Chapter Four: Forces that Promote and Constrain Collaboration

Collaborative approaches to resolving disputes, optimizing resources, and engaging in joint decision-making are increasingly called upon in natural resources planning and management. Factors promoting a more widespread adoption of collaboration include recognition of the need for broader community and stakeholder involvement, accelerated loss of biodiversity, and changing conservation strategies. Four case studies of collaborative approaches to conservation in the Toledo District of Belize are presented in the following chapters, illustrating many of these points. The cases and the conclusions that follow them are structured around three central questions:

- What are the challenges to effective collaboration?
- What factors foster collaboration?
- What opportunities exist for increasing collaboration?

Before addressing these questions in the context of the case studies and the Toledo District, however, this chapter asks these questions about collaboration more broadly, drawing on alternative dispute resolution and organizational literature. The chapter focuses on the first two questions in reverse order, starting with facilitating factors. In other words, why does collaboration occur and what forces help it along? Next, the chapter addresses what makes collaboration a difficult process. The answer to the third question, regarding opportunities for expanding collaboration, is introduced through the layout of the case study approach. Detailed responses to this last question are provided in the individual case studies, as so many opportunities are site-specific.

Factors that Foster Collaboration

Individuals, governmental agencies, and nongovernmental and international organizations are coming together in a number of fields such as education, development, tourism, natural resources management and joint problem solving for a variety of reasons. Diverse parties may come to realize that they share common problems and aspirations or feel there is a need to move forward in the face of conflict or uncertainty. Collaborative processes are often initiated in order to explore new opportunities or solutions that would not otherwise be possible (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). A variety of factors may encourage organizations and individuals to "build bridges," or enter into new partnerships and initiatives rather than "going at it alone." The following section highlights several of these factors, including: **power differences** among actors; the "wicked" **nature of the problem** at hand; the absence of suitable **alternatives to collaboration**; the perception of **crisis**; a shared **sense of place**; the identification of **superordinate goals**; **leadership**; **public pressure**; and **personal relationships**.

Power differences

Organizations and individuals choose to collaborate when they perceive that their potential power within a collaborative body would be sufficient to allow them to serve their interests more effectively than they would be able to using other processes, such as litigation. When considering whether or not to enter into a collaborative endeavor, parties must develop an understanding of the power relationships that exist among organizations with which they hope to be involved. Gray (1985) describes this situation as turbulence in the space in which organizations interact, referring to a situation in which one party cannot achieve its goals without greater coordination and cooperation with other parties. Sufficient countervailing power must exist among other stakeholders to prohibit unilateral action by any one stakeholder (Susskind and Cruikshank 1987).

The nature of the problem

Collaboration is also a response to issues that resist resolution because of their complexity. Questions and problems that are raised in the field of natural resources management and planning are often "wicked" in nature. The term "wicked" signifies that a problem is not discrete, where all the information that is needed to solve it can be succinctly stated such as in a mathematical equation (Rittel and Webber 1973). These wicked problems exist in a social space and context because they are a direct result of the variation and diversity of the actors involved (CogNexus Institute 2003).

"Wicked" problems can outstrip the organizational resources, jurisdiction, and expertise of any single organization. The lack of scientific understanding that surrounds these problems can lead to uncertainty; this is a classic problem in natural resource and environmental disputes. Individuals may have competing claims of knowledge or lack the resources and expertise necessary to overcome uncertainty, access risk, or determine a solution that is acceptable to all the parties involved. An example of a wicked question might be how to build a strategy to protect endangered species where overlapping and conflicting mandates, professional and political interests, and a large number of actors add considerable complexity to the issue. Additionally, it could be balancing the needs of development with questions of ecological integrity. For these reasons, organizational collaboration in conservation and development is occurring at an increasing rate (Brechin et al. 2003).

Collaboration can offer parties a means to bring together mutual knowledge, perspectives, and interests while forging innovative solutions to complex problems. The collaborative pool of resources, skills, and knowledge that is brought together by different organizations may be greater than the sum of its parts. When relationships among collaborating partners are formalized to take advantage of complementary strengths for the purposes of conservation and development projects, such "niche arrangements" may maximize project effectiveness (Brechin 1997).

The alternatives to collaboration

New forms of alternative dispute resolution, and collaboration in particular, have come to the fore in reaction to the perceived inefficiency of political lobbying and the narrow and often unsatisfactory outcomes of litigation. In the United States, for example, the proliferation of laws such as the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and the Endangered Species Act all provided new and important legal means for parties to take action in order to settle natural resource oriented disputes. The specificity of legal obligations established in these laws encouraged the use of litigation as a primary means of resolving disputes in natural resource cases. However, these legal channels often proved inefficient in handling disputes where the problems were complex and involved competing interests, expertise, and knowledge. These natural resource disputes often lasted for years and, given the limited range of remedies available in the context of the courts, ended in judgments that rarely satisfied either party (Bacow and Wheeler 1984). The "wicked" nature of these problems made legal action in many cases ill-equipped to arrive at effective solutions.

