

# Consensus Building with Participatory Action Plan Development



## A Facilitator's Guide

This guide is designed to:

- Assist consensus building among natural resource users
- Follow a six stage process for Participatory Action Plan Development
- Identify problems and constraints, and opportunities to address them

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## Introduction

This guide sets out an approach to community planning that intends to build local consensus to help people manage and improve their livelihood options. The approach is Participatory Action Plan Development (PAPD) – a structured and repeatable set of activities that helps local people identify key problems and constraints together with realistic opportunities to address them. The guide provides a basic explanation of six key stages required to reach consensus on simple livelihoods related initiatives at local level. The purpose, approach and process of each stage is described with reference to specific examples.

It is expected that facilitators will follow the sequence outlined in the guide and will understand the purpose of each stage. This structure is useful to maintain consistency between locations and will aid reporting and documentation by the facilitating agency. However, it is understood that facilitators and communities may have the confidence to modify activities and the direction of planning where appropriate. The guide concludes with some general observations and recommendations for expanding the planning process to a wider geographic which might include and benefit additional project stakeholders.

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## What is Participatory Action Plan Development?

Participatory Action Plan Development (PAPD) is a consensus building tool that seeks to identify and then solve environmental or livelihoods problems with community support and input. PAPD draws from several participatory techniques and principles. Its key features are: 1) recognising the wide range of stakeholders and their diverse interests in natural resource management and; 2) engaging these stakeholders fully. Over the last nine years the approach has been used in Bangladesh, India, Cambodia and Vietnam to help local people plan in floodplains, forests, coastal areas and cities.

Planning and discussion within PAPD is intended to increase the level of understanding of all stakeholders and to help reach consensus on proposed new activities.

These agreed activities can sometimes be modest but they will be well thought through, with broad support, and will benefit most local people. In

turn, this planning can provide the foundations to address more complex issues such as long-term disputes or conflict.

There are numerous stakeholders with an interest in natural resources and associated livelihoods. In any form of planning, it is important to include the full range of relevant stakeholders and appreciate their roles and interests (Box 1).



Incorporating the diversity of interests in local planning is not easy but it makes proposed initiatives much more realistic and it can help overcome local disputes or obstacles to development opportunities. At local level, PAPD can achieve agreement for action on simple initiatives and increase mutual understanding and respect. The same principles may also apply

to the regional level to path the way for initiatives that might benefit wider areas and larger numbers of people.

## Different Stakeholders

Any consensus building and planning approach should include both 'primary stakeholders' and 'secondary stakeholders' -

**Primary stakeholders** are those that rely directly on the natural resource base for their livelihoods – people such as settled villagers, migrant herders or part-time fishers, for instance. Different ethnic groups may pursue alternative livelihoods strategies and have differing perspectives and interests. It is also important to remember the range of interests within such groups. For instance, women are often involved in specialised activities and have different concerns and additional knowledge.

**Secondary stakeholders** are those people or institutions that have a less direct stake but also have an interest and role to play in management decisions affecting natural resources and livelihoods. This group includes people like extension agents and the technical bodies and line departments associated with agriculture, fisheries and water, for instance. Local and regional government bodies are also important secondary stakeholders. The UN agencies such as FAO, UNICEF and UNDP are further examples. Secondary stakeholders are very important because their support is needed to turn plans into action.

Including this range of stakeholders increases the quality and relevance of local planning. It helps ensure plans are feasible and well-supported and it increases the level of understanding and consensus between the stakeholders.

## How might PAPD be relevant in the project context?

PAPD has been used in many situations but in all cases there have been several different interest groups each trying to secure livelihoods. These groups are often interconnected, relying on each other or being affected by the actions of others.

There are several factors that increase hardship and that can increase competition between these groups and this can become an obstacle to productive planning and participation. These factors include climate change, other environmental stress, social change (displacement etc.) and political insecurity. Access to water such as irrigated land, pasture or fisheries is often at the centre of these problems. Consensus building through local planning can help people secure more reliable livelihoods by first highlighting and then attempting to address these issues.

The same approach will draw in additional supportive stakeholders to represent the interests of larger numbers of people and to participate in plans that might have greater potential and geographic coverage. It is possible for a network of participants to achieve consensus and access support for water management plans within a water catchment area, for instance (see Adapting the PAPD approach).

