

SECTION 6



SECTION 6

ESSENTIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR FACILITATORS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT



Many of those involved in community forestry conflict situations may find themselves at one time or another acting as third parties facilitating negotiations among disputing groups. This section aims to support that role by examining the practical aspects of facilitating meetings and negotiations in a conflict management process. To assist skills development in this type of facilitation, the section presents guidelines for addressing the many challenges that can arise among the parties during negotiations.



TRAINER'S NOTE # 42

FACILITATOR TRAINING

Good facilitation skills are most thoroughly learned through observation of other trained facilitators and through experience. The information in this section is not intended to replace those sources, but instead provides an introduction to facilitation and basic skills development. For those who have previously facilitated negotiations, the information provides an opportunity to reflect on that experience.

6.1 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF FACILITATORS

Throughout a negotiation process, a facilitator is challenged to help the participants stay focused on the substantive components of that process, while ensuring that the process itself is fair and collaborative. This requires simultaneous:

- ◆ monitoring of emotions and communication among individuals;

- ◆ intervention, when necessary to enhance the process and outcomes;
- ◆ understanding of what is happening outside the negotiation process that may be affecting the behaviour or attitudes of key stakeholders.

Box 6.1 lists many of the requirements of an effective facilitator. Facilitation in conflict management is different from routine meeting facilitation. Although they share a number of interventions, the dynamics of the two fora are quite different. In conflict management facilitation, there is often a greater intensity of interaction among stakeholders and more “difficult behaviour” to overcome in trying to establish mutual agreement. In practice, negotiations are most often emotionally trying. Negotiations are often likely to intensify emotions rather than reduce them, particularly in their early stages. In meetings that bring together the opposing stakeholder groups, it is likely that at various points many people will demonstrate a range of behaviours that can potentially halt the process. Difficult behaviours that are commonly observed include unwillingness to cooperate, dominance, obvious anger, posturing and withdrawal. Encouraging the disputants to move forward in negotiations and not to become blocked or disrupted by escalating tensions requires skilled facilitation.



**BOX 6.1 THE ROLE OF A FACILITATOR**

An effective facilitator in conflict management:

- helps make participants aware that they are *in charge* of the process and *responsible* for outcomes;
- assists communication among participants;
- sets the tone of discussion;
- assists the group in finding common ground and identifying positive solutions;
- remains objective;
- listens;
- is gender-, culture- and power-sensitive;
- monitors participation and acts to enhance it where necessary;
- protects members of the group from attack by others;
- helps the group to focus its agenda;
- controls the flow and pace of questioning and information brought before the group;
- introduces and summarizes, as necessary, to help the group make connections between sessions and stay on track;
- is alert to signs of confusion, frustration and resistance, and intervenes to resolve these difficulties;
- helps the group to chart its course and accomplish its goals.

Adapted from: Worah, Svendsen and Ongleo, 1999; Warner, 2001.

6.2 LEARNING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

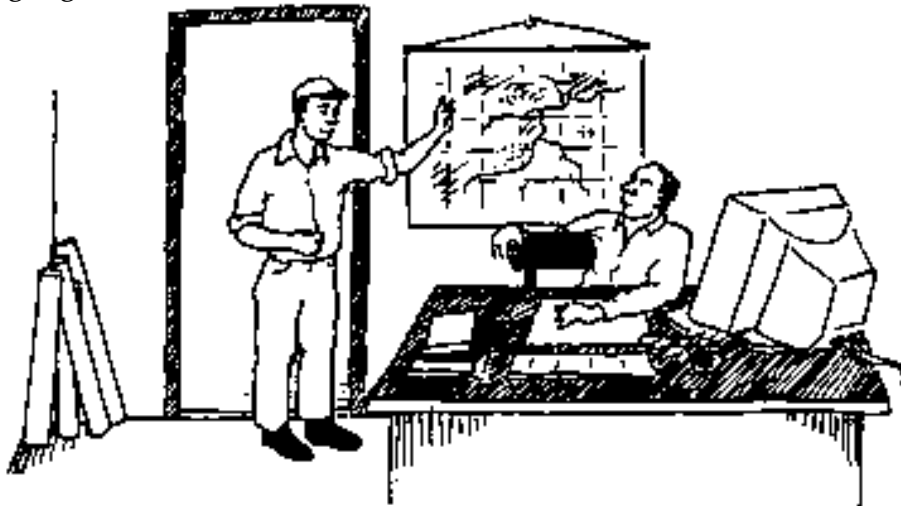
Communication is fundamental to every human interaction. Talking, listening, reading, writing and physical gestures are all forms of communication. Conflicts may arise or escalate as a result of poor communication and differences in communication styles. Negotiating multiple interests in forest management requires supporting effective communication among groups.

