

Livelihoods and conservation in post-conflict and post-disaster situations: learning in partnership



Both: Juan Pablo Morales / FFI

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment reinforces the importance of healthy ecosystems for human wellbeing, and reveals the extent to which those ecosystems are currently under threat. An often overlooked group of threats are unforeseen or high impact events, both natural and human-induced.

Such disasters have two characteristics that pose a challenge to conservationists: they often occur rapidly and therefore require a rapid response to mitigate both their environmental and human impacts, and in their aftermath they often leave not only devastation but also a management and institutional void that hinders rehabilitation.

The conservation sector has difficulty responding to sudden changes in threats to the environment and biodiversity due to traditionally slow funding delivery mechanisms and a lack of appropriate partnerships to deal with the many post-disaster and post-conflict challenges. At the same time, within the conservation sector and the development sector, there is a tendency to separate environment and biodiversity issues and concerns from other issues.

Conservationists need to respond rapidly to crises and to work with cross-sectoral partners to ensure that pressing human needs can be met in an environmentally sustainable manner. There is also a real

Above: After the 2004 tsunami struck Aceh, Indonesia, close partnerships with civil society and government were integral to the success of FFI's humanitarian and environmental work.

need to demonstrate the effectiveness of working cross-sectorally and in partnership, for the benefit of both people and conservation in the specific context of post-conflict and post-disaster scenarios.

What is partnership?

Working in partnership is one of FFI's guiding principles. But what does working in partnership mean? A 'partnership pandemic'ⁱ over the last decade has seen the term used to describe such a wide range of working relationships within and between the public, private and NGO sectors, that often the meaning is left unclear.

There can be many different sizes, types, structures, models and degrees of partnership, and many different reasons for working in partnership. A succinct definition from the New Opportunities Fund states that partnership is "a process in which two or more organisations or groups work together to achieve a common goal, and do so in such a way that they achieve more effective outcomes than by working separately"ⁱⁱ.

Increasingly, both conservation and development NGOs are analysing and articulating their approaches to partnership, but there is relatively little information and analysis around cross-sectoral partnerships in post-conflict and post-disaster situations.

ⁱ Caplan, K (2003) *The Purist's Partnership: Debunking the Terminology of Partnerships BPD Water and Sanitation*
ⁱⁱ Thorlby, T and Hutchinson, J (2003) *Working in Partnership: A sourcebook New Opportunities Fund*

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Learning from experience

FFI is part way through a USAID funded project that is reviewing and learning from experiences of working in partnership at field level, both within and outside of the conservation sector. Activities focus on five sites around the world where FFI is currently engaged and where natural disasters or human conflict have threatened biodiversity.

The goal of the project is improved long-term survival prospects for priority ecosystems threatened by natural disasters and human conflict, achieved through effective partnerships that deliver both conservation benefits and improved human well being.

FFI is also at the forefront of the development of an innovative rapid response mechanism – the Rapid Response Facility - to ensure timely and efficient support in the wake of unforeseen threats, natural disasters and conflicts, building on the lessons learned from our existing portfolio.

What and why are we learning?

Through proactively and systematically learning from experience, FFI and its partners should be able to engage in and manage partnerships more effectively, and more effective partnerships lead to more effective projects and programmes. FFI also wants to share lessons learned with other organisations, including both the conservation and development sectors.

The review of FFI's and partners' experiences is ongoing but already some common issues are emerging from across the 5 focal sites. Some of these appear to be obvious, but often it is the apparently obvious things that are overlooked, particularly in the post-crisis context. The following are some of the lessons learned to date, gathered from both FFI and partner staff.



Above: Liberian university students accompany FFI on a botanical survey – gathering data and building expertise for conservation. Below: A community planning meeting in Veal Veng, Cambodia.

Entering into and managing partnerships

Partnerships generally exist for strategic or pragmatic reasons, and are developed as a result of a joint piece of work. Some exist out of necessity rather than choice. The focus of discussions tends to be on the practicalities of that work rather than the organisational relationship, especially if the work is likely to be a one-off project.

However, as far as possible, it is also important to try and establish a common understanding of the nature of the relationship from the beginning, including roles and responsibilities, and expectations. There also needs to be a common understanding amongst staff within an organisation, on the purpose and nature of key partnerships. A key challenge is managing expectations of what both organisations can bring to the relationship, regardless of the type of organisation concerned.

A Memorandum of Understanding or some other kind of agreement can clarify expectations and make managing and reviewing the partnership easier. However not everyone sees the need for such a formality, and of course the form of agreement will depend on the nature of the relationship, but it is important to at least document and share key discussions and decisions.

