

# From conflict to co-management: the case of the Blue Forest

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## SUMMARY

Prins, Castillo and Almendares analyse the conflict between legal and illegal forest users from three communities near the Blue Forest, Honduras. Some villagers received the right to exploit the reserve, but legal and institutional requirements made their timber clearing less profitable than illegal harvesting. A project sponsored by the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center engaged in a multistakeholder strategy for managing the conflict, using development activities, facilitation, mediation and collaborative planning. The rates of illegal logging have dropped considerably as a result. Nevertheless, further change in the policy environment is needed to enhance the profitability of legal logging.



**GUIDING QUESTIONS****KEY ISSUES**

- Why is it important to have broad-based participation in conflict management processes?
- How can conflict management be a good social investment?

**CONTEXT**

- What influences the ways in which villagers from the three communities define their interests in the Blue Forest?
- How did the designation of forest user groups affect the management and use of the Blue Forest?

**CONFLICT BACKGROUND OR HISTORY**

- Why was the *Piedras Amarillas* group unable to prevent illegal logging?
- How did the OLAFO project get involved in the forest conflict?

**CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION PROCESSES**

- What were OLAFO's initial steps in conflict management? Why did they prove difficult?
- How did the communities become more motivated and able to discuss the conflict openly?
- How can trust be built and maintained among conflicting parties?

**CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION OUTCOMES**

- How has conflict management altered forest management and use in the three communities?
- How can conflict management outcomes be sustained?

**LESSONS LEARNED**

- What are the advantages and limitations of having outside parties involved as facilitators and mediators in conflict management processes?
- How could forestry policies, institutions and practices be altered to promote increased local participation?

## KEY ISSUES

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This case study describes and analyses how a conflict between three communities over access to, and use of, a communal forest in Honduras, known as the Blue Forest (*Bosque Azulera*), was handled so as to enable the co-management, conservation and sustainable use of the forest by those communities. The study was carried out in the Atlantic coastal region of Honduras and addresses the following key issues:

- ◆ The step-by-step, multistakeholder strategy applied in this case effectively addressed the conflict of interests and viewpoints related to the access to, and use of, natural resources, creating a solid social base for their sustainable use and conservation.
- ◆ Conflict management must be seen as an opportunity to shape fruitful social relations allowing for joint management of natural resources.
- ◆ Without all users and stakeholders agreeing to clearly defined rights, rules and objectives for resource and conflict management, precious natural resources may face severe destruction.

The first issue relates to the literature on how to tackle, in a collaborative way, conflicts between groups in society that are divided over the use of scarce natural resources. This includes: analysis of the origin and development of the conflict; defining the stakeholders, their positions and interests; and the design of ways and means to bring parties together and create common ground and a vision for a negotiated outcome.

The second issue expresses a central idea in the literature on conflict management and its practice, which is evident in this case: resolving conflict consumes time and energy but may also be an opportunity to create more just and productive social and institutional relations, which is a good social investment. Natural resource conflict management is not just a matter of solving a conflict but also of creating, in the process, a solid basis of cooperation for long-lasting conservation and the sustainable use of scarce natural resources. This implies an enabling environment, in the broadest sense of the term: to conserve and make better use of natural, human and institutional resources through concerted action, geared at an effective trade-off between conservation, production and a sustainable livelihood for the local population.

The third issue is in line with the literature on the conservation of common property resources such as communal forests, irrigation water, pastures and aquatic resources. These resources can be conserved over time if their conservation is vital for the group's survival and if the group is able to develop fair, effective and socially accepted rules that apply to the access to, and use of, those resources. If the latter is not the case, the probability is that that everybody will exploit the resources as quickly as possible and they will eventually be lost. Hence, there is a

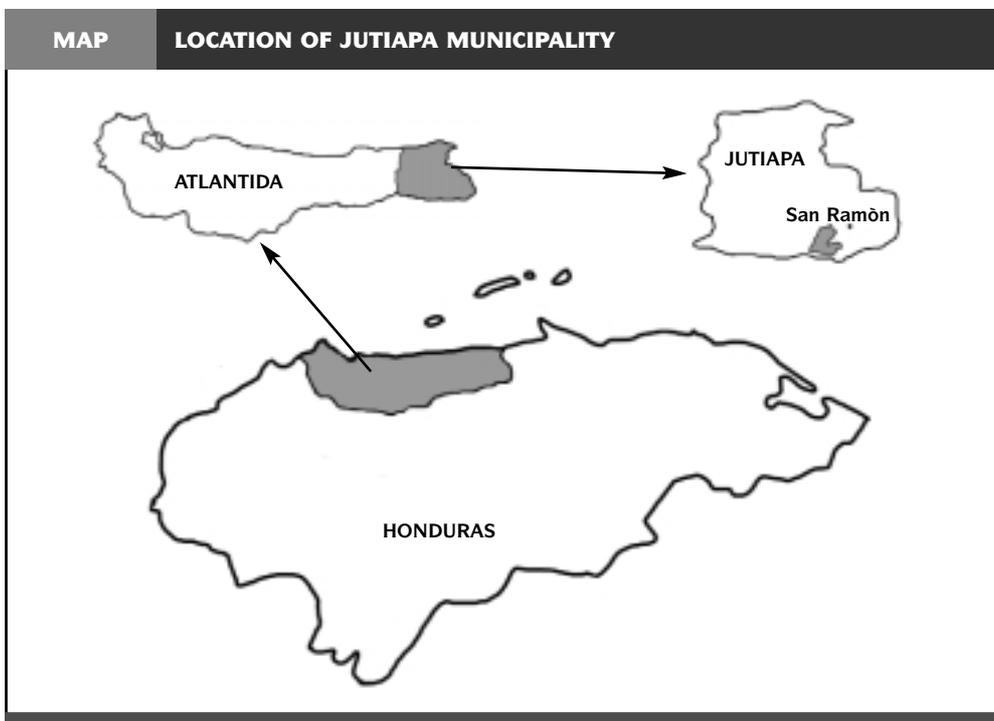
close link between conflict management and the democratic regulation of access to, and use of, common natural resources, in accordance with the characteristics of the ecosystem and the livelihood needs of its users, as will be shown in this case.

