

## **Critical Issue: Organizations and Stakeholders**

### **Are organizations and stakeholders ready? <sup>1</sup>**

Whether organizations and stakeholders are ready to directly engage in ocean and coastal conservation or whether they are ready for others to directly engage within areas they have interest in are critical questions that should be answered prior to implementing Marine Conservation Agreements (MCAs).

The viability of MCAs depends critically on the positions of a wide range of organizations and stakeholders. Organizations and stakeholders of concern are any groups or people who are directly or indirectly affected, either positively or negatively, by the conservation agreement; or, any groups or people who can affect the outcome of the agreement - either by contributing to or hindering its success. This might include any number of actors who do not appear immediately obvious. By way of example, typical organizations and stakeholders affected by conservation agreements may include any of the following:

- Conservation organizations entering into the agreements;
- People, communities, businesses and/or governments owning land or assets of interest in or adjacent to the site;
- Community, indigenous and/or users groups living in or near the site;
- Government agencies responsible for protected areas, natural resources, public services and/or regulatory decision-making;
- Local or international non-governmental organizations working in community development, conservation, human rights, indigenous rights, etc.;
- Multi and bi-lateral donors contributing to the MCA and/or with existing projects in the area;
- Natural resource companies (e.g., fishing, mining, and oil companies);
- Business groups representing the interests of the private sector; and
- Religious organizations.

Once organizations and stakeholders are identified, they can be grouped into those that will be directly involved in the conservation agreement, and those that either can impact or be impacted by the agreement. Those who will be involved in the agreement include the conservation organization(s), land or resource “owner(s)”, and in some cases users of the resource who are not owners (e.g., fishermen in open-access fisheries). Questions regarding organizational capacity and property rights will often arise in this component of the assessment:

- Is the conservation organization willing to commit to long-term, local involvement?
- Does the conservation organization have the necessary expertise, experience, and capacity related to the ocean and coastal environment?
- Who owns the resource or habitat area?
- Who makes use of the resource, regardless of formal ownership?
- Are informal, or customary, use and ownership rights involved?

In many instances where property rights are unclear or insecure, agreement design will have to pay particular attention to the balance between incentives and investment in enforcement capacity.

For organizations and stakeholders who will be directly involved in the agreement, an essential characteristic to assess is whether they can be a reliable party to an agreement. If a party to the agreement is a community, government, or other organization, the quality of their representation, their internal decision-making processes, and stability will be important factors. Questions to ask in this regard might include:

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<sup>1</sup> Largely adapted from: Conservation International. 2007. Draft - Conservation Incentive Agreements: An Introduction and Lessons Learned to Date. Guidance Manual. Washington, D.C. pp 51.

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- Has a system of representation and decision-making been in place for a number of years, or is it fairly recent?
- Does decision making appear orderly or sporadic and inconsistent?
- Does leadership change often due to fundamental issues that cannot be resolved within the stakeholder group?

One example of this might be a rural community of colonists composed of various ethnic or religious groups that recently settled in the same area. Another could be a government that appears unstable or unable to maintain consistent legislation that would affect a conservation agreement. If the prospective parties are individuals, their reputation from other dealings may offer clues about their reliability. In all cases, if prospective parties to an agreement do not appear reliable with respect to governance considerations, it is an indication that a successful, long-term conservation agreement may be difficult to achieve. If conservation at a site is extremely important and local stakeholders are *not* sufficiently organized to establish an agreement, a decision may be made to assist in building local capacity.

For stakeholders who will be affected by, but not be directly involved with, a conservation agreement, an assessment of whether the affects can be managed responsibly is necessary. Early consultation with indirect stakeholders, such as local communities, will provide insight on how obstacles may be addressed.

For those stakeholders who can impact the conservation agreement, specific strategies must be in place to ensure that their issues are understood and managed. In some cases, this will include various agencies/ministries within a government. For this reason, it will be essential to understand how relevant levels of that government operate and which agencies/ministries must be engaged. Stakeholders that can impact an agreement may also include NGOs, activist organizations, trade groups, or others with social, economic, or environmental issues in the area. They too will need to be understood and engaged as necessary.

### Discussion Questions:

1. What are the specific resources, skill sets, and commitments that organizations and partners need to implement MCAs?
2. How can organizations and partners obtain resources and skill sets that are needed but not possessed or immediately available?
3. How can organizations and partners determine the commitments (in duration and locality) needed to implement MCAs and whether they possess the ability to make the necessary commitments?
4. What specific organizations are positioned now to take advantage of immediate MCA opportunities in which locations?
5. How do we ensure other conservation organizations and stakeholders in affected areas understand, accept, and will not be negatively impacted by MCAs?
6. What are the essential criteria that determine whether parties to a potential MCA are reliable?
7. What are the essential criteria that determine whether indirect stakeholders are ready for a MCA in their area?

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## **Summary Findings**

### Project Level Assessment, both Internal and External Review

- Internal Review
  - Make sure MCA is in alignment with mission
  - Perform internal skills analysis
    - Internal governance
    - Commitment level
    - Identify potential training needs
  - Overcome deficiencies through partnering, self-training
  - Evaluate Experience
    - What skill set is needed?
      - Relationship/manager builder
      - Strong leader
      - Culturally pragmatic
  - Evaluate Risk Tolerance for MCA
    - Develop both Short Term and Long Term Goals
    - Be prepared to be adaptive
- External Review
  - Identify stakeholders and their role (direct and indirect)
  - Continually refine list of stakeholders
  - Determine best means of communication (develop community support)
  - Understand potential for conflict (indirect stakeholders and others in arena)
  - Assess reliability of partners

### Strategic Level Assessment: Need to develop resources people can share

- Best Practices/Common Framework
- Organizational Assessment Tool
- Case Studies
- Leadership/Learning Network
- Professional Network-Technical Capabilities (GIS, Legal, Financial)