

## 1. Introduction

Natural resource conflicts, including those involving indigenous people and nation-states, have received significant attention in recent years. Conflict can be defined for present purposes as "any relationship between opposing forces whether marked by violence or not" ([Deloges and Gauthier, 1997, p. 4](#)). As [Ochieng Odhiambo \(2000, p. 8\)](#) notes: "Each party wants to pursue its own interests to the full, and in so doing ends up contradicting, compromising, or even defeating the interest of the other." Very few would dispute the notion that conflict over natural resources is ubiquitous, though much disagreement might arise over explanations for this situation. Resource conflicts can sometimes become severe and debilitating, resulting in violence, resource degradation, the undermining of livelihoods, and the uprooting of communities. If not addressed, such conflicts can threaten to unravel the entire fabric of society ([Suliman, 1999](#)).

To some extent conflict can be useful in defining the competing needs for resources within communities and society. [Deloges and Gauthier \(1997, p. 4\)](#) point out:

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Anthropology, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244-1090, USA

<sup>2</sup>Forestry Policy and Planning Division, Forestry Department, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy

As such, conflictual situations are neither positive nor negative but they can be used in a constructive or destructive way. Many authors consider that conflicts are crucial not only for social change but also for the continuous creation of society by society itself. Therefore, conflict should not be viewed only as a dysfunctional relationship between individuals and communities that should be avoided at all cost, but also, as an opportunity for constructive change and growth.

If participatory policies and mechanisms are in place for dispute management, substantial potential exists for addressing both the immediate manifestations of conflict and its underlying causes in an equitable and sustained manner. Such policies and mechanisms need to address conflict in a reactive and proactive manner (see [Pendzich](#); [Chandrasekharan](#); [FAO, 1997](#); [Buckles](#); [Warner](#) and [Matiru](#)).

There is growing interest in seeking innovative policy and institutional arrangements for resolving or managing natural resource conflicts in a peaceful and participatory manner. Co-management agreements between indigenous people, other stakeholders, and state agencies offer substantial promise as a way of dealing with natural resource-based conflicts. These collaborative natural resource management arrangements can foster a sense of community empowerment as local stakeholders participate meaningfully in decision making and benefit sharing. However, experience also shows that co-management agreements can set into motion new conflicts or cause old ones to escalate. In practice the result may not be power sharing, but rather a strengthening of the state's control over resource policy, management, and allocation. Instead of contributing to local empowerment, such arrangements may further marginalize indigenous communities. What is required is a clear assessment of the benefits and limitations of co-management as a mechanism for promoting conflict resolution, peace building, and sustainable development.

This paper examines the pervasive role of conflict in generating, shaping, and influencing the performance of co-management regimes. We use experience gained from our work on natural resource conflicts and examples taken from the literature to explore how and why such regimes arise as a response to conflict. The cases cited include co-management arrangements in northern Canada, Joint Forest Management in India, and the Social Forestry Project in Bangladesh (for which Castro served as an evaluator). In all of these cases co-management regimes were introduced as a means of addressing on-going conflicts between the national government, indigenous people, and other stakeholders over access to, and use of, natural resources. The paper looks at the divergent interests and motives of state agencies in planning and implementing co-management arrangements. The paper also highlights the cultural, political, and legal obstacles encountered by indigenous people and other communities in trying to negotiate co-management agreements. We also explore the conflicts that can arise in co-management regimes where local participation in decision making is very limited. The paper concludes with general lessons and recommendations drawn from our analysis.

## 2. What is co-management?

The definition of co-management itself varies both in the literature and in practice. For many analysts the term refers to joint decision making by the state and communities (or other interest groups) about one or more aspects of natural resource access or use. In their path-breaking edited volume *Managing the Commons*, for example, [McCay and Acheson \(1987\)](#) use it to signify local political claims to the right to share resource management power and responsibility with the state. [Borrini-Feyerabend et al. \(2000\)](#) state that co-management is a situation in which two or more social actors negotiate, define, and guarantee amongst themselves an equitable sharing of the management functions, entitlements, and responsibilities for a given territory or set of natural resources. Although co-management arrangements may impose restrictions on natural resource access or use, their chief purpose may not be conservation or resource protection. The goals of a specific co-management regime, or of stakeholders within it, may differ substantially from those characterizing modern or scientific resource management ( [Holm et al., 2000](#)).