The case study provides an insight into the multiple dimensions and processes of (conflict) management and conservation of scarce and common natural resources, and makes this accessible to development facilitators and the public at large.

Natural resource conflict management is not just a matter of resolving a conflict about access to, and use of, scarce natural resources. It is also about shaping, in the process, more equitable and productive relations among the different stakeholders and generating a solid social, institutional and policy environment for enduring conservation and sustainable use of those resources.

## CONTEXT

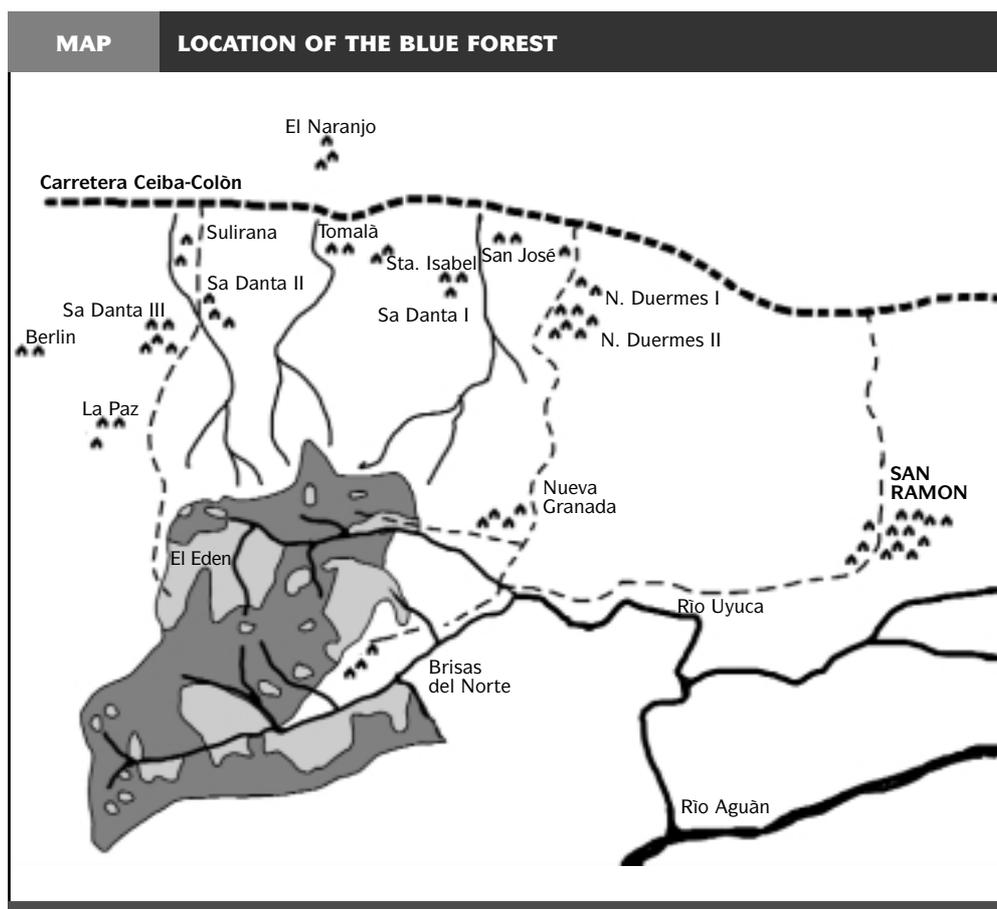
The area on which this case study focuses is a rural area of the Atlantic coastal region of Honduras, in the Municipality of Jutiapa, Department of Atlantida (see Map below).



### Characteristics of the disputed area and the services it provides

Until five years ago, the Blue Forest covered 1 200 ha. Currently (in 2000), just 804 ha of forest remain, of which 124 ha are designated for watershed protection (see Map below). A total of 680 ha may be used for the production of timber and other forest goods. During the last five years, 400 ha of the forest have been illegally converted into agricultural land. If no concerted action is taken, it is anticipated that the forest will be completely destroyed within ten years.

Various rivers spring from the mountainous forest. The water resources protected by the forest ecosystem provide drinking-water for 30 communities in Jutiapa, and groundwater for irrigating part of the lower terrain on which banana plantations have been established.