What else makes a partnership successful?

More frequent and deeper communication was most often cited as the main thing needed to improve a partnership. The presence of field officers from each partner organisation, working together, is a contributory factor to successful partnerships, allowing for more regular contact and communication.





Above: Communities displaced by conflict in Liberia. Below: Anti-violence murals in Monrovia, Liberia

Some common principles of partnership, including accountability, mutuality and equity, are well documented in the literature of some conservation and development NGOs. Trust and transparency are seen to be the key principles of partnership by FFI and partner staff. However in exploring elements of successful partnerships, the main overarching factor is most often seen to be good personal relationships between key individuals.

Context and how it affects partnerships

It is difficult to identify the ways in which the context specifically affects a partnership, rather than the project that the partnership is delivering. It is also not easy to distil the post-conflict or post-disaster features from the wider political, economic, social, and cultural context. To date, the most observable post-crisis factor in terms of organisational relationships is the solidarity and moral support to individuals and organisations that have suffered personal loss. There have been situations in which this has led to much improved relationships.

In any emergency type response there will be time pressure and some issues may be under-addressed and planning will be done in haste. As some of the organisational relationships in a post-crisis situation will

not be long term, there is a disincentive to invest in the development of these relationships so long as the job in hand is done. As personnel changes are more frequent in post-crisis situations, this can have an effect on the effectiveness of organisational relationships.

The importance of understanding the wider social, political, economic, cultural and historical local context has been emphasised, including the need for the majority of staff of international organisations to be from the area or at least speak the local language, and also to be there on the ground. This is widely acknowledged to be a problem in post-crisis situations when there are many external organisations and personnel present.

Cross-sectoral partnerships

The same principles that apply to any partnership apply also to cross-sectoral partnerships. The difference is that the organisations come from different backgrounds and need to work to find the common ground.

FFI's approach to conservation is based on the premise that local stakeholders are the best long-term guardians of biodiversity, and FFI aims to be responsive to local needs and the aspirations of local people. It has been suggested that this approach means that working with some development organisations can actually be less challenging, once the common ground has been agreed.

The key lessons to date

It is difficult to generalise about partnerships. So much depends on the approach of individual organisations, on individual people, and on the project, the circumstances and the wider context. However, two key lessons are: the key ingredient for a successful partnership is good personal relationships, and; it is essential that staff really understand the context, and in particular the culture, in which they are working.



FFI's approach to working in partnership



Both: Jean-Pablo Morales / FFI

If over-analysed, partnership can become a difficult concept to grasp. On the other hand, it is not necessarily useful to describe every working relationship as a partnership. Are the relationships that FFI has with large donors and with communities both partnerships? There will be shades of grey, but it is important to engender amongst all staff a common understanding of partnership.

With USAID's support, FFI is reviewing a number of partnerships in order to identify and articulate FFI's approach to partnership and to identify good practice. Whilst the focus of the project is on cross-sectoral partnerships in post-conflict and post-disaster situations many of the lessons will apply equally to all partnerships, as the principles of working in partnership apply equally to cross-sectoral partnerships operating in post-conflict and post-disaster contexts.

The case study sites

FFI had been working in Aceh Province, Indonesia, for a number of years before the tsunami in December 2004 which, compounded by decades of civil war, resulted in resource demands for recovery and reconstruction that have jeopardised the environment and biodiversity.

After the tsunami, FFI worked with and alongside development and humanitarian agencies in responding to the overwhelming human need. FFI has also worked with the Aceh Jaya district government to develop their 20 year land use plan, and has supported the formation of an association of traditional community leaders, assisting them in identifying and implementing priority activities to meet the needs of communities.

Above: Agricultural restoration and rebuilding projects in Aceh, in partnership with civil society and government.

FFI is working with a range of provincial and district government departments, NGOs and Acehese community stakeholders to improve livelihoods and safeguard the critically important forest ecosystems, focusing on Ulu Masen, which are under a variety of threats, all increased by the reconstruction efforts.

The other case study sites are the Cardamom Mountains, Cambodia; Sapo National Park, Liberia; Golden Stream Watershed Preserve, Belize; and Nimba Mountains, Guinea.

About FFI

FFI is the world's longest established international conservation body, active in over 40 countries around the world, developing, implementing and managing biodiversity conservation projects in partnership with host country organisations, to protect and conserve species and ecosystems. FFI's guiding principles are to work through local partnerships, to act as a catalyst for change, to make conservation relevant and to base decisions on sound science.

Contact:

This is one of a series of leaflets produced by the Biodiversity and Human Needs team at FFI. For more information contact livelihoods@fauna-flora.org