A recent trend in the co-management literature is to use the term in a highly inclusive manner. The term is increasingly applied to any situation where local populations or key stakeholders engage in 'partnership' — though not necessarily power sharing with the state. [Brown \(1999\)](#), for instance, defines it as a "working partnership" between local communities and the state, with its principles embodied in participatory forestry, collaborative forest management and joint forest management. [Bowcutt \(1999, p. 359\)](#) also lumps it with other forms of resource management involving some local participation: "Crafting partnerships

between institutions and local communities is known by many names: co-management, community-based management, community forestry, social forestry, and watershed management." Such broad definitions render the term synonymous with participatory, collaborative, joint or multi-party management. [Holm et al. \(2000\)](#) call for a focused definition, limiting the term to institutional arrangements that entail intensive user participation in managing a specific resource. Whether the public will display that sort of discipline in word choice remains to be seen. For purposes of this paper, however, we will concentrate on formal resource-sharing agreements and institutional arrangements

### 3. Why co-management?

Co-management connotes a collaborative institutional arrangement among diverse stakeholders for managing or using a natural resource. These management regimes can be found worldwide in a range of common property resources – forests, pastures, wildlife, fisheries, watersheds, protected areas – where excluding access among competing users can be difficult, although often the reality. In many cases co-management involves state agencies sharing resource allocation or management responsibilities with communities, including indigenous ones, and other parties such as user groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and corporations. Although these stakeholders may hold different interests, the fundamental assumption is that sharing authority and decision making will enhance the process of resource management, making it more responsive to a range of needs ([McCay and Jentoft, 1998](#)).

State-local collaboration has long existed in common property management, such as the Norwegian Lofoten fisheries, which originated in the late 1800s ([Holm et al., 2000](#)) or the council forests in Kirinyaga, Kenya which arose during the 1930s and 1940s ([Castro, 1995](#)). However, it is only in the past two decades that such resource regimes have attracted strong scholarly and policy attention. Recent works on common property resource regimes have focused on their institutional arrangements, legal properties, policy settings, social composition, and historical dynamics (for example, see [Berkes](#); [Ostrom](#); [Messerschmidt](#); [Arnold](#) and [Bruce](#)).

A major justification for co-management is the belief that increased stakeholder participation will enhance the efficiency and perhaps the equity of the intertwined common property resource management and social systems. According to this view, people will respond in a positive manner to material and social incentives. A recent publication by the Food and Agriculture Organization asserts: "The promotion of collaborative management is based on the assumption that effective management is more likely to occur when local resource users have shared or exclusive rights to make decisions about and benefit from resource use" ([Ingles et al., 1999, p. iii](#)). The motivation to manage a resource in a sustained manner also depends on people's ability to be assured of possessing long-term access to it. Having security of tenure to, and receiving benefits from, a resource are critical variables for community involvement. The complete devolution of governance responsibility over natural resources to indigenous people and other rural communities offers a means of fulfilling these conditions ([Banerjee, 2000](#)). But such far-reaching reforms may not be palatable to (or practical for) national governments. Co-management may offer a pathway for resource users to obtain a proprietary share in the authority and decision-making powers that underwrite management. However, a degree of conflict may be necessary before the state and other stakeholders are willing to enter into negotiations for a co-management agreement.

### 4. The state as "Partner"

The state has been both a willing and a reluctant partner regarding participatory approaches, including co-management. Many policy makers, planners, and practitioners now accept the view that resource management must contribute to wider processes of rural development, including uplifting of the poor, women, and other disadvantaged and vulnerable populations. Participation by rural people in activities such as forest management and tree planting has often succeeded in addressing environmental degradation and meeting a range of local needs. A report by a World Conservation Union Working Group to the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests observed: "In many countries, community involvement is proving to be a cost-effective, socially just, and environmentally sound approach to stabilizing natural forests" ([Poffenberger, 1996, p. 2](#)). Thus, participatory approaches have demonstrated their value and viability. The notion of collaboration with communities in resource planning and management has increasingly moved from the margins into the mainstream for professionals in forestry, fisheries, agriculture, wildlife, ecology,

and related fields ( [Chambers](#); [Berkes](#); [Hatch](#) and [Arnold](#)). The importance of pluralism – with its emphasis on analytical tools and methods for taking into account in an open and equitable manner multiple stakeholders, gender and power dimensions, conflict management processes – has gained ground as the starting point for discussions about sustainable resource management ( [FAO, 1997](#)).