6.2.1 Different communication styles

When meetings and negotiations involve people from different cultures, ethnic backgrounds, social rankings or geographic areas, it is important to consider the likely impact of these factors on negotiation processes. Rather than ignore such diversity, an effective meeting process will acknowledge and respect these differences.

Differences in communication styles may result from differences in:

- ◆ age;
- ◆ gender;
- ◆ socio-economic status;
- ◆ education;
- ◆ culture;
- ◆ language.



In cases in which cultural differences are significant, it may be best to provide meeting time to explore the cultural aspects of communication and process before working on the specific conflict issues. Establishing mechanisms that bridge cultural differences in advance may be essential to the outcome of negotiations.

A facilitator will want to be aware of, and sensitive to, the social norms of the people in dispute, taking into account cultural and socio-economic differences. The following specific aspects of cultural and socio-economic diversity may affect negotiation sessions.

Patterns of communication:

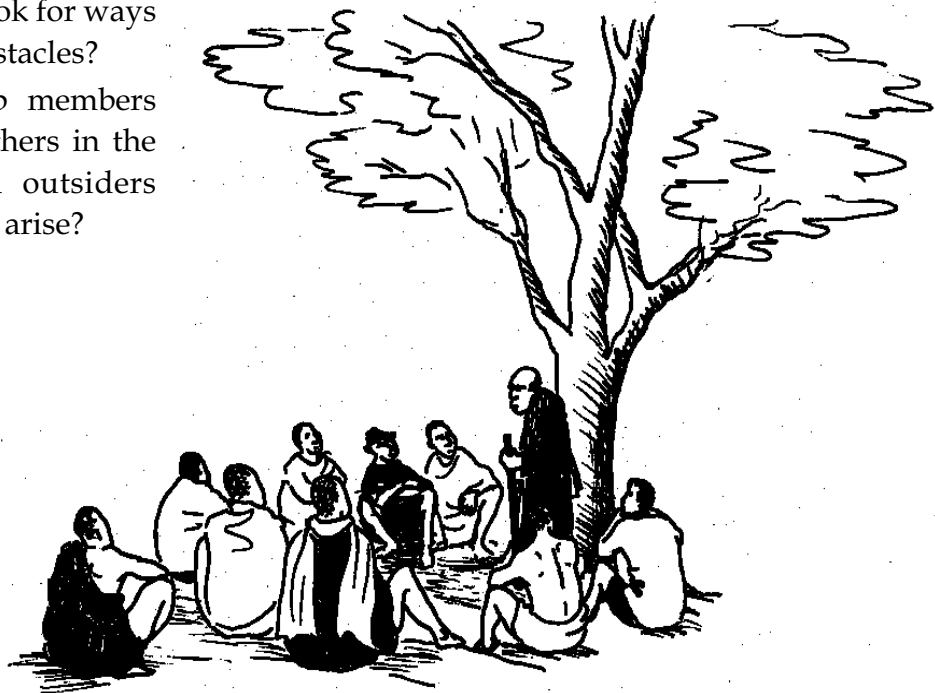
- ◆ language;
- ◆ gestures;
- ◆ eye contact;
- ◆ vocal inflections;
- ◆ familiarity;
- ◆ reliance on written or oral formats;
- ◆ normal protocol for who speaks and in what order.

Views on time. Groups may treat time differently. For some, time lines may be a significant factor and there is constant pressure to carry out tasks according to schedule. In other cultural or geographic settings, attitudes to time may be more relaxed, the pace slower and other features of life take priority over meeting set deadlines.