## What is required to attempt PAPD with communities at village level?

Very few materials are required to conduct PAPD. It may be necessary to take large flip charts and pens together with notebooks for the facilitators and a community volunteer to record the discussions. A digital camera would be very useful to record any maps and tables generated by the discussion. However, the intention is to focus on discussion rather than the written word, especially if literacy is low.

The most important requirements are: 1) a well prepared team of 2-3 facilitators; 2) a suitable venue where discussion can take place comfortably (a school or community building etc.) and; 3) an enthusiastic and representative group of local stakeholders willing to donate their time.

The following section discusses the six stages of PAPD in detail. The guidelines are based on the experiences of Practical Action and other organisations in using PAPD within projects at community level. It is important to understand the principle and purpose of each stage in working towards consensus and viable plans, However, the size of the groups, the length of each stage and the type of meetings can be modified according to the purpose of PAPD (see Adapting the PAPD approach).



## The six stages to PAPD

1. **Preparation** – good background knowledge of the area is collected with project and community support (socio-economic features including livelihood strategies and ethnicity, geographic features etc.).
2. **Problem census and problem prioritization** – a mixed group of primary stakeholders lists and compares the most pressing livelihoods problems and focuses on key concerns.
3. **Information gathering** – information relevant to the problem is collected by primary stakeholders through discussion or documentation
4. **Analysis of solutions** – the community consider the feasibility of different solutions
5. **Public feedback** – progress is presented to the wider community and secondary stakeholders for their input and support
6. **Action plan development and implementation** – a plan for a feasible action is drafted and roles and responsibilities drawn up.

### 1. Preparation

The **purpose** of this stage is to help facilitators develop sufficient background knowledge of local issues with primary stakeholders and to help them select a representative group with the community.

The **approach** is to seek the support of the community in developing a profile of the area and in participating in future planning.

The **process** includes community profiling and participant selection (below).

#### 1.1 *Community profiling*

The facilitation team must compile a simple profile of the area in advance of the community level discussions to include;

- Bio-physical setting (key features including waterbodies, pasture etc.
- Livelihoods and environmental issues (the range of livelihoods and their limitations)
- Social and institutional issues (list of primary and secondary stakeholders and roles)
- Types and extent of problems in the area (including changes and recent trends)

Some relevant information will already exist (for instance, project baseline surveys and case study reports). In addition, the facilitation team should conduct a transect walk with a knowledgeable community volunteer who will be willing to highlight significant features (waterbodies, infrastructure, livestock routes etc.) and discuss issues regarding social features, recent changes to livelihoods and any specific difficulties in the area.

The output will be a small document of 3-4 pages outlining the context (quantitative and qualitative features) of the planning area and which will act as a reference for the facilitating team and will be available to local stakeholders as required.

### *1.2 Participant selection*

Once the facilitators have a good understanding of the local context they must decide who to include in the first stages of PAPD. Normally about 30 local primary stakeholders will form a group which is large enough to be representative but small enough for the facilitators to manage the process. This group should be: 1) willing to donate their time and motivated by the planning process; 2) representative of the diversity of primary stakeholders within the village or village cluster. There is a need to retain the same participants throughout the whole planning process and to minimise changes to this group.

The decision on who to include should be based on local advice. For instance, in some settings it will depend on whether women are permitted to meet and talk in mixed groups or whether it is possible to meet and talk with people from other ethnic groups. This will also have a bearing on the composition of the facilitating team (i.e. language skills, gender).

The participants should be notified of the time and venue of the planning several days in advance.