The rise of participatory approaches in resource management is also indicative of a number of challenges facing state resource managers. Broad trends in governance towards decentralization and economic liberalization are shrinking the authority and the budgets of agencies. Some perennially understaffed and underfunded administrations are now overwhelmed by their lack of resources, unable to provide adequate logistical support for basic activities. At the same time policies of decentralization frequently have been promulgated with little input from the public and with very little reform of the overall legal, administrative, and fiscal frameworks ( [Lindsay, 2000](#)). Situations arise in some countries that can be characterized as "decentralization without empowerment" ( [Anderson, 2000](#)). Communities and local authorities may be asked to bear the work and costs of resource management without any meaningful transfer of authority or decision making. The lack of funds for implementing local mandates is an especially pressing issue. Ironically, decentralization can sometimes add to the power of the central government, as in Bangladesh, where villagers were required in co-management contracts to relinquish their tenure claims to state forest lands (see below). In many places agencies also confront a growing crisis of confidence in the effectiveness and legitimacy of their centralized command-and-control management ( [Holm et al., 2000](#)). Public disillusionment with official resource management (or mismanagement) has spawned local initiatives aimed at resource protection and rehabilitation. Such actions by indigenous people, non-aboriginal community members, user groups, and NGOs can compel authorities to collaborate. Officials may respond with genuine interest in supporting such efforts at the local-level by providing technical assistance or other help. In other cases agencies may seek to coopt such initiatives, trying to guide activities so that the government remains the controlling partner ( [Castro, 1997](#)).

The desire to retain state control can be prompted by self-serving motives – political and even personal interests in maintaining command over a valuable resource. In many cases state agencies hold enormous power or influence through their management and decision making about forest reserves, parks, protected areas, and other public resources. Co-management can mean reduced authority, a decline in influence, and smaller budgets. Reluctance towards collaborative arrangements can also be motivated by professional skepticism about the ability of such initiatives to accomplish sustained resource management. Central government agencies may be unwilling to enter into a co-management arrangement because they perceive 'conservation' – as defined by conventional scientific approaches – as the ultimate goal of the state. By entering into a co-management agreement they will be restricting their ability to achieve that goal. As [Dubois \(1999, p. 60\)](#) observes: "Moreover, experience shows that *decentralisation does not constitute a prerequisite, nor a guarantee for sound development and environmental management*" (emphasis in the original). Official resource managers may perceive more risks than benefits from formally incorporating the views of multiple stakeholders into their plans and activities. For example, [Chambers et al. \(1989, p. 21\)](#) described the typical perception of Indian foresters towards participatory management during the 1980s: although changes are taking place, the attitude has been conservationist and custodial, with those whose livelihoods depended on forestry products regarded more as a danger and nuisance than as collaborating managers. The impact of the new approaches on resource agencies can be substantial. [Chambers et al. \(1989, p. 223\)](#) reported that with the rise of participatory approaches in some Indian states: the influence of foresters on policy making and execution has been declining, causing widespread resentment and frustration in their ranks. This reduced their output.

## **5. Co-management as a response to conflict**

Many co-management agreements have painful births, arising out of intense conflict – sometimes fought in courts and government offices, sometimes fought on the land and sea, sometimes fought in the mass media and in the hearts and minds of the wider public. Whatever the region, the resource, or the resource-using population, conflict often plays a key role in prompting the creation of co-management agreements. These conflicts include the struggle of indigenous people to resist state and private resource appropriation, to defend their locally based livelihoods, and to maintain their cultural identities. Non-aboriginal communities have experienced similar situations as well. Sadly, such conflicts may involve substantial social, economic,

and personal costs for the involved parties, including loss of life. Nonetheless, conflict is a major factor in getting officials and other stakeholders to negotiate co-management arrangements.