Use of space. Each group also has rules and norms concerning the appropriate use of space. Most cultures have a certain preferred distance between individuals when they are talking or sitting.

Ways of meeting obstacles. Culture can also influence the way in which a group meets new or unexpected obstacles. For example:

- ◆ Do group members usually work to remove obstacles, or do they avoid them?
- ◆ How do they look for ways to overcome obstacles?
- ◆ How do group members interact with others in the group or with outsiders when problems arise?



**TRAINER'S NOTE # 43****CONSIDERING A FACILITATOR'S OWN CULTURE**

In training, it is important to remind those who will act as facilitators that they need to recognize the influences of their own culture when facilitating meetings and interacting with people from other cultures. A facilitator's own values, behaviour, attitudes and customs can lead to misunderstandings. It is important that facilitators acknowledge the affects of their own cultures within a process and, when necessary, explain and clarify their cultural approach to working within other cultures.

Some hints for facilitating negotiations when there are differences in culture or socio-economic status are presented in Box 6.2.

**BOX 6.2 FACILITATION HINTS IN SITUATIONS OF CULTURAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIVERSITY**

Think about the impact of cultural and socio-economic differences on behaviour, especially communication. Be willing to adapt your own communication style to promote cross-cultural understanding.

- Consider a person's response to a situation from his or her own point of view rather than your own.
- Learn to deal with ambiguity, including approaches that are very different from your own.
- Understand that biases and stereotypes get in the way of other interactions. In discussing cultural or socio-economic differences, emphasize the need to help people get beyond stereotypes rather than reinforcing them. Be prepared to point them out when they occur.
- Carefully observe the behaviour of others before reaching conclusions. Your initial impressions of a person's style of communicating may not be accurate. In some cultures, for example, speaking directly and forcefully may be the common way to

express opinions while, in others, this behaviour may indicate anger. Through observation, you may become better able to determine how a particular person communicates.

- Demonstrate a willingness to challenge your own assumptions about culture to help others challenge theirs.
- Ask questions about what is going on when you suspect that cultural differences might be promoting misunderstanding.
- Remember the three cardinal rules of dealing with multi-cultural situations: patience, patience and patience.

Differences in communication style may block people from listening.

When people hear views or experience behaviours that are different from their own traditional ways of communicating, they may become confused, anxious or angry. Some people will not hear or pay attention to what is being said if they are uncomfortable with the way in which it is being communicated. For example, some individuals may be nervous or have poor language skills, and therefore speak in broken sentences or be repetitious. Others may exaggerate, distort or put forward unfounded claims. Some refuse to respond to a person who interrupts. The result in such situations may be that some individuals will become impatient or rude or will ignore the substance of the ideas being expressed, no matter how valuable those ideas are. In such cases, the facilitator has an important role in accurately transforming the content of what is being said into a more acceptable style.

Differences in communication also lead to escalating emotions. One person may take another's opinion as a criticism or insult. This may lead the others to respond with a defensive criticism or another insult. As tensions increase, people may stop communicating directly with one another, even bringing in additional people to support their side. By this point, the conflict has escalated beyond the original source of the misunderstanding. Such a negative spiral of communication only serves to increase the misunderstanding among individuals and the groups they represent. The longer the cycle of miscommunication, the more problems emerge.

6.2.2 Effective communication

Learning and demonstrating good communication skills are essential to effective facilitation. Good communication practices ensure that people's needs and interests are being heard and addressed.

Fundamental to good communication is "active" listening. Active listening entails listening to the content of the dialogue, as well as the tone and physical gestures that people use to express their interests. It also means that the people speaking are confident that they are being heard. Facilitators may use a variety of techniques to ensure that those speaking know that they have been heard and that the group hears what the speaker is saying (Kiser, 1998). Box 6.3 outlines some guidelines for active listening.



BOX 6.3 GUIDELINES FOR ACTIVE LISTENING

- Be silent when silence is appropriate.
- Be fully attentive to what you are hearing.
- Listen completely, until the speaker has finished speaking.
- Do not interrupt.
- Do not prepare a counterstatement until the speaker has completely finished.
- Do not assume that, once you have heard the first part of a speaker's message, you have fully understood the complete message.
- Pursue or expand points of substance.