## **2. Problem Census & Problem Prioritization (approximately half a day)**

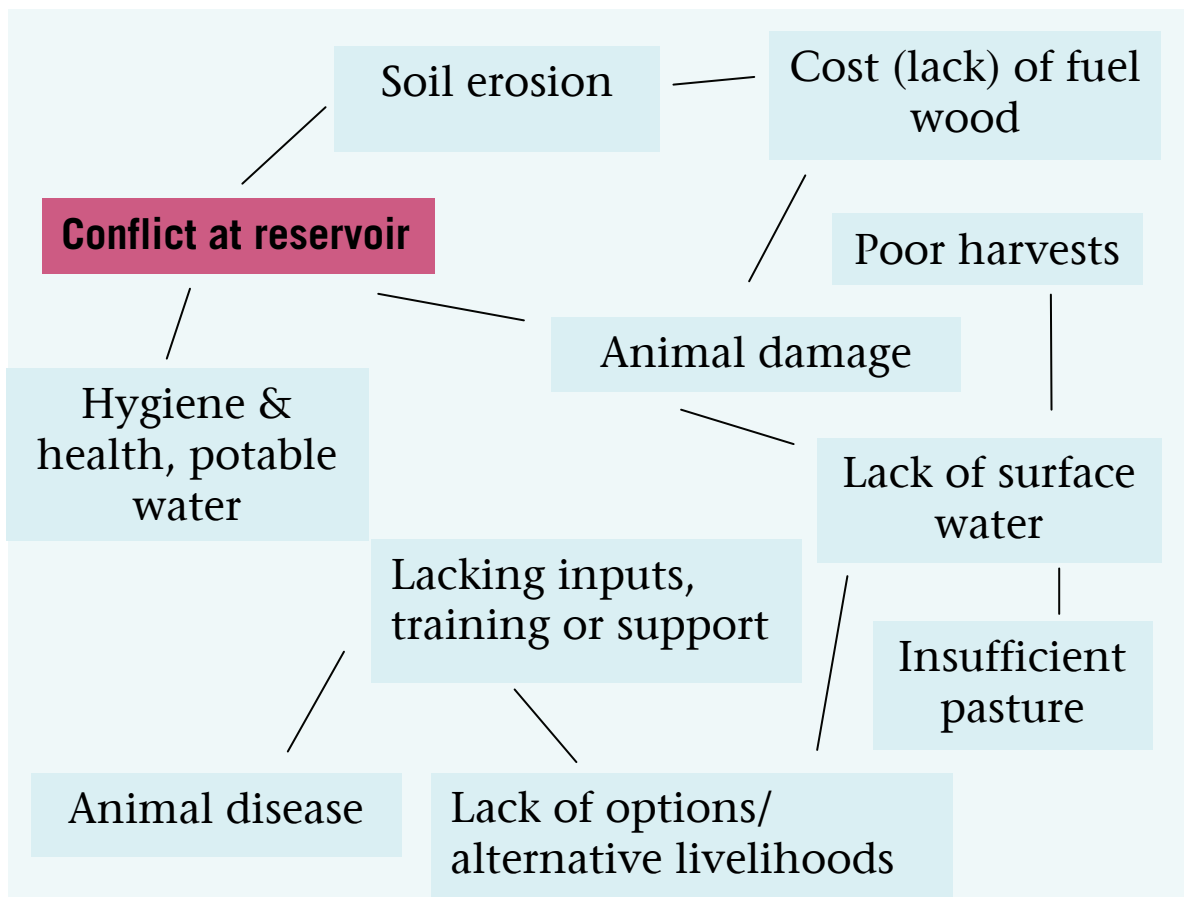
The first task is to explain the purpose of this planning with PAPD and its role in relation to local work and projects. Introductions can be used as a way to reveal attendants' names and stakeholder group. This should be recorded in a register each day there is a PAPD meeting.

The **purpose** of this stage is to initiate discussion of the range of livelihoods and natural resource management problems in the area, to increase awareness of these issues and their underlying causes, and of how they impact different groups. Discussing the concerns of each stakeholder group, in turn, helps build confidence and empathy between the primary stakeholders.

The **approach** is to seek input from the each group of stakeholders in turn and to discuss the relative importance and root causes of specific problems across the whole group.

This **process** commonly involves separating the participants into smaller stakeholder groups (e.g. women, farmers, fishers) to work with one facilitator and list what they view as the major natural resource related livelihoods problems. A facilitator can record this list on a flip-chart on behalf of each group or keep notes if the group is illiterate. Each group then reports its findings to the whole group.