Belizean law ranges from specific regulations such as the 1992 Environmental Protection Act (which outlines Government and citizen obligations and roles and responsibilities) to more general laws such as the 1992 National Lands Act (which provides few specific requirements and gives a great degree of discretion to the Minister responsible for lands). These realities limit, to some degree, the legal options that interested parties have at their disposal to explore litigation as a tool to resolve disputes. Consequently, they may not offer the types of resolution desired.

Other forms of dispute resolution may involve political lobbying and public pressure. Lobbying can be a very effective way to alter natural resource management decision-making especially where legal power over a resource is in the hands of a Government Ministry and does not require direct parliamentary action to affect the status of that resource. At the same time, the resource is susceptible to the political currents of the day and gives very little security for its long-term management. These ministerial-level land use decisions are often based on political pragmatism and for this reason they are very unpredictable.

Collaboration is not only a compelling alternative to individual people; when other alternatives are less attractive, organizations often join in collaborative endeavors. This especially occurs when organizations are confronted with an impending crisis or a challenge that must be met.

Crisis

Crisis is often a natural call to action. Throughout history, individuals have been called to act collectively in the face of a perceived crisis or threat (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, eds. 2001). For action to occur, however, the perception of a threat must be coupled with the power and ability to respond (Kottak and Costa 1993). Crises that motivate people to action can take a variety of forms (Hewitt 1997; Quarantelli, ed. 1998). Stakeholders may perceive an impending regulation as a threat and may join forces to address the regulation (Bentrup 2001). In other instances, impacts of national development projects like large mines bring people together from across the globe (Kirsch 1997). Highway development, increased logging, expansion of destructive agricultural practices, foreign land ownership, and their associated effects, can also be powerful incentives for parties to work together.

Sense of place

While crisis has shown to be a strong motivator for collaboration, people often feel a sense of belonging and value for a place whether it is threatened or not (Feld and Basso, eds. 1996). Collaborative natural resource management, therefore, is often intimately tied to a "sense of place." Environmental policy specialist Charles H. W. Foster states: "Places are considered to be physical locations imbued with human meaning [that] display three primary characteristics: a landscape setting, a set of associated activities, and significance to people. Thus, place involves both humans and nature, not the presence of one to the exclusion of the other" (Foster 1995 as cited in Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000).

The variety of ways that a place is recognized and created provides opportunities for bringing people together in a particular area. People know their environment through the inevitability of their coexistence and interaction with it. In conferring significance to the physical environment, meaning is not merely attached, but rather drawn from people's surroundings at

a particular moment (Ingold 1993). The understanding is drawn from the environment through a person's relation with its biological, hydrological, and geological components, in addition to recognized social, historical, and spiritual characteristics. Collaboration itself can help shape a sense of place. When people perform any action, the action occurs socially and materially in time and space and imparts the physical world with meaning (Werlen 1993). This meaning can be shared among people working together and lead to collective senses of place. A place is then the spatial and temporal axis of conscious human interaction (Casey 1993). How a place becomes identified and made meaningful is a process that involves shared actions and understandings. This process can help reveal the different values and levels of influence among the people and groups involved collective action (Crewsswell 1996; Massey 1994).

A "sense of place" and its three characteristics identified by Foster—setting, activities, and significance—motivate and provide context to collaborative efforts. A sense of place helps define the scope of the area being managed and the problems to be addressed. Places help to reveal the various ways that people identify with and relate to them. Such identification provides a wellspring of energy and concern emanating from an individual or group's association with and care for a particular place.

Superordinate goals

Conflict surrounding natural resource issues is often a result of competing positions, interests, and claims over a specific resource in question. It may take the form of advocacy for endangered species protection versus the building of a dam for rural electrification (Wondolleck 1985). These competing positions are often bridged when a superordinate goal enters the discussion.

Superordinate goals, as stated in the classic work of Muzafer Sherif, are:

> [G]oals that could not be attained by the efforts and energies of one group alone and thus created a state of interdependence between groups… Superordinate goals were indeed effective in reducing inter-group conflict: (1) when the groups in a state of friction interacted in conditions involving superordinate goals, they did co-operate in activities leading toward the common goal and (2) a series of joint activities leading toward superordinate goals had the cumulative effect of reducing the prevailing friction between groups. (Sherif 1958: 355)

These goals can bridge divides among parties. A goal that exists beyond the conflict changes the dynamic of interaction in a variety of ways and provides incentives that would otherwise not exist. A superordinate goal provides a context in which to build positive relationships and understanding. It sets the stage for the development of a process that leads to greater understanding of not only positions but interests. Finally, it may lead to a vision that extends beyond an adversarial view of the situation ("if you get it then I don't") to a practical understanding of the joint gains that can be achieved through cooperation and collaborative action (White and Runge 1995).