A facilitator must also be able to *focus discussions* in order to move negotiations ahead successfully. The main objectives of focused discussion are:

- ◆ establishing and maintaining a clear sense of direction;
- ◆ using good facilitation techniques;
- ◆ balancing status;
- ◆ supporting the communication skills of the individuals involved;
- ◆ maintaining a sound group memory.

The key steps in a focused discussion are:

1. Introduce discussions:

- ◆ ensure that stakeholders understand the purpose and rationale for discussions.

2. Keep discussions on track:

- ◆ follow the agenda that was agreed;
- ◆ take notes or use a recorder and refer to what has been covered.

3. Assist the flow of discussions:

- ◆ assist individuals who get “stuck” or have difficulty expressing themselves;
- ◆ moderate discussions so that no individuals or group dominates the discussion.

4. Keep stakeholders focused:

- ◆ remind stakeholders of the objectives that they have set and where they are;
- ◆ manage multiple or different viewpoints;
- ◆ summarize.

5. Address disagreements:

- ◆ acknowledge and assist stakeholders in exploring multiple paths and options;
- ◆ address one issue at a time;
- ◆ avoid reacting to unintentional remarks;
- ◆ use power balancing techniques.

6. Address differences in participation levels:

- ◆ be sensitive to underparticipation;

- ◆ use methods to gain greater participation;
 - ◆ be alert to and address overparticipation or dominance.
7. Bring discussions to a close:
- ◆ pause and recollect what has transpired;
 - ◆ rearticulate points of decision;
 - ◆ ensure that the next steps are clear.
8. Affirm the work of the stakeholders.



TRAINER'S NOTE # 44

IMPROVING FACILITATION SKILLS

Building skills in communication and facilitation is an important component of training in conflict management. *Training activities #50 to #55* help participants to explore and practise active listening, and provide specific interventions and techniques to aid focused discussions.

6.2.3 Building confidence

Conflict situations can be threatening to some people's self-respect, dignity, honour, reputation or pride. This, in turn, can erode an individual's confidence and reduce his or her ability or willingness to engage fully in negotiating agreements. In some instances, individuals may require communication interventions in order to protect their confidence and ensure that they can interact with others. Appropriate use of the



following communication strategies can help establish and maintain respect for all individuals:

- ◆ Use courteous language and a polite tone of voice.
- ◆ Make sure that all processes and activities are fully and clearly explained.
- ◆ Encourage questions when people are confused.
- ◆ Use culturally and gender-appropriate humour.
- ◆ Focus on the issues and avoid blaming or criticizing individuals.
- ◆ Avoid using judgemental language.
- ◆ Take notice of and attend to practical needs during the meeting.
- ◆ Find ways to acknowledge or take responsibility for past acts, including possible restitution or compensation.
- ◆ Find ways to allow people to change their minds without having to back down from their primary interests.

6.2.4 Non-verbal communication

As mentioned earlier, people communicate not only through language but also through non-verbal means, such as eye contact, sitting posture, facial expressions and hand gestures. Non-verbal communication plays a significant role in indicating the underlying feelings or emotions behind the words (see Box 6.4).

Clarifying the difference between the words and the non-verbal behaviour is an important part of a facilitator's work. It encourages everyone to honour their own interests and be more conscious of their non-verbal communication. It is the facilitator's job to be aware of the rising or conflicting emotions that are signalled by non-verbal communication, noting whether the behaviours are assisting or impeding negotiations.



**BOX 6.4 WHERE WORDS AND GESTURES DO NOT TELL THE SAME STORY**

Two groups have been negotiating the final points in their agreement, but one issue has been particularly difficult for them. Finally, a person representing one of the groups agrees to accept a condition that the other group had been insisting on. However, the facilitator notes that the person's hands are clenched and they are looking down at the floor. The facilitator intervenes with a clarifying question: "You say that you will agree to this point, but it would appear that you have some reservations. Is there some part of the agreement that is not completely acceptable?"