### **Location of the communities and reasons for the conflict**

The three communities involved in the conflict over the Blue Forest are: San Ramon, Nueva Granada and Brisas del Norte. San Ramon has the formal right of forest access, but it is three hours' walking distance away, which makes it difficult for the community to exercise its rights. Nueva Granada is one-and-a-half hours away, and Brisas del Norte is located on the forest border (see Map on p. 105). These two communities illegally exploit timber and have converted parts of the forest into agricultural land. Half of the land possessed by the peasants of Brisas del Norte was originally part of the area set aside as the Blue Forest. The conflict is detrimental to the conservation and sustainable use of the forest.

Because of poor road conditions, all goods and timber harvested are transported on mules and horses to points accessible by large trucks. The road used for smuggling timber from the Blue Forest passes the community of Nueva Granada and continues on to the community of Ni Duermes (see Map on p. 105). There, during the night, trucks enter and take away the timber illegally, to be sold at the local market.



*Goods and timber are transported by mules and horses*

### **Some aspects of the communities**

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The community of Brisas del Norte is between 750 and 900 m above sea level (masl), far from modern infrastructure. It is the youngest and poorest of the three communities with regard to income, employment and access to social services. San Ramon is between 300 and 400 masl. It is the oldest of the three communities and is the least poor. It has a road to the highway, which connects the towns along the Atlantic Coast. Nueva Granada lies halfway between Brisas del Norte and San Ramon. Its poverty level is about midway between that of the two other communities.

The area is mountainous. Agriculture is carried out on steep, erosion-prone hillsides, and mainly staple goods such as maize, rice and beans are grown. Slash and burn agriculture is still widespread and is usually carried out before the first planting of maize during the month of May. Efforts are being made by extension workers to convince farmers to adopt new practices such as applying mulch. For many members of the communities located near the forest, harvesting timber is an additional source of income.



*Slash and burn agriculture is widespread*

Small plots of tropical forest remain, although they are threatened by continuous migration from other regions of Honduras. The region can be characterized as “agricultural frontier”. The inhabitants of the three communities originate from other regions of Honduras where there was limited access to land as a result of population concentration. The main incentive for emigration was to obtain land and make a living from it. At that time, the prevailing perception in society was that forests were a hindrance to rural progress; official policy was geared towards forest conversion for agricultural purposes, and forest clearance resulted in entitlement to tenancy.

Since the 1980s, national policy has gradually changed in favour of forest conservation. In 1994, forestry groups in the communities obtained the legal right to exploit state-owned forest through a contract with the National Honduran Corporation for Forestry Development (COHDEFOR). To effectuate the right, a group must ensure sustainable exploitation of the forest through a long-term management plan and annual operational plans.

A weak aspect of this arrangement is that COHDEFOR signs the contract with a particular group within the community that is engaged in forestry, and not with the community as a whole through its representative local organization, known as *el patronato*. This does not necessarily mean a conflict between the forestry group and the rest of the community, as not everybody is interested and engaged in timber exploitation, but it often lowers community involvement in forest conservation and protection.

Various forestry groups in the zone are members of the Regional Agroforestry Cooperative of Atlantic Honduras (COATLAH), a cooperative timber service organization located in the city of La Ceiba, which often acts as an intermediary for other groups to obtain a forest use right from COHDEFOR.

The economic, political and institutional environment is not yet conducive to sustainable forest management and legal logging. Legal loggers must comply with many formal obligations: they must adhere to sustainable harvesting guidelines, follow bureaucratic procedures, pay taxes and tolerate complicated payment schemes. The slightly better price for legally produced timber is offset by these barriers. Furthermore, certification of sustainably produced timber and payment for environmental services is just beginning in Honduras.

Legal and institutional flaws combined with a weakly developed incentive system contribute to the wide-scale illegal exploitation of timber promoted by some traders. In addition, the control of illegal traffic through confiscation of the timber and incarceration of those responsible is not very effective. Hence, many members of legal forestry groups are eventually induced to leave them and become involved in illegal timber extraction. For a list of the main stakeholders in the conflict see the Box.

**BOX      MAIN STAKEHOLDERS IN THE CONFLICT**

- ◆ Three communities located near the Blue Forest: San Ramon, Nueva Granada and Brisas del Norte, represented through their *patronatos*.
- ◆ A forestry group with forest use rights in the Blue Forest: *Piedras Amarillas*, associated with the community of San Ramon and COATLAH.
- ◆ COHDEFOR, the government agency in charge of policy-making, and orientation and control of forest conservation and harvesting.
- ◆ The Municipality of Jutiapa: responsible for certain environmental matters (i.e. watershed management with COHDEFOR), drinking-water supply and public sanitation (with the Ministry of Health).
- ◆ OLAFO, a project of the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE).<sup>1</sup> The project carries out activities in agro-forestry and social forestry, and others aimed at strengthening communal and intercommunal organization in the area.