The Canadian [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples \(1997\)](#) acknowledged the pervasive role of conflict in the establishment of its numerous co-management regimes. The commission identified crisis-based co-management as one of three co-management categories. Crisis-based co-management denotes agreements developed as an ad hoc, and possibly temporary, public policy response to crisis. However, the regimes created as part of the other two categories — claims-based co-management and community-based resource management — also usually formed as responses to conflicts occurring among indigenous people, government agencies, private industries, and other stakeholders.

The protracted and intense conflict over clear-cutting timber around Clayoquot Sound in British Columbia resulted in the formation of a crisis-based co-management regime. The provincial government's sanction of a plan by a private firm to harvest extensive areas sparked intense protests from the region's first nations and from environmental groups. In 1993 aboriginal communities, other local residents, and environmental activists worked together to blockade logging roads and similar mass protests. Hundreds of arrests occurred as protesters defied the law. The struggle over logging attracted considerable attention in the national and international media. The protest campaign and the media scrutiny placed pressure on the provincial government, ultimately forcing it to negotiate with the first nations and other stakeholders to set up collaborative forest management agreements ([Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1997](#)).

The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement — a so-called claims-based co-management regime — was itself the outcome of conflict ([Niezen, 1998](#)). Quebec Province announced in 1971 a massive hydroelectric scheme within the Cree and Inuit homelands without their consultation. The absence of a treaty between the indigenous population and the federal or provincial governments made Quebec's territorial claims ambiguous from a legal perspective. The Cree and Inuit first nations went to Quebec Superior Court in May 1972 to challenge the province's legal ability to carry out the project. In October 1972 they petitioned the court, seeking an immediate injunction to halt all construction pending a decision on their original legal case. The hearing on the injunction began in December 1972 and ended 6 months later. The court heard testimony from more than 160 witnesses, including indigenous community members, engineers, biologists, hydrologists, and social scientists. The judge announced his 360-page judgment in November 1973: the Cree and Inuit obtained their injunction, halting work at the dam sites. The same day provincial parastatal agencies implementing the project filed an appeal with the Quebec Court of Appeals, asking for a suspension of the injunction. Within a week the appeals court agreed to their request. With the threat of further legal action looming, all parties entered into negotiations. None of them was willing to assume the risk of a winner-take-all outcome in the courts. Their negotiations culminated in the first comprehensive land claims settlement in Canadian history ([Salisbury, 1986](#)). Ratification of the Agreement took place in November 1975. Thus, co-management regimes set in place by the Agreement were actually the creation of an out-of-court settlement.

The Joint Forest Management program in India is one of the world's largest co-management efforts, involving more than 10000 local committees working with state forest departments to protect 1.5 million ha of government land by the mid-1990s ([Sundar, 2000](#)). [Guha \(2000, p. 201\)](#) finds direct connections between the Chipko protest movement (which gained worldwide notice when women in Uttarakhand saved their local forests from loggers by hugging the trees) and earlier forestry conflicts in rural India and the rise of the program:

the pressures of popular movements have forced the state to move, at least on paper, towards a more decentralized and participatory form of management. In this ecological and social reorientation of forest policy the heritage of Chipko has played more than a walk-on part... Possibly the most innovative recent initiative... is the programme of Joint Forest Management, or JFM. In different parts of India the Forest Department has signed agreements with individual village councils, making them the chief beneficiaries of forest... and consulting them in management decisions. There are now tens of thousands of village forest committees, helping take care of land previously guarded strictly by the state. This turn around is a product not so much of rethinking within the forest bureaucracy as of continuing social conflict between the communities

and the state. That is to say, the concessions to local use and village right have not been granted from above but wrested from below.

[Sundar \(2000, p. 256\)](#) records that officials, "worn out by constant conflict between recalcitrant villagers and beleaguered forest staff in which both sides had been known to lose lives and limbs... [felt] there was no alternative but to turn from coercion to consent, at least in certain areas." For the most part state governments have focused co-management efforts on highly degraded forestlands.