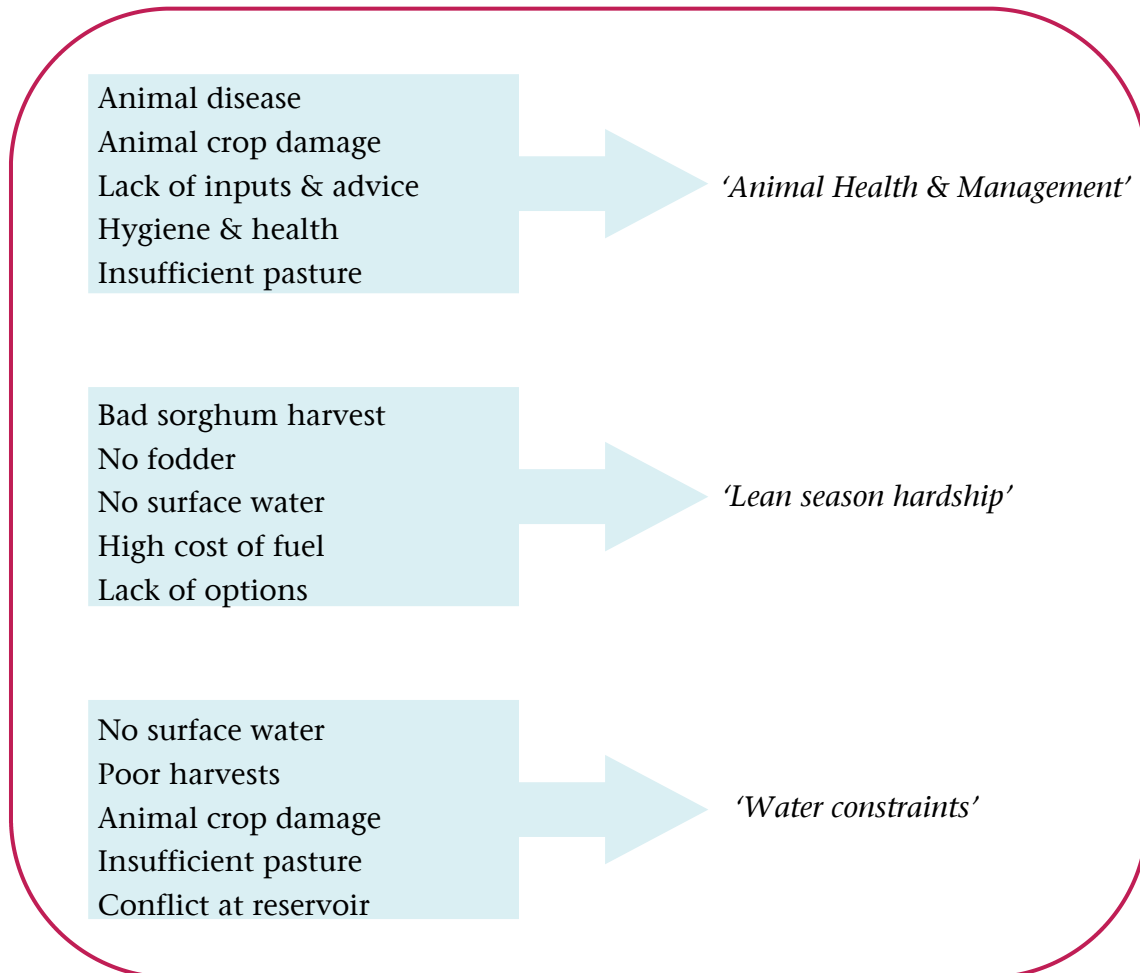
Alternatively the facilitators may wish to base the problem census on discussion with the entire group together. This may be preferable when the local community and the planning group is not diverse or where there may be sensitivity around separating the group. The discussion should highlight how interrelated many of the problems are and how different types of stakeholder are affected (see Box 2.).



**Box 2.** Examples of potential problems and how they are linked. Natural resource problems are often interrelated. The task of the facilitators is to help highlight and discuss these linkages with the community and to help identify initiatives that might tackle cross-cutting issues.



The facilitators must help the participants identify the most commonly mentioned problems and to group or cluster them into themes. Problems can be grouped into clusters that contain related issues (see example below). This helps participants identify linkages and solutions that might be both focussed and cross-cutting.