**CONFLICT BACKGROUND OR HISTORY**

In 1994, a forestry group known as *Piedras Amarillas* (Yellow Stones) received forest use rights for the Blue Forest from COHDEFOR. At that time, the group was composed of members of all three communities described in this study. Later, discontent arose within the group over the management of funds, the decision-making process and the way timber quotas were allotted. The trees to be harvested, selected in the annual operation plan, were assigned to two-person teams. The members of the group originating from Brisas del Norte and Nueva Granada complained that this allotment was not equitable. They then deserted the group and started to harvest timber illegally and unsustainably in the Blue Forest, seeking the highest prices for the most precious species (see Box on p. 111).

The *Piedras Amarillas* group kept the forest use rights, but it was not able to prevent the illegal logging and was prevented from making full use of its rights by the distance between the community and the forest (see Map on p. 105). When

1. CATIE is located in Turrialba, Costa Rica. Its efforts are concentrated in Central American countries and some other Latin American countries with links to Central American government agencies.

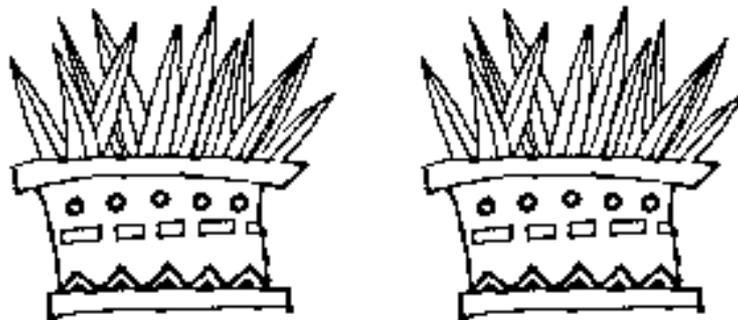
the group entered the forest to inventory tree species for harvesting, as specified in the general management plan, it found that the precious timber species had already been felled by members of the neighbouring communities.

In 1996, a CATIE project called OLAFO began working in the community of San Ramon. The project helped the community obtain a number of social services (such as drinking-water), promoted sustainable hillside land-use practices and helped strengthen the local organization. The drinking-water project created awareness among the people of San Ramon about the importance of tree conservation close to water sources, and established a link between conservation measures and public health. A local health committee was formed, together with an agroforestry committee to carry out activities such as establishing a nursery for fruit- and timber trees, live fences, and other practices associated with soil conservation and income generation.

*El patronato* was revived and became the encompassing local organization for previously existing (i.e. the *Piedras Amarillas* group) and newly formed groups. In this way the local organization in San Ramon became more unified in its goal setting.

Progress in social forestry was hindered by the lack of effective control over the forest use rights. Frustration, associated with failing to meet its objective of social forest management, motivated the local OLAFO team to think about a collaborative and negotiated way to resolve the conflict among the three communities.

As will be shown in the next section, strengthening the local organization in San Ramon around development activities and, later, initiating a similar process in the communities of Brisas del Norte and Nueva Granada contributed to the willingness and capacity of the communities to find a negotiated solution to the conflict over the forest.



BOX	HISTORY OF THE BLUE FOREST CONFLICT
1994	The <i>Piedras Amarillas</i> group, composed of members of three communities, receives the right to exploit the Blue Forest from COHDEFOR
1995	A conflict arises within the <i>Piedras Amarillas</i> group concerning fund management and the partition of the timber quota; the foresters of Brisas del Norte and Nueva Granada start illegal timber exploitation; more conversion of forest into agricultural land
1996	OLAFO starts rural development activities and strengthening local organizations in San Ramon
1998	Mediation of the conflict begins

## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION PROCESSES

### The first steps

In June 1998, the OLAFO team started to approach the communities and other stakeholders in the conflict.

A first step was to establish a rapport with the communities of Brisas del Norte and Nueva Granada. Exploratory visits were made to, and conversations held with, the authorities of the *patronatos* and ordinary families, and some needed services were provided. Examples of these were helping Brisas del Norte to build a school, since the lack of primary education was a major concern of the community. These contacts and services helped OLAFO to gain a minimum level of acceptance, since it would be needed to act as a mediator among the three communities. Still, a considerable amount of distrust remained and conflict resolution was still a long way off.

While approaching the communities, the OLAFO team tried to generate interest among the development agencies present in the region to support a negotiated resolution to the conflict. The first agencies addressed were COHDEFOR and the Municipality of Jutiapa. COHDEFOR's support was sought because it was its task to guide the conservation and sustainable harvesting of the national forests. The municipality had the additional responsibility of ensuring the protection of the natural resources within its jurisdiction, and of guaranteeing the provision of social services, such as the supply of drinking-water.

Contacts were also established with other agencies that it was hoped would play a role in the resolution of the conflict, including a regional organization for protection of human rights and an agency associated with the Ministry of the Interior, in charge of overseeing compliance with environmental protection laws. The latter two agencies were to observe and certify the overall process and procedures.

After establishing some common ground with these agencies (e.g. the importance of avoiding violence at any cost and of providing incentives instead of just punishing smugglers), the OLAFO team put the idea of a conflict settlement to the local authorities. First the leaders of San Ramon were approached, because of the trust that already existed there, then those of Nueva Granada and, finally, those of Brisas del Norte, which was the most confrontational of the three communities.