Bangladesh shared a colonial history with India, and similar sorts of struggles occurred with the imposition of custodial forest management in East Bengal. Forest conflict continued through the Pakistan years and after independence. A complex and sometimes contradictory array of land laws, regulations, and policies made the forest tenure situation murky. Some of the most enduring and intense conflicts occurred in tribal areas. The Forest Department responded to the presence of so-called encroachers through police action, including increasing the fines for illegal timber removal. This practice proved ineffective as conflicts continued. By the 1980s some policy makers started exploring participatory-oriented strategies as a proactive response to long-standing conflicts over state forest reserves. The government launched the country-wide Social Forestry Project in the late 1980s with support from the United Nations Development Program (US \$1.9 million grant) and the Asian Development Bank (US \$44 million loan). The project incorporated resource-sharing arrangement into its design, proposing to establish co-managed woodlots and agroforestry plots on 16000 ha claimed by the state but occupied or used by villagers. Benefit-sharing arrangements were also set up for strip plantations to be created along roadways, canals, and other sites. Planners viewed the project as a major step forward in conflict and resource management, especially compared to the practice of evicting or arresting encroachers on government land. However, some forestry and project staff primarily viewed the arrangements as a means "to re-establish the influence of the [Forest Department] on encroached state forest land" ([Castro, 1997, p. 7](#)).

The role of conflict in generating co-management is not limited to non-Western or aboriginal societies. For example, the long-standing and highly regarded Lofoten co-management regime for cod fisheries in the Northeast Arctic arose out of class struggles among Norwegian coastal fishers ([Holm et al., 2000](#)). They opposed the penetration of their fishing sites by large firms with big ships and industrial fishing technology. The Lofoten co-management system sought to regulate fishing space as a means of ensuring the survival of small- and medium scale harvesters. The weakening of the regime in the 1990s has reflected the ascendancy of large-scale business interests, including processors, over the small-scale harvesting entrepreneurs.

## **6. Conflict and barriers in negotiating agreements**

In contrast to the Norwegian small-scale fishing entrepreneurs, however, politically and economically disadvantaged rural groups, including indigenous people, often face substantial difficulties in negotiating agreements with the state and other powerful stakeholders. Although they may possess substantial legal, economic, political, and moral grounds for pursuing their case, such groups generally hold a very weak position in terms of their capacity to carry out negotiations. The problem is not that these groups are not familiar with processes such as negotiation or mediation. On the contrary, they may be quite adept at using them, but usually within their own society ([Castro and Ettenger, 1997](#)). These groups encounter major obstacles trying to navigate the maze of the formal legal system, including judicial and administrative institutions. Obtaining access to legal assistance can be very difficult due to costs, distance (most lawyers are urban based), and a lack of interest or expertise on the part of lawyers on issues related to community-based property rights. Participating in formal legal procedures or state-organized negotiations may prove intimidating. A lawyer for the Cree during their 1972-1973 injunction trial against the James Bay Project, for example, repeatedly objected to the questions put to native witnesses, "on the grounds that they were beyond the knowledge and competence of the witnesses, were confusing to them because of their lack of knowledge of court procedure, impossible for them to answer and generally unfair" ([Richardson, 1991, p. 41](#)). Through implicit and explicit means, lawyers, administrators, and other authoritative individuals can make it clear to indigenous people and other rural folk that they are not welcomed in the halls of power. [Chapeskie \(1995\)](#) stresses the cultural barriers that impede negotiations about co-management. He contends that the members of the Anishinaabe first nation of northern Ontario, Canada, conceive of the landscape and resource management in very different terms from the Euro-Canadian scientists and officials that they

must negotiate with. There is a cross-cultural incommensurability that separates their ideas, practices, and expression of interests. [Chapeskie \(1995\)](#) claims that current western models of co-management are "culturally foreign and not infrequently repugnant to most of those who continue to work on the land in accordance with their customs." He called for negotiations based on the holistic concept of co-existence rather than on the co-management of a particular resource.