Leadership

Leadership can catalyze collaboration. An individual or organization may possess the energy and vision that mobilizes other parties to participate (Selin and Chavez 1995). Leaders in collaborative processes often have a variety of characteristics that allows them to mobilize or champion these processes. Leaders may take on the role of "cheerleader-energizer, diplomat, process facilitator, convener, catalyst, and promoter. They are not superhuman; rather, they put a lot of energy into moving projects forward" (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000: 178).

Public pressure

The general public can have an effect on the possibility of collaboration. Though the wider public is not directly involved in the collaborative process it can steer the interests of parties who participate in that process. Public interest can change the political stakes of collaboration and raise the awareness of an issue, which may promote the furthering of the project (Yaffee et al. 1997).

Personal relationships

Many collaborative processes begin with existing friendships and relationships among actors. Friendships provide legitimacy and the initial trust and respect that are necessary for collaborative endeavors to take root (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000; Yaffee et al. 1997). Collaboration can also come about through existing inter and intra-organizational arrangements. In addition, relationships provide legitimacy to initiatives that are currently underway.

Challenges to Effective Collaboration

Collaboration, like all close interpersonal interactions, is in many ways a "dance of adaptation." Relationships among individuals involved in a collaborative process must be able to change and adapt to new challenges that are posed. A variety of challenges are documented in the literature on collaboration. These theoretical perspectives will be later used as a means to analyze the four case studies.

Negative preconceptions

Differing perceptions and values present real challenges to the collaborative process. Perceptions may stem from cultural norms or professional knowledge and views. Negative personal views and characterizations about other individuals and organizations among participants can also hinder collaboration (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). When personal views impair the process, parties tend to adopt opposing positions and can restrict the conversations to an adversarial and less constructive tone. Differences in perception pose the greatest challenge to collaboration when they are value-laden and rooted in identity or a strongly held ideology (Carpenter and Kennedy 1988; Gray 1989; Susskind and Cruikshank 1987; Wondolleck et al. forthcoming). Strong positions may make it difficult for parties to arrive at "reasonable compromises" (Susskind and Weinstein 1980) and may limit willingness to subdivide complex problems into solvable increments (Gray 1989; Susskind and Cruikshank 1987).

Differing conservation paradigms

Conservation practitioners and researchers continue to debate the relative value and efficacy of integrated conservation and development in the tropics. On the one hand, critics like Terborgh (1999) argue that development-oriented strategies, like alternative income generating programs for individuals living near protected areas, have largely failed. Instead, they call for a return to approaches for conservation that focuses on enforcement, such as boundary monitoring. Extreme crises in biodiversity, they suggest, call for extreme measures. Critics of this "barbed wire and border guards" approach suggest that it ignores both on-the-ground management realities, such as lack of resources to enforce contested boundaries in the absence of community support, and the rights and needs of the individuals who are often displaced by protected areas (Brechin et al. 2002). The critics of the "resurgent protectionist paradigm" raise the important question of "conservation for whom?" Organizations view communities through different lenses depending on their chosen conservation approach. Interaction with community members built on mutual respect is central to an approach that values protected area neighbors as partners in conservation rather than simply as threats to biodiversity.

Conflict and competition among groups

Historic conflict and organizational turf can constrain or impede greater collaboration. Mutual ill will, especially when the relationship between organizations has been marked with past instances of intense conflict, can have lasting effects. Bitter adversarial positions can imperil future consensus on any issue (Selin and Chavez 1995; Yaffee et al. 1997). The animosity held by individuals taints the types of possibilities organizations can envision collectively and may impede the development of relationships that are necessary to facilitate a collaborative process. While past conflict can impede collaboration, so too can current competition for scarce resources.

Groups receive their funding and self-identity by carrying out specific tasks. Those tasks are often related to organizational survival. Organizations may carry out specific contracts with donors, they may take care of a given protected area, or they may be in charge of specific services or products. "Turf" of this nature, like the turf or territoriality of street gangs, is

highly protected by many organizations. Territoriality comes from the fact that the interests of a given organization are viewed as crucial to meeting organizational goals and ultimately preserving its survival (Peck and Hague 2003). Organizations may fear that collaboration will lead to higher costs due to increased competition from one or more parties on their turf. For this reason, many organizations prefer the gains that multilateral action provide their organizations (Levine and White 1961).