After this preparatory groundwork, a joint meeting of the three communities was held in Nueva Granada, which was attended by the Lord Mayor of Jutiapa and representatives of other agencies. At this meeting it was agreed to settle the conflict in a peaceful way and to establish a conciliatory committee for that purpose.

However, as later events showed, the agreement was fragile and the idea of a negotiated solution had not yet really taken root among the communities.

In February 1999, the conciliatory committee began its activities, with the task of discussing the issues at stake, discovering ways of resolving them and finding equitable rules for all. The committee was composed of representatives elected by the communities and members nominated by COHDEFOR and the municipality. COHDEFOR took on the role of chairperson and the municipality became secretary of the committee. OLAFO was not a member of the committee, but attended the meetings in the role of initiator and facilitator of the process. At the beginning, representatives of the human rights organization and the environmental protection agency also attended the meetings.

### **The difficult start**

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In spite of the efforts undertaken to ensure a smooth process that would lead to an agreement, reconciliation and conflict resolution were far from easy to obtain, especially at the beginning.

There was no solid basis of trust: COHDEFOR was considered by the smuggling communities to be an adversary, associated with confiscating illegally harvested timber. OLAFO was not completely trusted either, because of its long-term relationship with the people of San Ramon. The team had to prove to the smuggling communities that it was impartial, and it had to learn, by trial and error, to act as an effective mediator.

The community representatives did not show a strong will, nor the necessary openness, to analyse and discuss the issues. The earlier attitude towards the conflict had been avoidance, and this attitude prevailed in the first committee meetings. Representatives exhibited a certain rigidity and did not feel free to modify formerly held positions.

In time, the communities became more motivated and were able to discuss the conflict in a more open and flexible way. This was a result of various interacting factors:

- ◆ At one point a physical clash occurred between a group of foresters from the *Piedras Amarillas* group and inhabitants of Brisas del Norte, when the latter group tried to prevent the former from walking on what had previously been forest land. This land had been converted into agricultural land and had subsequently been claimed by inhabitants of Brisas del Norte. The clash aroused strong emotions, but it also convinced the authorities and people of San Ramon that negotiation was really necessary.
- ◆ Two months later, timber smugglers from Brisas del Norte were captured by forestry inspectors and police while illegally transporting timber. OLAFO, the municipality and the human rights organization mediated to obtain their freedom. Fear of imprisonment, the confiscation of their timber and loss of income, combined with the goodwill shown by the mediators, began to convince the people of Brisas del Norte that negotiation might be necessary and might offer an opportunity to advance their interests.
- ◆ Common reflection in the committee on these events contributed to enhancing the willingness of the communities to seek a peaceful solution. Balancing rights and obligations, the human rights organization stressed the need to respect the social rights of poor people, while representatives from the environmental protection agency stressed the need for *all* people to abide by the established laws.<sup>2</sup>

2. The observers from these two organizations chose to retire from the committee, not wishing to mix their official responsibilities with the negotiation process by simultaneously acting as judge and participant. Nevertheless, their presence had created a positive effect by convincing the communities of the vital importance of settling their dispute in a negotiated and peaceful way. The observers remained available for consultation.

### **The importance of communication, adequate procedures and language**

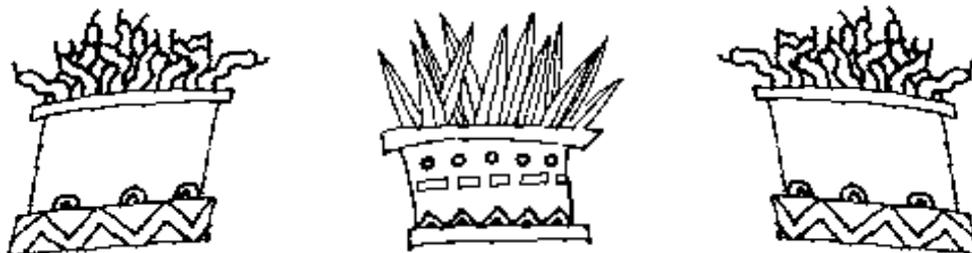
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To make progress in uniting the three communities, it was of utmost importance to implement adequate and equitable procedures, promote dialogue among the communities and their committee representatives, and provide proper follow-up to the agreements reached.

For instance, it became clear that the first elected committee representative from Brisas del Norte did not openly communicate the agreements discussed in the committee to his community. Apparently he had a hidden agenda and particular interests – he was a leader of the smugglers – and attempted to sabotage the process by giving erroneous information and speaking out against the committee, which obstructed its progress. It was then decided that community representation on the committee be increased to include at least two members of each community, so that decisions did not rest with one community representative. As the process advanced and the committee became more and more connected with the communities, the aforementioned representative was eventually isolated and lost the support of the community.

A sensitive issue in the process was the language to be used. At the start, the communities were completely opposed to the use of the word *ilegales* (illegals), which was clearly a defence mechanism as long as there was little trust of the other participants. When a foundation of mutual trust was later established, and the communities involved in illegal harvesting desired legal alternatives, the term was no longer found objectionable.