6.3 THE ROLE OF A RECORDER

Commonly, a person will take the role of the recorder in negotiations (see Box 6.5). The recorder plays a significant role in documenting the participants' discussion and assisting them to:

- ◆ categorize;
- ◆ prioritize; and
- ◆ integrate their interests into a final product.

The ability to capture, record and display group discussions quickly serves a number of important functions (see Box 6.6):

- ◆ by recording individual contributions and group agreements, it helps keep the group focused on their task;
- ◆ by recording the essence of ideas, rather than all of the words, it protects the group from overload;
- ◆ by capturing everyone's ideas, it encourages participation and balances status;
- ◆ by capturing ideas, issues and events, it provides a visual memory of the process, progress and outcomes.

**BOX 6.5 PRINCIPLES FOR RECORDING**

The role of the recorder is explained and agreed on by the larger group. The recorder works:

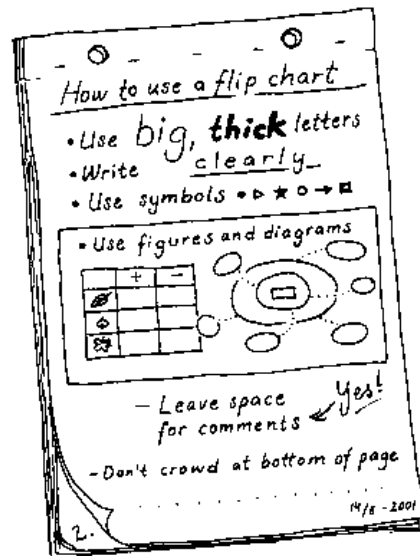
- with the facilitator;
- captures key ideas and the essence of what is said;
- uses the speakers' own words when possible;
- treats all ideas and comments equally;
- puts energy into using a range of recording techniques;
- listens for high-priority words;
- makes corrections non-defensively;
- asks for clarification when confused.

Group members are responsible for checking accuracy.

**BOX 6.6 RECORDING HINTS**

- Print clearly.
- Use letters that are large enough to be seen from the back of the room.
- Make thick-lined letters.
- Alternate colours in lists.
- Avoid the use of red or light colours for text.
- Use bright colours to highlight.
- Use a range of techniques to capture ideas, information, relationships, direction and agreements – for example, lists, matrices, maps (context and process), diagrams, organizational charts, flow charts, graphs, time lines, groupings and calendars.

- Use symbols – bullets, stars, borders, circles, arrows, etc.
- Use a variety of lines – solid, dashed, dotted, etc.
- Leave space – keep margins and areas for additional comments or notes.
- Do not crowd the bottom of the page.
- Title and number each page.
- Prepare before the meeting – ensure that you have all the necessary materials and that the tape is cut.
- Post completed charts so that the group can view them.
- Make information accessible to stakeholders after the meeting is finished.



TRAINER'S NOTE # 45

TRAINING IN RECORDING SKILLS

The job of a recorder is not easy. Recording requires the use of many skills at the same time: active listening, writing legibly, creative presentation and synthesizing stakeholders' comments. To be skilled at recording requires a solid understanding of the role and practice of recording.

Training activity #56 provides learners with both theory and practice in developing these skills.

6.4 INTERVENTIONS WHEN DIFFICULTIES ARISE

A facilitator can also draw on a variety of other interventions when difficult behaviours surface. The facilitator may have the group revisit their agreements on meeting process, organize private meetings, or use a variety of power balancing techniques.