Peck and Hague (2003) cite three primary reasons for turf conflict:

1. An organization perceives the other as a direct and regular competitor for resources that are not likely to be shared;

2. An organization perceives the "marginal cost" (in terms of money, time or energy) of the proposed cooperation greater than the perceived benefits of collaboration;

3. The degree to which the organization feels it is flexible to change its current goals, tasks and philosophy to adopt the course of action being proposed.

Collective decision-making prompts organizations to consider these turf-related costs. Costs of this nature can make groups unresponsive to collaborative proposals and may continue to be a hindrance until the perception of costs shifts to make collaboration more appealing.

Resource constraints

Financial and human resource constraints are a common threat to collaboration. Resources are needed for various aspects of collaboration from undertaking joint fact-finding to paying for mediators (Gray 1989). Collaboration requires resources in the form of money, time, and personnel (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). Often there is need for a resource pool. This can be a pool of funds that is created and collaboratively administered by members (Gray 1989). The lack of funds to distribute among members who are less financially capable can be a barrier to their participation. These discrepancies may lead to power imbalances that will discourage the participation of parties with fewer resources.

Community capacity issues

Rural communities often lack the human and financial resources needed to participate fully and fairly in the collaborative process. Individuals and organizations from communities may lack time, funds, and paid personnel to participate and implement collaborative plans so as to truly take advantage of the benefits. There are numerous examples in the United States where plans for community development were created, but the town lacked the professional and financial resources to implement the vision (Aspen Institute 2003).

Lack of resources and professional staff must be specially considered in the collaborative process. Research in developing countries shows that support is “critical for self-help grassroots organizations in the early stages of their development, since these organizations rarely possess the requisite technical or financial capacity to implement development projects" (Bryant and Bailey 1997:181). Resource disparities among participants can lead to resentment of more powerful parties (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). Without attention, community participants may be marginalized by the collaborative process or discontinue their participation in it.

Power and politics

The potential for collaboration is “hindered when significant power differences exist among parties or when certain parties are not perceived as having a legitimate claim to participate in consensus forums” (Selin and Chavez 1995 p 193). The potential for collaboration is severely diminished when there is a lack of countervailing forces amongst parties, and when a single party or small group of parties can act independent of the collaborative body (Gray 1985, Susskind and Cruikshank 1987). Individuals and groups need to feel a sense that they will gain more from a collaborative process than they would by pursuing other options (Gray 1989). Power imbalances can limit opportunities for certain parties to provide input, thus limiting the potential for their interests to be met. Imbalances of power can take a variety of forms. Specifically, power can take the form of control over the collaborative group’s agenda, control over strategies and suggestions, control of information, and the ability to authorize actions unilaterally (Gray 1989). All of these factors can impede the collaborative process, thereby discouraging participants to engage one another in a constructive manner.

These theoretical perspectives give insight to the case studies in the Toledo District. They provide a lens of analysis to give a sense of why collaboration occurs on the one hand, and what prevents collaboration on the other hand. The factors described above will be referred to in the cases that follow.

Opportunities for Increasing Collaboration: Case Study Approach

Collaboration is occurring in the Toledo District at a rapid rate. Conservation practitioners are attempting new means to address large landscape-level problems that affect local communities, regional ecological integrity, and the development of Southern Belize. To gain insight on opportunities for collaboration in the region, four Southern Belize collaborative initiatives were studied: the Maya Mountain Marine Area Transect, the Toledo Watershed Association, the Golden Stream Corridor, and the Bladen Management Consortium. Methodology that draws from alternative dispute resolution and organization literature was used to analyze these cases.

The cases were selected both for their visibility and because they provide insight on constraints, opportunities, and lessons that could apply to future efforts at regional collaboration. Additionally, they represent a range of geographic scales around which collaborative efforts are organized, from a single protected area to the entire Toledo District.

Each case is introduced with a detailed background section. These narrative descriptions provide the reader with the contextual richness of the story. The reader is introduced to the various actors, their relationships to one another, and the historic issues that affect development and conservation management decisions of the area. In addition, the situational factors that led to the beginning of each collaborative initiative are thoroughly discussed.

Each of the four case studies illustrates the challenges posed to collaboration. This section specifically addresses aspects of trust, shared vision, conflict and competition, resource constraints, power and politics, organizational barriers, and community issues in the

respective collaborative endeavors. The analysis of these difficulties provides a thematic understanding of the challenges posed to collaboration.

All the cases discussed show promise and potential for collaboration and provide regionally-specific insights on collaboration in Southern Belize. The case studies highlight the strong relationships that exist, the political support for collaboration, the perception of joint gains, shared concern, and the drive to move forward.