When negotiations reached a possible solution and activities were undertaken to investigate the state of the forest resources, the term “inventory” was rejected by the communities of Brisas del Norte and Nueva Granada, since it reminded them of the former, disputed activities of the *Piedras Amarillas* group. This impeded the progress of planned activities; the term “diagnosis” was accepted and used instead.



## The process accelerates

With flexible strategies, tactics and language to fit the evolving circumstances and moods of the participants, trust among the communities gradually grew. This enhanced their willingness and capacity to analyse the problems in an open and just manner, and to seek a mutually agreeable outcome. In time, the committee became firmly rooted and broadly accepted in the three communities.



*A meeting of  
community  
members*

This positive change was stimulated by parallel development activities in Brisas del Norte and Nueva Granada. Some extension workers were contracted to assist farmers to improve agroforestry practices aimed at sustainable production of maize, beans, fruit and vegetables. As part of the extension methodology, excursions were organized to visit communities in other areas, which broadened the participants' thinking and created a genuine interest in shaping better relations with other communities and development agencies. It also improved their capacity to interact and negotiate with outside agents.

It became clear to the other two communities that OLAFO was not just a friend and supporting agency of San Ramon, that it was not acting as a "spy" and that its aim was not simply to suppress illegal harvesting. It also became obvious to them that legalizing their timber activities might lead to better and more productive relations with outside development agents.

Another factor that helped to gain the trust and support of the communities of Brisas del Norte and Nueva Granada was the provision of medical aid in cases of illness or accidents associated with illegal timber extraction. On one occasion a forester cut his leg with a chain saw and, as a result of prompt medical attention, he was able to save it.



*A fact-finding excursion into the forest*

The growing interest expressed by the outside agencies in finding a fair and sustainable outcome to the conflict was also important. Their motivation increased when they realized that the process of conflict resolution helped them to fulfil their own institutional mission and achieve unity in vision and action (see section on the outcome of the conflict).

From the start of 2000, the committee began to seek and examine practical solutions to the conflict that were acceptable to the three communities. It became possible to discuss former “hot” topics, such as management of funds and timber quotas, and seek solutions to problems arising from these.

A crucial point of discussion during the last stage of the process was the use of the Blue Forest. As the process advanced, the smuggler communities became aware of the overriding importance of conserving the forest and were prepared to commit themselves to it. At the same time, they wanted to ensure that this would not involve the loss of the land obtained by converting parcels of the forest into agricultural land. Hence, a trade-off had to be found between conserving the remaining forest and retaining those agricultural parcels.

To help people form opinions and make decisions, a number of participatory fact-finding excursions were organized to gather information on the state, use and possession of the forest resources. (For details, see the section on the outcome of the conflict.)

In a complex and long-lasting conflict, a long time span, a clear strategy and high-quality process guidance are required in order to find and implement adequate and appropriate solutions, with a solid base of support in society.

BOX	ACTIVITIES AND MILESTONES IN THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS
June 1998 to February 1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiation of mediation process and preparatory groundwork. Initiation of development activities in Brisas del Norte and Nueva Granada</li> </ul>
February 1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of conciliatory committee. Initiation of difficult negotiations; lack of trust; positions inflexible</li> </ul>
April to July 1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical clash between communities around access to the Blue Forest</li> <li>• Timber smugglers from Brisas del Norte are captured and released through intervention of committee</li> </ul>
July to December 1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased technical assistance in Brisas del Norte and Nueva Granada</li> <li>• Increased mutual trust; positions in committee open up; more support in communities for committee</li> </ul>
January to July 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open and serious negotiations to find practical solutions to the conflict</li> </ul>
June 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reunification of the three communities and the <i>Piedras Amarillas</i> group in meeting at the municipality</li> </ul>
June 2000 to June 2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conciliatory committee keeps functioning</li> <li>• Planning and execution of activities of sustainable exploitation of Blue Forest by reunited <i>Piedras Amarillas</i> group</li> <li>• Participatory territorial “diagnosis” of Blue Forest</li> <li>• Establishment of municipal guards in the communities</li> </ul>



*The meeting at the Jutiapa Municipal Town Hall, June 2000*

## **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION OUTCOMES**

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- ◆ On 19 June 2000, the three communities and members of the *Piedras Amarillas* group were reunited in a meeting at the Jutiapa Municipal Town Hall.
- ◆ The majority of the group members are now from the two communities previously associated with illegal harvesting, and the chairperson is from Nueva Granada. This expresses a change in power relations between the communities and an even-handed outcome to the conflict. Nueva Granada lies midway between Brisas del Norte and San Ramon and played a mitigating and reconciliatory role while the other two communities often displayed impassioned and confrontational behaviour.
- ◆ The forestry group is now rooted in the three communities and the *patronato* organization, and backed by regional development agencies. Previous isolation from tri-community organizations and development agencies was an important group weakness.
- ◆ The reunited group obtains assistance from an OLAFO forest engineer and was involved in drawing up a sustainable harvest plan for early 2001.
- ◆ Former illegal harvesters from Nueva Granada and Brisas del Norte are eager to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for sustainable forest management and to receive orientation and assistance regarding sustainable agriculture. To demonstrate that they have become respected citizens, they have become very legal-minded. They operate in close association with the municipi-

pality and COHDEFOR to control illegal timber logging and transportation, and to assist in protecting the forest from trespassing by outsiders. COHDEFOR has been asked to provide more technical assistance to the communities in forestry practices and to monitor the sustainability of the forest harvest in accordance with the forest use rights contract.