In some cases indigenous people and other resource users are given little opportunity for negotiation regarding co-management. State officials simply present them with a pre-established plan, with acceptance or rejection as the only options. The Bangladesh Social Forestry Project, for example, used preprinted contracts for its co-management arrangements for agroforestry and woodlot plots. Having a standardized, ready-made, fill-in-the blank form offered convenience and orderly procedure to the project staff. However, one might question their appropriateness in situations such as rural Bangladesh where a high percentage of the population is illiterate. But the most controversial part of the project had to do with the contents of the contracts, which furnished a legal mechanism for the Forest Department to assert complete control over contested lands. The woodlot agreement stated that the right to land was held by the department, and that continued access to the parcel depended on its consent. The agroforestry agreement similarly specified that the department held exclusive rights to the land and controlled its uses. The contracts stipulated that the farmer faced immediate eviction without the right of appeal to the courts if the divisional forestry officer decided that its conditions were not fulfilled. The Forest Department reserved the right to adjudicate any disputes over the agreements. Not surprisingly, villagers were often reluctant to sign the contracts. A project technical specialist observed, "farmers feel this agreement is imposed on them and that they have no say in the terms or conditions of agreement" (quoted in [Castro, 1997, p. 10](#)). In some cases where villagers had signed the contracts, they were unaware of the full contents of the agreements. Police often evicted long-standing occupants who refused to sign the contracts, replacing them with other rural folk who were willing to do so. Therefore, villagers sometimes faced a difficult choice: sign away their land rights or lose their plots.

Political, cultural, and other barriers for negotiating co-management agreements are not insurmountable. [Pinkerton \(1992\)](#) and colleagues ([Pinkerton et al., 1995](#)) documented how indigenous groups in the United States and Canada engaged in alliance building with other first nations and non-aboriginal groups to implement co-management agreements. Her research is especially important in detailing how negotiations unfolded in distinct stages, with different strategies required in each in response to political conditions. [Castro \(1995\)](#) showed how the African representatives in Kirinyaga, Kenya, used local administrative bodies to resist threats from the colonial government to place local forests under its control. The Africans engaged in protracted negotiations, lasting almost four years, resulting in an innovative co-management agreement. The Africans retained control over the forests through their local administrative council. The agreement lasted 12 years, until disrupted by the Mau Mau War in the early 1950s.

Overall, conflict – though not necessarily violence – seems to be a catalyst for getting co-management negotiations underway. The Canadian [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples \(1997, p. 669\)](#) observed: "it is difficult to change the established ways of doing things. It often takes the eruption of a major problem for government institutions to consider surrendering power". But the commissioners also observed that the crisis-based co-management agreements lacked "the certainty and staying of regimes created by new regimes... As soon as the precipitating crisis drops from the headlines, governments can lose interest or turn to more pressing matters, forgetting the obligations assumed in the agreement that ended the crisis."

## **7. Co-management regimes in practice: conflicts through lack of participation**

As might be expected, co-management regimes encompass a broad spectrum of policies and institutional arrangements for participation, partnerships, and power sharing. The regimes can be a source of conflict when they provide limited bases for local participation. At the less participatory end of the scale are advisory councils, review committees, and other forums aimed solely at public consultation with state resource managers. Consultation furnishes opportunity for people to share their interests and knowledge, exposing decision-makers to a wider range of issues, concerns, and needs. At best the process is a modified

form of top-down resource management. In the worst case scenario people find that they are members of advisory groups from which no one seeks meaningful advice. Co-management in such cases essentially co-opts local interests, providing only a venting outlet. Ironically, frustrations over being limited to a consultative role can itself generate further conflicts – especially when those in power do not seek out, or listen to, advice.

The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement provided an important measure of self-governance and economic progress to the first nations. However, the co-management mechanism established by the Agreement has been controversial, especially for the Cree. The Agreement set up a Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Coordinating Committee, composed of equal number of indigenous and government representatives, to make recommendations to the ministries about wildlife management and allocation issues. The James Bay Agreement also created collaborative advisory bodies similarly composed of representatives from the first nations and the provincial and/or federal governments for environmental and social impact assessment. A comprehensive analysis of these regimes for the Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concluded that the bodies "have made sincere efforts, but... their success has been limited. Nevertheless, we find that the Regimes constitute a very significant improvement over the situation preceding their creation" ([Wilkinson and Vincelli, 1995](#)), p. 2. However, Cree representatives have been very critical of its operation. As one of them noted in a report for the Royal Commission:

The structures providing for participation in wildlife management and environmental protection have themselves so far proved cumbersome and ineffective. The concept of the 'advisory committee' relies on assumptions, inadequately explored, about the ways in which authority is assigned and consensus is achieved. In cross-cultural settings the advisory committee concept frequently excludes or obscures native participation. Linguistic background and the technical nature of the language act as further obstacles to effective participation ([Penn, 1995, p. 3](#)).