TRAINER'S NOTE # 46

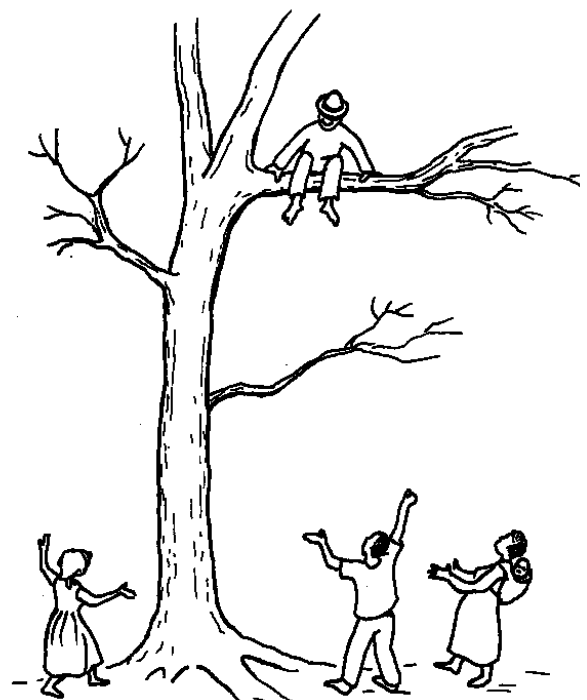
IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING DIFFICULT BEHAVIOUR

As a facilitator, it is not necessarily easy to identify and address difficult behaviour effectively. Turning around increasingly tense situations and moving them forward to collaboration often requires considerable thought and practice. *Training activities #57 to #59* support learning and practice in this area. They have been designed to assist understanding of difficult behaviour and develop improved facilitation skills to address it.

1. Revisit agreements: When difficult behaviours emerge, a facilitator may revisit earlier agreements on conduct or group objectives. For example, you can refer to:

- ◆ the communications agreement; or
- ◆ the agenda.

If one or more individuals is/are behaving outside of previously agreed limits, it is the facilitator's job to draw attention to those agreements. The facilitator may ask an individual to consider whether his or her behaviour fits into the framework of acceptable communication. For example, if a person or a group's emotions are significantly affecting the time schedule, that person or group should consider how this will



influence the process. Changing the agenda requires the agreement of all the other participants. If everyone agrees, the facilitator should adjust the time schedule to focus discussion on resolving the particular issue that provoked the difficult behaviour.



TRAINER'S NOTE # 47

ENCOURAGE INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP RESPONSIBILITY

In training, it is useful to remind participants that it is always best to let the individual, and then the group, take responsibility for correcting difficult behaviour. This is particularly important at the beginning of a resolution process because it encourages participants to maintain collaborative problem solving. Periodically throughout the course of meetings, a facilitator may note that, as new and particularly controversial issues emerge, people slip back into their familiar behaviour patterns, which may provoke a renewed cycle of negative responses.

2. Private meeting sessions. Mediators frequently use private meetings to diffuse emotions, clarify misunderstandings and reconsider mediation approaches in a private setting. Separating the disputants and discussing the emotional content privately provides the mediator with an opportunity to help the group or individual to identify the underlying issues. It also provides time to consider a more effective way of presenting concerns.

Private sessions should be used:

- ◆ when there are problems with the substantive issues;
- ◆ to diffuse emotions, clarify misunderstandings and reconsider underlying issues and interests;
- ◆ to gather new facts;
- ◆ to develop new settlement options;
- ◆ to refocus and reflect on short- and long-term goals;
- ◆ to reassess BATNAs;
- ◆ to consider alternative options or solutions;
- ◆ to retain commitment to and involvement in the mediation;
- ◆ to provide new ways of presenting concerns.

The following are guidelines for conducting a private session:

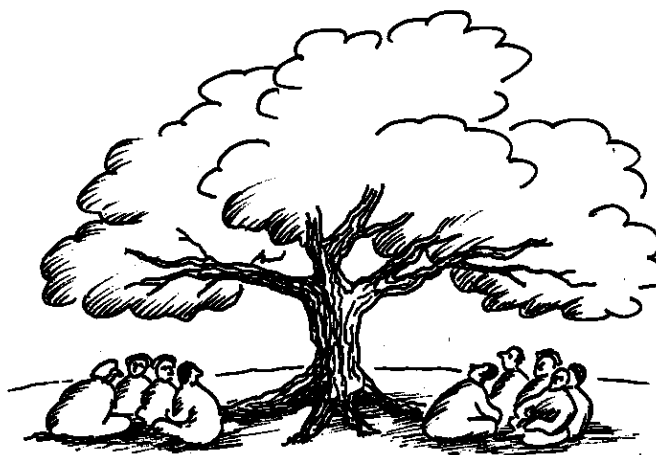
- ◆ Review the confidentiality of the discussion.
- ◆ Ask open-ended questions to initiate the conversation.
- ◆ Review the original list of issues and concerns, and add any new ones.
- ◆ Use active listening, clarifying questions and summary statements.
- ◆ Ask how participants think the other groups view their interests.
- ◆ Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of proposals.
- ◆ Focus on finding ways to loosen fixed positions and encourage forward movement.
- ◆ Propose integrative solutions to stimulate creativity.
- ◆ Close the session with a reminder of confidentiality, unless there are specific points that participants would like to raise during the joint session.
- ◆ Finally, ask participants whether they have any particular points that they would like communicated to the other groups.