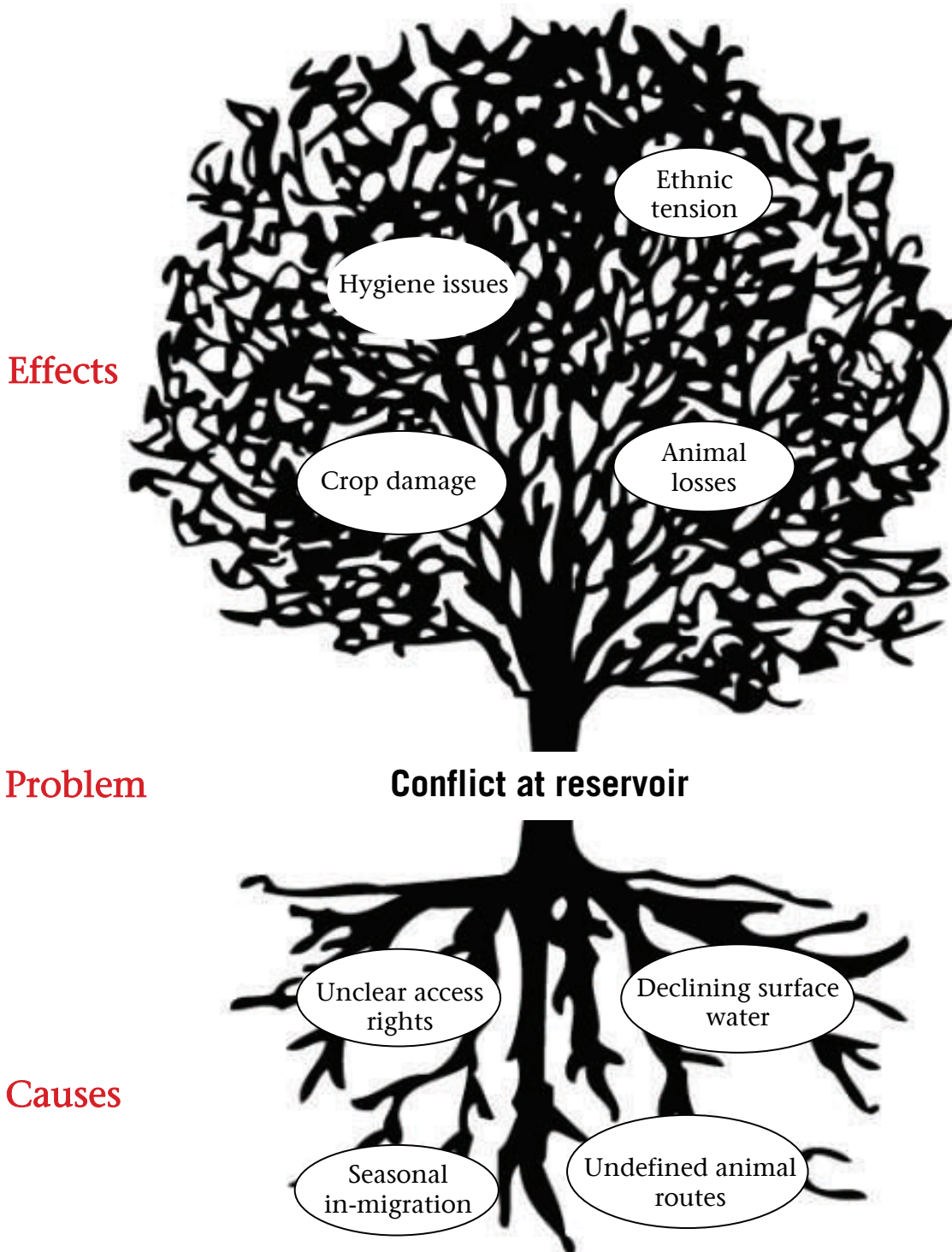


**Figure 1.** Grouping problems to help the analysis of common and cross-cutting issues.

Agreement must be reached to discuss three or so priority problems in detail. To do this, each member of the group is invited to rank what they see as the 1st 2nd and 3rd most important problems of all those mentioned. The facilitators then calculate the three priority problems to take forward for more detailed discussion.

The facilitator must keep in mind the purpose and scope of existing project work and the roles of major partners. Many highlighted problems may be addressed by activities available within the project.

It may be useful to invite the group to sketch a “problem tree” which represents the cause and effects linked with each of the priority problems. The example below outlines some causes of low level conflict at local waterbodies and their effects (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. The Problem Tree.** *This is an example of how a group may have sketched the relationships between a problem (conflict at a reservoir), its causes and effects (impact).*

To keep the discussion focussed, and to move towards potential solutions, a ‘cause and effect analysis’ can be conducted. For each major problem, the facilitators should help the group consider its causes, impacts on primary stakeholders and potential solutions. The feedback should be recorded on behalf of the participants in table form (Table 1.).