The Cree have been frustrated by Quebec's sanctioning of expanded timber harvesting, increased road building (opening the area to increased competition from outside hunters), proposals for large-scale hydro-projects, and policy changes "that occur independently of and largely without reference to advisory structures in the Agreement" ([Penn, 1995, p.3](#)).

The Bangladesh Social Forestry Project had many positive accomplishments, particularly regarding the large number of people it trained and the tree nurseries it established. But the project's experience with co-management arrangements and benefit-sharing arrangements were problematic. Even if a co-management participant performed the assigned work in a satisfactory manner, there was no guarantee of his continued tenure. The Forest Department was often tardy in renewing the annual agreements, a source of concern to prospective beneficiaries. Many villagers believed that the project staff was trying to minimize local involvement on the woodlots and agroforestry plots as a means of separating the local population from any claim to the land or trees. In most places people seemed unsure how benefit-sharing would take place. Despite the project's enormous potential, it floundered in many places as rural people resisted its 'pre-printed participation' ([Castro, 1997](#)).

The reasons for the Social Forestry Project's disappointing performance were complex and varied, but several factors stood out. Some senior forestry officials were clearly unconvinced about the value of community participation. Their concept of collaborative or participatory forestry seemed to be that villagers ought to do what officials wanted them to do. The externally funded project was largely treated as an addition to existing departmental activities, instead of being integrated into the totality of its structure. The co-management arrangement was perceived from the outset as a means of co-opting local claims to contested land. Ironically, the project often intensified, rather than reduced, the tensions and conflicts between foresters and rural dwellers ([Castro, 1997](#)).

Although Joint Forest Management in India has offered an alternative to past models of custodial resource management, it has been criticized for its limited power sharing between the state and rural communities. The contractual agreements offer villagers few formal powers in terms of leasehold over land, and the decision-making responsibilities of the local protection committees are quite circumscribed. Forest officers often possess the power to terminate the arrangement if their guidance is not followed. The case of JFM is not unique. In many countries collaborative resource management is implemented or tolerated locally, but



national laws, policies, and administrative structures continue to favor centralized control ([Cabarle](#); [Bruce](#); [Brown, 1999](#) and [Enters](#)).

The way that stakeholders are identified and represented in management regimes is crucial to ensure local participation. One set of issues revolves around how representatives for co-management bodies are selected from within community-based groups, whether a range of local viewpoints based on differences of resource use arising from gender, class, caste, or other differences is taken into account. In addition, the tendency in many places has been to identify local stakeholders in very specific and narrow terms as product-centered resource user groups. The concern of such regimes often ends up resource allocation rather than resource management per se. [Warner 2000](#), p. 8 points out a difficulty with this approach regarding forest resources: "Product centered local management, in which the community is regarded as user rather than actor, makes co-management especially difficult in forests where utilization should be minimal or reduced." She suggests the adoption of a broader-based strategy to resource management based on recognition of local custodial interests: "The underlying assumption in this approach is that forest adjacent communities have custodial interest in seeing a forest or woodland remain. It is this that is built upon – to be a stakeholder for the forest, not a product." Such an approach fits with the often expressed desired of indigenous people to deal with co-management in terms of holistic living landscapes, rather than narrowly defined resources that are seen as divorced from their wider ecological and social contexts ( [Berkes, 1999](#)).

In some cases the problem for local communities and local resource users may be that multi-stakeholder collaborative arrangements allow for too much equity, too much participation, among divergent parties. Managerial or consultative bodies may treat all identified stakeholders as equal partners, locking local residents into a minority or inferior position. Government agencies, private firms, global non-governmental organizations, and other interest groups external to communities can set the agenda and make decisions regardless of local viewpoints. [Hughes, \(1996\)](#), case study of park expansion in Rusitu Valley, Zimbabwe, documented such a situation, with local representatives consistently overruled by the majority of stakeholders.