TRAINER'S NOTE # 48

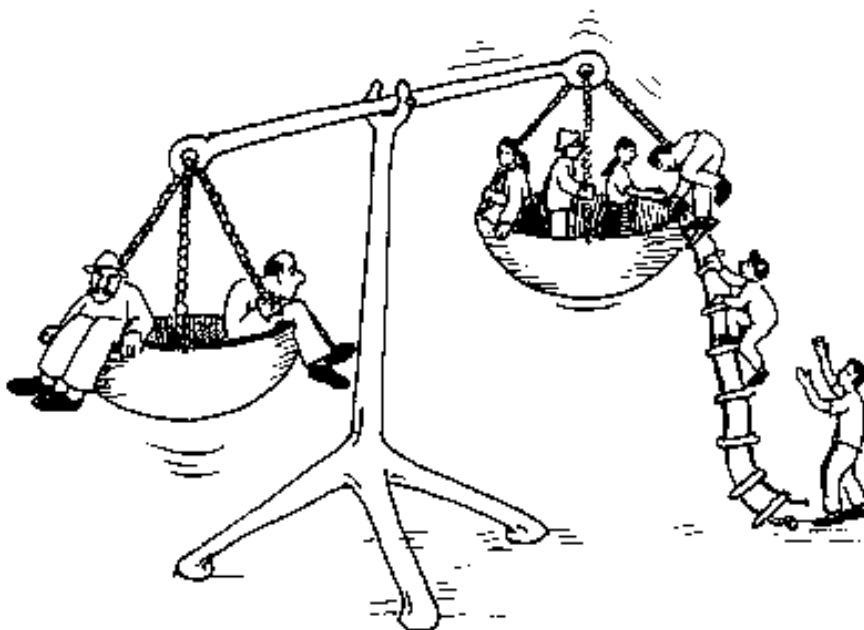
BALANCING PRIVATE MEETINGS

It should be emphasized in training that private sessions offer a significant opportunity to reduce escalating tensions. Whenever a private session is held with one group, similar sessions should be held with the others. This ensures that all sides have an equal opportunity to explain their feelings and reactions to what is happening. It also allows the groups to hear and consider in private the perspectives of others. *Training activity #41* provides practice in holding private meetings.



3. Power balancing techniques. Facilitation techniques to help balance power in negotiations include:

- ◆ recommending to participants who appear disadvantaged by inadequate information at joint meetings that they go back and gather the additional information they need, which might include historical perspectives, personal views and traditional knowledge;
- ◆ encouraging information flow, in order to empower the process and the individuals involved, and clarifying how much information will be shared;
- ◆ monitoring communication among stakeholders, in order to assess the non-verbal and verbal indicators that signal when one group may feel intimidated, cornered or disempowered in some other way, and then taking appropriate action;
- ◆ ensuring that all individuals have time to speak and fully express themselves and, if people are speaking for widely different lengths of time, monitoring the way this is received by others;
- ◆ demonstrating communication with and respect for all participants by listening and reflecting on their inputs;
- ◆ altering the physical setting – seating arrangements, table shape, room size and the availability of private meeting space can all affect the outcome of negotiations;
- ◆ as much as you can, being aware of what happens outside the formal sessions, after the negotiations.