Problem	Cause	Impact	Affected groups	Potential solution
Conflict at reservoir	Villagers & herders want to use green area & reservoir for farming/ animals	Crop damage Animals kept from water & pasture Hygiene issues	Herders & villagers (agro-pastoralists)	Designate a pasture area for herders  Designate part of reservoir for human use only

**Table 1. Cause and Effect Analysis.** *These are examples of how a problem may be analysed by the participants. The facilitators should keep a record of these tables and be prepared to present them or describe them in public to other stakeholders later in the process.*

The **outputs** are: 1) broad agreement to target one key problem that affects local stakeholders; 2) understanding of the root causes and potential solutions to this problem and; 3) a written or photographic record of this planning in the form of tables as above.

### **3. Information gathering (several weeks)**

Before local stakeholders can make informed choices about potential solutions to problems they need to seek information and advice. This is the first time in PAPD that secondary stakeholders are engaged.

The **purpose** of the information gathering stage is to increase local awareness and to form new links with secondary stakeholders.

The **approach** is to support a small but representative committee to gather information about the problem or problems prioritized.

The **process** involves the committee consulting relevant stakeholders like NGOs, government, tribal leaders and others such as households highly involved with the issue. The committee will also make an initial assessment of the scale of the problem and reflect on a possible time scale for the PAPD process.

The **output** is increased awareness of the issue and, where appropriate, written documentation of the advice and support received by the PAPD participants.

#### **4. Analysis of Solutions (approximately half a day)**

The **purpose** of this stage is to work towards realistic solutions to the problems and to build awareness of the types of additional stakeholders that may need to be engaged.

The **approach** is to analyse in detail the feasibility of alternative solutions with the whole group.

This **process** relies on a tool called 'STEPS analysis'. This tool allows the facilitators and the group to consider all aspects of proposed solutions in relation to the following factors:

**Social // Technical - Financial // Environmental //  
Political - Institutional // Sustainability**

This stage starts with a summary of the group's achievements including a list of problems, causes and their potential solutions. The group should then debate the solutions to one or several key problems with STEPS analysis. This requires group discussion with broad input and debate. The facilitator should also offer his or her technical advice or opinion where appropriate.

The **output** is a STEPS table for each key problem tackled. A hypothetical STEPS analysis table to a common local problem in Sudan is presented below (Table 2.).



*STEPS analysis highlights the conditions that must be met to implement an activity and ways to avoid unwanted outcomes and impacts.*

<b>Problem:</b> Low level conflict at reservoir (between agro-pastoralists and migrant herders) <b>Proposed solution:</b> Physical demarcation of part of the reservoir for animal use	
<b>Social</b>	Support needed from all primary stakeholders Existing project committees to discuss with representatives from neighbouring villages and herder communities
<b>Technical – Financial</b>	What materials are required (fencing, signs etc.)? Agree position & size of animal area What tools & machinery are required / how much and what? Identify labour source (voluntary or paid?) & funding (existing project?)
<b>Environmental</b>	Will it increase trampling & soil erosion? Will it ensure sufficient water for all users? Will it reduce contamination of drinking water
<b>Political – Institutional</b>	Which agencies would be interested or must be contacted? What permission is required? Who might support or block the plan – why? Who will manage and monitor the plan? Is a special sub-committee needed to manage the plan?
<b>Sustainability</b>	How long will the benefits be enjoyed? Will long-term financial support be required? Will social & environmental consequences require managing? What other steps could make the plan longer lasting?

**Table 2.** Hypothetical example of issues to include in a STEPS table. The table is a way to record discussions and a useful way to summarise progress to other secondary stakeholders.

## 5. Public feedback (approximately half a day)

The **purpose** of this stage is to communicate the planning process and its achievements (key problems and carefully analysed solutions) to the wider local community and sets of relevant secondary stakeholders and influential people. The intention is to seek broad consensus and the technical, financial, political and institutional support needed to turn the proposal (or proposals) into actions. *Note: this is a very important stage because wide public knowledge is required to make the plan legitimate and well supported.*

The **approach** is to make public the findings of planning by explaining both the process undertaken and the draft plans. The audience should include: 1) other local village stakeholders and; 2) secondary stakeholders such as relevant line department extension agents and local government officials. This group may also include invited representatives from other project areas and project partners.

This **process** requires the facilitators to help the participants present their findings to a large mixed audience of primary and secondary stakeholders. The STEPS tables will have identified important secondary stakeholders. Where possible the facilitator should arrange several days in advance that these officials or institutions attend the public meeting. All relevant stakeholders must be made aware of the meeting's location and time well in advance.

Summaries of the planning process can be presented in table form as large posters but must be introduced and interpreted verbally by the facilitators and with the help of the PAPD participants if possible.