- ◆ The rates of illegal logging and transport have dropped considerably, although not to zero. Some members of Brisas del Norte continue to harvest and sell timber illegally; however, these people are now under strong social pressure from the community to stop this conduct. The three communities are now very much on their guard against illegal timber exploitation by people from inside and outside the communities, conversion of the remaining forest land for other uses, and the occurrence of fires and other dangers.
- ◆ The former gap between legal rights over, and actual control of, the forest has greatly decreased, although it has not closed completely, owing to persistent intruders from outside the communities. How to restrict such intrusion is the next agenda point to be addressed by the conciliation committee, which continues to operate with the strong support of communities and development agencies.
- ◆ A number of excursions have been organized to gather information on the state of the forest resources, their potential and limitations and the current tenancy along the borders, and to produce an agreed plan for the area. The results of these fact-finding missions have been used as input to determine, in a workshop, how the forest area should be used: of the remaining 1 300 ha, 800 ha are still considered appropriate for timber exploitation. In all, 150 ha will be protected because of their proximity to water resources, and part of this area will be reforested. The 450 ha that have already been converted to agricultural land will continue to be used for that purpose, although now in a sustainable manner. This implies planting fruit-trees, live fences and employing other agroforestry and conservation-related practices. The intensification of land use in the areas around the forest is considered to be a strategic means to lower the pressure on the forest.
- ◆ Members of Brisas del Norte who have converted parts of the forest into agricultural land will receive rights of possession for those lands, in exchange for protecting the inner forest. Hence, the area assigned to forestry and pure protection has been reduced; however, this has been done in order to conserve the remaining forest through increased control and guarantees concerning illegal harvesting, with the cooperation of neighbouring communities and agricultural producers.
- ◆ This process of drawing up a participatory territorial plan and regulating the use of the common forest resources is an essential and complementary part of resolving the conflict, and makes the outcome more viable and sustainable.

- ◆ The office of the Municipality of Jutiapa, responsible for natural resource protection in the area under its jurisdiction, has been empowered through the establishment of committees on environmental protection, education and health. The local population participates in these committees, which have begun to function dynamically. *Auxiliares municipales* (community members who function as a liaison between the municipality and the communities) of all communities of Jutiapa are currently being trained to act as guardians of the forest and other natural resources. This does not mean that they merely act as inspectors. They promote the sustainable use of the resources for the benefit of the local population.
- ◆ The municipality and COHDEFOR have developed, in the process of analysis and negotiation, a common vision on conservation matters and now coordinate and complement their activities better than before. For instance, they promote watershed protection in a concerted way, through workshops with the water boards in the communities of Jutiapa. OLAFO acts as a facilitator.
- ◆ On the whole, the social and institutional environment has been enabled for conservation and sustainable use of the forest and water resources that provide water for drinking and for irrigation purposes.

The overall results are quite promising, although it is still early days. The results need to be consolidated in order to guarantee their long-term sustainability. A number of questions still need to be resolved.

### **Consolidating and building on the outcome of the conflict**

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An important issue to resolve in order to consolidate the outcome of the conflict relates to the profitability of the forestry activities. As stated earlier in the section on context, the lack of profitability of legal logging is one of the main reasons for illegal timber harvesting and related conflicts about access to, and use of, the forest resources.

A short-term concern is to tighten up and streamline the economic and administrative aspects of the current harvest plan by the *Piedras Amarillas* group. Members who were accustomed to receiving direct payment from dealers for illegally harvested timber may be tempted to start harvesting illegally again if they have to wait too long for their money.

A broad issue to resolve is how to improve the economic and political environment for legal and sustainable logging. Some concrete action has already been taken: in line with a Forestry Law currently being prepared, an agreement has been implemented that allows 50 percent of the taxes paid by legal loggers to be assigned to finance infrastructure (reforestation, road improvements, etc.) in their

own communities. This encourages legal logging and support for it by the local population and the *patronato* organization.

Another crucial step in consolidating the gains of the process is to widen the scope of public and private support for conservation. The importance of the forest is not only based on timber harvesting, but also on the provision of other goods and services such as drinking- and irrigation water. The forest provides drinking-water for 30 communities in Jutiapa and the groundwater for the banana plantation in the lower parts of the area. Groups and enterprises that benefit from these services should be involved and should contribute to forest protection and to those who are making an effort to protect the forest. In this case, these are the three neighbouring communities. This implies allocating economic value to the environmental services of the forest and payment for those services. Lessons from some pilot projects may point towards the course of action to be taken.<sup>3</sup>

## LESSONS LEARNED

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### Lessons learned about the management of the conflict

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- ◆ There is often a need for an outside agent with proven analytical and social skills to initiate and facilitate a process of conflict resolution. This outside agent must be a group or organization that is accepted by the groups involved in a conflict. External mediation is necessary if traditional institutions that manage conflict within or among communities have been weakened, and if the communities are not yet able to begin to resolve conflict.
- ◆ It takes time to build trust, since this is the major ingredient of any solution. It is necessary to create the conditions and means for well-thought-out and agreed-upon solutions and arrangements, with a clear and shared vision. In this particular case, the combination of development activities in the communities and conflict mediation proved to be an important asset in building the necessary trust. Once their subsistence needs were met, the smuggling communities became solid allies of conservation.