6.5 WHAT TO DO IF THE PROCESS BREAKS DOWN

There is always the risk that emotions, tensions, frustrations, etc. will continue to escalate and threaten the negotiations. Sometimes some or all of the parties are unwilling to renegotiate their positions. In such cases, the facilitator should ask them to consider what other options they may have. One option is to avoid discussion of a particular issue, another is to reassess the BATNAs and identify other alternatives. The facilitator may also want to remind the disputants that it is their responsibility to determine the outcome.

If emotions continue to obstruct the discussion, and none of the interventions have been successful in changing the behaviour, a facilitator may ask the participants to take a break or, if necessary, may simply close the meeting. At this point, it is useful for the facilitator to reiterate that his or her purpose is to assist all parties in the resolution process and to help the disputants to overcome difficult moments in order to reach a final agreement in time. If such an action is taken, the facilitator should conclude the meeting, encouraging the participants to consider how they wish to proceed at the next meeting.

If the parties have determined that they are unable or unwilling to work together to meet previously agreed objectives, the facilitator may also ask them whether they would like to cancel negotiations formally. It is acceptable that one or more parties decide they would prefer to proceed with a different option. This is their process.

6.6 SECTION SUMMARY

Section 6 has presented the responsibilities of a facilitator and useful facilitation skills to assist communication among stakeholders in negotiations. The following is a brief summary of the key points covered in this section. To support the introduction and discussion of concepts in training, refer to the training activities in Section 9.

The role of a facilitator requires the balancing of multiple responsibilities. The facilitator is challenged to help all participating stakeholders to stay focused on the substance and content of the negotiation process, while ensuring that the process is fair and builds collaboration. This requires the monitoring of participation, emotions and communication, while keeping discussions on track. These skills are best developed through practice.

Facilitating conflict management is different from meeting facilitation. There are important differences between facilitating routine meetings and negotiating agreements among opposing stakeholder groups. Negotiations frequently involve a series of intense meetings, and regularly involve periods of a high level of emotion, posturing and other difficult behaviours. Within negotiations, sensitive issues are raised, leaving many parties feeling vulnerable. As negotiations are voluntary, this can erode stakeholders' interest in participating. In response, the facilitator must often intervene to reduce perceived threats and support a more open atmosphere.

Facilitators need to work effectively with a range of communication styles. Cultural, age, gender and socio-economic differences all affect the communication styles of different stakeholders. These differences can significantly block or impede communication. When differences surface, the facilitator needs to build communication bridges between groups, fostering understanding and acting to improve communication. Failure to do so may lead to escalating emotions and a collapse of the negotiating process.

Facilitators use a range of communications techniques. In order to be effective communicators, facilitators need to be active listeners and skilful in focused discussion techniques. Facilitators also need to be aware of participants' body language and should use their own non-verbal language effectively. Measures to improve both verbal and non-verbal communication are introduced in Section 3 and linked to a series of skill development activities in Section 9.

Good recording can greatly support negotiations by improving group memory. Quality recording assists negotiations by capturing and displaying what is being discussed and agreed, helping participants to stay on track and reach targets. Details of information needs, possible solutions, new stakeholders or future actions may be introduced and captured for later follow-up. By mapping discussions, participants can view their

progress and respond accordingly. This section provided a range of techniques that are useful to improving recording skills.

Facilitators intervene when difficulties arise. All the parties involved in negotiations need to feel that their key interests will be served by participating. Maintaining equity and balancing power in negotiations are therefore essential. Often these require significant intervention by the facilitator to ensure that the issues of weaker parties are addressed. At the same time, the facilitator has to help more dominant and powerful stakeholders understand why doing so is beneficial to both reaching an agreement and their interests.

6.7 REFERENCES

Kiser, G.A. 1998. *Masterful facilitation: becoming a catalyst for meaningful change*. New York, AMACOM.

McCall, I. & Cousins, J. 1990. *Communication problem solving: the language of effective management*. Chichester, UK, John Wiley and Sons

Mead, R. 1990. *Cross-cultural management communication*. New York, John Wiley and Sons.

Warner, M. 2001. *Complex problems, negotiated solutions: tools to reduce conflict in community development*. London, ITDG Publishing.

Worah, S., Svendsen, S. & Ongleo, C. 1999. *Integrated conservation and development: a trainer's manual*. Godalming, UK, WWF UK.