The facilitators should invite the opinion of the audience and should listen carefully to accommodate their comments. One facilitator must make notes of the comments and issues highlighted by the audience.

The **output** will be to have achieved wider support and to have received the opinion of the PAPD plans from the wider community and important secondary stakeholders. Issues arising from the meeting should be documented by the facilitators.

## **6. Action Plan Development and Implementation (approximately half a day)**

The **purpose** of this stage is to provide support to the local communities to finalise a working plan and take the first steps towards implementing it.

The **approach** is to set up discussion and negotiation between PAPD participants and supportive stakeholders whereby a detailed work plan for the proposal can be made.

The **process** involves facilitating a meeting to review the draft plans and STEPS analysis with relevant technical service providers, PAPD participants and supporting committees (these may include existing project committees or regional networks). The facilitators will encourage the group to identify realistic schedules and stages to implementation, paying specific attention to technical, institutional, political and financial requirements.

Agreement must be reached on specific roles and responsibilities regarding implementation.

The **output** will be a detailed implementation plan which specifies:

- Financial arrangements – sources of funding, budgets, responsibility for budget management;
- Technical requirements – materials and expertise required;
- Political-institutional factors – the individuals or institutions willing to support the plan, any authorisation required and the structure and function of any new sub-committee;
- Timeline – the stages in implementation and management of the plan and outcomes.

This implementation plan will be in written form and copies should be owned by the PAPD participants, implementing committee and the facilitators.

## Adapting the PAPD approach

Facilitators need to carefully consider the purpose of PAPD in each context. The usual function of PAPD is to build local agreement and support for new or alternative options and strategies at local level (e.g. technical livelihoods related options).

There are two other scenarios where the six stages of PAPD can be relevant, however: 1) when local disputes or conflict are a barrier to the uptake of new options and; 2) when consensus and support is required over a wider geographic area.

### *1) When local disputes or conflict are a barrier to the uptake of new options.*

These may be pre-existing issues or minor problems associated with past or present project activity. Often communities will lack the planning experience and confidence to deal with NGOs and other secondary stakeholders. In either case, PAPD can build trust and help local stakeholders identify solutions to the problems. This can add value to existing project activity and open up new opportunities.

It is useful if facilitators are aware that problems can be **simple**, **moderate** or **complex**.

An example of a **simple** problem could be a recent breakdown in the effective operation of an existing scheme at village level e.g. a revolving fund not being replenished regularly or problems accessing inputs in certain localities.

If a problem has existed for a long time but has not resulted in conflict, it could be considered a **moderate** problem e.g. lack of participation and consultation of women in village decisions, or bias towards one land use at the expense of other uses.

If a problem has lasted years and involves stakeholders on a wider scale, it is clearly **complex** and will take more time, negotiation and resources to resolve e.g. migration routes and animal damage to crops in Sudan. If these issues are publicly acknowledged and obvious, the planning process could focus more time and energy on the latter stages of PAPD (analysis of solutions, public feedback and action plan development).

A PAPD process can last from a number of months to a number of years. It is often useful to first work with the community on simple problems because this quickly achieves visible benefits that can create greater public enthusiasm for the PAPD and interest from other influential stakeholders. This is a way to build confidence and local skill in planning.

### *2) When consensus and support is required over a wider geographic area (e.g. an urban or regional setting).*

Some problems cannot be tackled at the local level only. In addition, many options benefit from a series of related activities and support in neighbouring areas in order to achieve greatest impact. This requires discussion and consensus over a wider geographic area and may require support from a large array of secondary stakeholders.

Larger areas like river basins, grazing lands or livestock routes provide a challenge because they: 1) may overlay several administrative units; 2) will include new sets of primary and secondary stakeholders and; 3) will require particular care to incorporate the political support and concerns of powerful interests. The latter is particularly true in the urban setting where the concentration of formal government stakeholders is greatest and the economic stakes tend to be very high.

Stakeholder analysis of regional institutions and their interests will help to focus the planning strategy on key stakeholders. The early stages of PAPD can provide evidence to decision-makers (in particular, STEPS analysis) at other levels.