3. For instance, a pilot project involves San Pedro Sula, a city of 1 million inhabitants on the Atlantic coast of Honduras, and a number of communities around the mountainous area of Merendon, a natural park, where the water for San Pedro Sula is generated. This project provides compensation to the communities for their efforts to protect the park and its water resources.

- ◆ Engaging in struggles with several different parties at the same time must be avoided: a coalition should be built step by step. This should start with the groups with which there are greater affinities. It is necessary to gain consensus for the goals of the conflict management. Achievements depend on the consolidation of social forces. At the same time, in a collaborative conflict management strategy, defeating the adversary is not the aim. It is better (if possible) to create a winning situation for all and to look for an outcome that is acceptable to all parties. An outcome that is not seen as fair is neither viable nor sustainable.
- ◆ It is important to look for some initial common ground between parties in conflict, in spite of differences in interests and outlook. During the process a common vision will be developed, which will be an outcome rather than the start of the process.
- ◆ The initial strategy should be modified according to the interests, priorities and behaviour of the stakeholders: in the end all actors need to interact positively, but in order to get everyone on the same track, it is first necessary to reach the stakeholders with procedures and tactics adapted to each. Development agents and communities need different types of stimuli. Moreover, the peculiarities of each community should be taken into account. For instance, at the beginning of the conflict, the people of Brisas del Norte were much more aggressive than the people of Nueva Granada, although the perspectives and interests of both communities contrasted greatly with those of the people of San Ramon. The community of Nueva Granada served as a bridge to reach the people of Brisas del Norte.
- ◆ During the process, the roles and capacities of all stakeholders should be strengthened in accordance with their functions and interests, and complementarity within a common vision should be sought. In this particular case, the different members of the conciliatory committee developed a shared vision concerning the value of conservation of the Blue Forest and established concrete mechanisms and tools to achieve it. In addition, the role that each actor had to play was clearly defined.
- ◆ Conflict management is not just a matter of resolving a given conflict, but also of creating new and fruitful social and institutional relationships. In an acute conflict situation, people are no longer on speaking terms. However, if the conflict is properly handled, those people may eventually work together on many other questions of common interest.
- ◆ Past weaknesses must be analysed and overcome and new experiences generated in order to consolidate gains and be able to handle more complicated matters in the future.

- ◆ Careful monitoring of the implementation of the agreements and of the proper functioning of the initially fragile institutional and organizational frameworks is needed.
- ◆ Decisive action should be combined with careful reflection in order to learn what works and what does not. Then strategies can be modified to make them more effective so that they can move the process closer to its final objectives.

To make progress in resolving a conflict, it is necessary to reflect regularly upon the intermediate products of the process and to “feed” the outcome of this reflection into the planning of new activities and mechanisms of conflict resolution. This will increase the effectiveness of the actions and methods, and build a strong and lasting social coalition to support the final outcome of the conflict.

### **Lessons learned about the institutional and policy environment**

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- ◆ Mediators should conduct a comprehensive analysis of the factors that hamper the sustainable use of forests and that are at the root of socio-environmental conflicts. This does not mean that all these factors must be tackled at the same time, but it will provide an overall picture of which factors should be addressed sooner or later.
- ◆ In this case, it proved very useful to combine agroforestry with forestry activities; the intensified use of the surrounding agricultural areas helped to lower the pressure on the remaining forest resources, made local people more inclined to consider conservation, and facilitated the resolution of the conflict.
- ◆ Plans for areas must be made in a participatory way; if not, they will not be rooted in civil society and government institutions, and are therefore unlikely to be effective.
- ◆ Collaborative natural resource conflict management and participatory territorial planning must go hand in hand with the making of equitable and effective rules of access and use for scarce natural (common pool) resources.
- ◆ Drawing up a proper plan for the area must be accompanied by organizational planning, since it is necessary to define not just the limits and use of natural resources, but also the roles, responsibilities and abilities of the users and supervisors.
- ◆ The economic, political and institutional framework must be made more attractive for legal logging and the sustainable use of natural resources.

- ◆ This implies, among other things, creating mechanisms to compensate those who are making efforts to conserve the forests and the environmental services they provide, starting with the generation of water supplies. In this respect, it should be possible to capitalize on some good practice that already exists in the region.
- ◆ A trade-off between conservation and poverty alleviation should be aimed for, since this is a vital strategic matter. Poor people may become strong allies of conservation as soon as their basic living needs are met; thus, conservation of natural resources and sustainable livelihood strategies should be closely linked.
- ◆ Institution building and social networking are needed to form a critical mass and to carry out the aforementioned concerted actions successfully; the wider and more complex the proposed goals, the greater the mass and the more time needed to achieve them.
- ◆ It is necessary to “**think big, but act small**”. To achieve change at higher levels of society, a long-term vision is needed; but to attain this vision, a step-by-step approach must be followed.