

## **Thirteen Training Objectives for Community-based Conservation**

### **1. Developing and administering a democratic community organization**

Democratic community organizations are at the heart of conservation at the local level. Training in this arena involves building leadership skills in individuals, defining the vision and mission of a community in regards to their resources, and development of processes that identify, respect and empower stakeholders within the community. These skills can be developed from experiences / techniques of organizational development in the NGO and business spheres. Key here is the growing of *institutions* that are sustainable beyond trained and skilled individuals.

### **2. Understanding laws governing co-management, land tenure and working with government agencies**

Whether operating under a co-management agreement, as an independent community organization or in some other capacity, communities must understand and be able to work within the greater legal and political framework. A beginning point is knowing the legal basis for a community's actions and their rights within the system. Who has the jurisdiction to make decisions about resources (land tenure)? Who claims authority over a particular piece of land? Who has responsibility for management? How can communities relate to government agencies best? Training here might best be facilitated by representatives of government, legal professionals, and NGOs with experience in these areas.

### **3. Developing linkages between NGOs and other community groups**

Community-based conservation seldom exists in a vacuum, and there is a lot of experience already in place within other communities and organizations. An effective community group needs to develop the skills to network with these other players and design methods to share experiences, information, and resources with these groups. Training for this objective would focus on methods for communities and organizations to define shared goals, and identify points of potential collaboration and conflict.

### **4. Negotiation and conflict resolution**

Conflict is often a real and potentially destructive force within communities and could sabotage efforts at collaboration. Training to address these issues involves building skills of community members to address their points of contention in a positive way, and develop skills of negotiation so that members of the community are able to present their concerns and resolve conflict.

### **5. Basic natural science and principles of conservation biology**

Understanding the natural ecosystem processes that are in operation in a protected area fosters accurate valuation of resources within the community and priority setting for limited resources. Training here could be traditional classroom education or (preferably) hands-on learning within the context of the protected area.

## **6. Technology for natural resources management**

Computers, GPS (Global Positioning System) and GIS (Geographical Information Systems) are just a few of the ways that communities can better make management decisions and present this information to a variety of stakeholders. Mapping, in particular, allows communities to visualize change and their own place within a larger, regional system. Training to use this technology should be hands-on for the most value.

## **7. Protected areas management**

This category highlights specific skills of managing a natural area to achieve goals set forth in a management plan. It includes techniques such as demarcation of boundaries, trail building, wildlife management, erosion control, fire control, invasive species control, planting, addressing illegal activities on the protected area, etc. Training to achieve this objective will be, for the most part, technical, and should be taught in a hands-on manner for the most effect. Utilizing specialists from NGOs and government agencies to facilitate this type of training would be useful.

## **8. Practices of monitoring and evaluating wildlife (or ecosystems)**

Keystone species (those of greater significance to the ecosystem) and charismatic species (those that draw interest and support for the project) are important for achieving the goals of a project. It is important, then, to have effective ways to monitor and evaluate the health of these species on a regular basis. This can often be something that is incorporated into the community as a whole for participation and education purposes (eg. water monitoring activities), but should ultimately be rigorous in its scientific basis. Training could be done at the community group level for the purposes of designing a more inclusive program with citizen or student participation.

## **9. Creating management and operations plans**

Well thought out plans for the management and operations of the protected area—as well as a plan for the growth and sustainability of the community group—are essential to the project. Creating these plans requires a clear identification of goals, values, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, etc. Developing these kinds of skills, though, is something that has been done extensively in the business and non-profit sectors. Training should draw on the lessons learned and methods of these sectors, as well as the experiences of other community groups. A facilitator for this learning should be an organizational development specialist with experience in these kinds of plans.

## **10. Accounting and financial management**

Organizations – regardless of whether they receive funding from the private or public sector or through business operations — must be accountable and responsible for their finances. Often, organizations must learn to leverage limited funds into greater resources. Training these skills is often technical (say, bookkeeping and reporting), but can also focus on strategies for growing funds thoughtfully. There are lots of resources from the business and non-profit sectors to help organizations develop these skills.

## **11. Fundraising and sustainable business development**

Obtaining grant funds often occupies a large amount of time for a growing organization. This is important because so many of the other activities community projects accomplish rely on this funding. If communities go this route they need to know how to write

successful grant proposals. Other methods for fundraising are also out there, though, such as raising money from the community itself or through other donors. Some communities go the route of developing a business around the protected area, such as ecotourism. This necessitates operating this concern in a way that doesn't cause harm to the protected area or conflict within the community over the distribution of benefits. Training could focus on many things here: writing proposals, developing business ideas, organizing events, etc. depending on where the community wants to go to raise money.

## **12. Communication, outreach and education**

This involves both communication within the community group and to the community and stakeholders outside of the group. Specific skills needed might be development of a newsletter, website, word-of-mouth, school programs, adult education programs, posters, etc. Depending on the specific ways in which a community group wants to share its vision and activities with the community as a whole would dictate the type of training that might be needed here. Does a community want to make its own website, or is it more effective to hire someone? Is the project concerned with the education of children, adults, or both? In what ways can they best do this – talks at schools, a formalized program, education center, etc.?

## **13. Training for trainers**

A sustainable community group is grown and nurtured over many years. How do you pass these skills on to new members and develop a strong and lasting institution? Passing these skills to new members should be an integral part of the long-term plans for the organization. With this in mind, organizations should create and implement a program for teaching experienced members how to train others in some or all of these concepts. Designing and developing this type of program can come from many resources in education and organizational development.

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The **Thirteen Training Objectives** were first presented in the following document, which should be cited if these are used:

Bernstein, Scott Elliot. 2005. Defining and building community capacity for co-management of protected areas in Belize. Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin – Madison.

The author appreciates comments and questions relating to the content and application of these ideas.