The task is then to quickly transfer the negotiation and discussion process to higher levels (civil society organisations and regional authorities etc.). The latter stages of PAPD (public feedback and action plan development) can be adapted to include a range of key secondary stakeholders in central venues. The challenge to the facilitator is to organise and manage a series of formal and informal meetings or workshops that work towards regional agreement. As such, regional level PAPD will follow a process approach which is less bounded and less predictable than local planning. This makes documenting PAPD more complex and support should be provided to help record meetings and arrange follow-up actions.

## Working with existing and supportive institutions

### *Local level and informal institutions*

It is important that PAPD facilitators are fully aware of the potential of existing institutions to support new planning and consensus building. In addition to the visible **formal institutions** (local government authorities, line departments etc.) there are often important but invisible social norms and systems that represent informal institutions. For poor primary stakeholders these **informal institutions** are often as significant to their livelihoods as any formal structures.

These institutions or norms often influence how negotiation may proceed (what is, or what is not, permissible) and the planning process should acknowledge them if it is to succeed. For instance, planning can be affected by social norms relating to the traditional role of women in public or customary relationships between different ethnic groups. Of particular interest are existing means of dispute resolution involving respected and influential individuals (Box 3.).

### **Regional institutions or networks**

There are many good reasons to utilise existing supportive institutions rather than to attempt to build new committees or structures. Established networks may be well placed to provide support because they: 1) may legitimately represent numerous villages; 2) may be experienced in securing financial and technical support and; 3) might be able to reach new supportive institutions and sources of funding during the lifespan of the project and beyond.

Facilitators must ask: “Are there existing networks and institutions (project-related, civil society etc.) already involved in regional planning or service delivery that can support PAPD?”



There may already be issue-specific networks or forums that attempt to address regional problems (for instance, water management or migration routes). Many stakeholders may be represented within these networks and they present an opportunity to communicate local issues and plans to a regional audience and to influence broader decision-making.



## Informal Institutions for conflict resolution and local decision making

In Sudan, Ajaweed is the traditional system for conflict resolution in rural areas and is recognized by both government and civil society. Ajaweed operates in all rural Sudan but is particularly important where seasonal migration brings low-level conflict. Ajaweed uses a recognized group of wise people in each village cluster who are entrusted by the community to resolve disputes and help address grievances.

At state level there is an Ajaweed Committee composed of tribal leaders and other respected individuals that can address larger and more complex types of conflicts. The Ajaweed Committee has even been able to resolve local issues within the Darfur conflict.

In Bangladesh, a similar traditional approach is used to resolve village level disputes. Respected elders (the 'mathbor') will meet to discuss and mediate conflicts through a system known as 'salish'. This informal approach to conflict resolution avoids entering into the slow and complicated judicial system and is an important part of the informal decision-making process across the whole of Bangladesh. Salish often relates to natural resource management and livelihoods (e.g. decisions relating to water management to balance the interests of both fishers and farmers).

## Documenting PAPD

There are two areas aspects to documenting PAPD: 1) supporting local participants to collect and maintain information and plans on behalf of communities and; 2) recording the process, strategy and effectiveness of the facilitators.

- **Supporting local participants to collect and maintain information and plans on behalf of communities**

This is straightforward because each stage of PAPD stage is intended to produce written or visual records of local planning. The outputs of each stage can be retained locally and by the facilitators. For instance, the information gathering stage introduces local participants to the process of collecting and managing knowledge independently. Similarly, the STEPS tables are an effective way to prove to others how carefully the plans were devised.



- **Recording the process, strategy and effectiveness of the facilitators.**

This is achieved by maintaining a simple checklist or monitoring format (see Box 4.). A similar format could be used if planning extends to the regional level but in this case the emphasis will be on the workshops and meetings that have taken place (who was represented, what was the purpose and outcome?) and the type of follow up actions that are required. During the implementation of the plans this format will have to be modified to provide a monthly progress report. Progress should be recorded in relation to the social, technical, environmental, political and sustainability requirements identified in the STEPS tables.

**Practical Action** is an international development organisation working to improve people's access and use of technology in order to benefit their lives now and in the future. In Asia, Africa and Latin America Practical Action works with communities to build upon their expertise and knowledge and achieve sustainable development from poverty.

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## PAPD Monthly Monitoring Form

*Date:*

*Location:*

PAPD issue / problem:

Primary stakeholders included:

Secondary stakeholders included:

Stage of PAPD reached:

Activities completed during the month:

Evidence of consensus built:

Main lesson learned or difficulties:

Next actions proposed:

**Box 4.** *Facilitator's documentation – a template for operational records.*