On the participatory side of the spectrum are co-management arrangements that provide legal recognition for customary land and resource tenure rights, political empowerment for local resource management institutions, or an active role for local resource users in management and allocation decisions. For example, some recent co-management arrangements in Australia, involving aboriginal communities, and in Canada have provided institutional arrangements enlarging the scope for local participation in decision making over resources, while also respecting indigenous land claims ([Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1997](#) and [Stevens](#)). Though not perfect they offer significant vehicles for participatory power sharing. Even in highly participatory situations, however, conflict can arise across and within stakeholder groups as different participants seek to pursue their own interests. Conflict management considerations need to be a part of any co-management arrangements.

## **8. The road ahead**

Co-management arrangements can offer a socially and environmentally appropriate means of increasing local participation in resource decision making. One must build from past lessons and errors, however, to achieve a more robust and fruitful alliance among participants in the future. Embracing a collaborative process can be a truly liberating and empowering process for communities, state agencies, and other stakeholders. But the experience with co-management regimes in many places suggests that such agreements and arrangements can result in the co-optation or further marginalization of local interests. Key variables influencing such outcomes include the nature of the negotiations, the intent and content of the agreement (including acknowledgment of local rights and decision-making powers), the institutional arrangements contained in it, the manner of implementation, and the continued commitment of the participants. In many cases co-management has meant consultation or weak contractual arrangements. The practice seems to work best when the scope for local participation in resource management and allocation decision making is substantial.

## 9. Some concluding thoughts

*Change will bring conflict:* Natural and social systems are dynamic and evolve naturally. It is important to recognize that simply because a more pluralistic environment is evolving, not all stakeholders will be content with associated changes. In a context of expanded participation, conflicts will escalate and increasingly surface in community interactions. Conflicts often arise when individuals and communities interact with one another in the midst of change. The scope and magnitude of change in resource management regimes and the societies of which they are part will only increase as the 21st century unfolds. This does not need to be understood as negative, but simply as part of a normal dynamic system.

*Renewed energy:* Today there is a growing rejection of the belief that government is the sole legitimate agent for decision making or for management of development resources. Often due to past poor performance of many government agencies and organizations within the non-industrialized world, and in some developed countries, local participants are now charged with more responsibility and control over their own development. Local stakeholders have gained renewed energy for action in the midst of this new pluralistic climate. Decentralization is increasingly providing the political space for communities, including indigenous people, to pursue innovative forms of collaborative and participatory resource management.

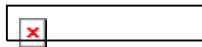
*Time, resources, and social capital:* It is essential to remain aware of ongoing barriers and potential threats to the collaborative/co-management process. Individuals and institutions must carefully consider these barriers and threats before they fully endorse a partnership approach based on equity, respect for human rights, and concern for long-term resource management. Perhaps the most substantial challenge is that of investment. Viable and productive networks will not happen without an adequate investment of time, financial resources, and social capital.

*Balance of traditional with modern methods:* Co-management offers major opportunities for incorporating local knowledge, skills, and practices into formal resource management regimes. Indeed, this is one of its major benefits—the ability to bring together local expertise with scientific and state approaches to resource management. At the same time one needs to have realistic expectations about the contributions and viability of indigenous knowledge, as well as the willingness and ability of diverse resource users to solve collective-action problems. [Holm et al. \(2000, p. 353\)](#) warn against the assumption that: "co-management requires little more than the revival of time-honored, traditional institutions... All that is needed is for government to recognize and empower these institutions instead of subverting them." They warn that co-management often needs to be designed "for social landscapes that differ radically from those in which its traditional precursors belonged" ([Holm et al., 2000, p. 354](#)). The case of the Cree of Quebec also showed that co-management agreements can become quickly out of date, failing to provide local populations with adequate mechanisms for confronting state policy changes allowing for increased regional development.

*Benefits:* Incentives are a vital aspect of getting people to negotiate, to reach to an agreement, and to continue participating. A key question always must be: What benefits will stakeholders receive who enter into a co-management arrangement? The co-management arrangement should bring about numerous benefits to the stakeholders that would not necessarily have been achievable working alone in the particular pluralistic context.

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