

Community Involvement in Protected Area Planning and Development

The Case of the Kanuku Mountains, Guyana

Introduction

The success of protected areas depends greatly on strong collaborative relationships with people, particularly communities within and near areas under protection (Andrade & Rhodes, 2012; Holmes, 2013). Guyana articulated a policy of “parks with people”, embracing a concept of meaningful community involvement in planning and management of protected areas (EPA, 2002). Early protected areas established in the country had little to no involvement of communities, particularly prior to their declaration. In order to demonstrate the stated policy and provide support towards the establishment of suitable legislation for protected areas, the Kanuku Mountains region was identified as one of two pilot sites in which a process that ensures meaningful community involvement in protected areas planning and management would be designed and tested.

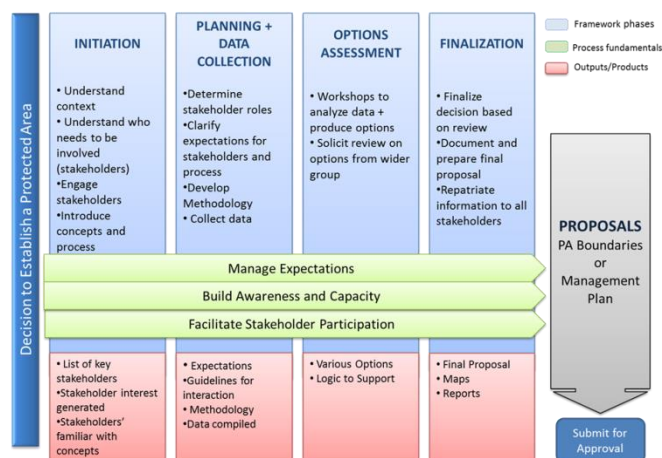
The Kanuku Mountain Protected Area Planning Framework

The Government of Guyana mandated Conservation International Guyana (CI-Guyana) to collaborate with a diverse group of stakeholders¹ to design and test a participatory process for protected area planning in Guyana. The framework for the approach used comprises four sequential phases (see Figure 1) carried out each time for (1) boundary design and afterwards, (2) preparation of the management plan (CI-Guyana, 2014). The process involved the use of highly participatory and innovative methods particularly to ensure effective and informed participation of stakeholders in decision making throughout.

Results/Outputs

This holistic approach to protected area planning and development has produced extremely positive

Figure 1: Kanuku Mountain Protected Area Planning Framework (CI-Guyana, 2014).



results, notably the nurturing of interest among the local communities in the establishment and management of the protected area. The meaningful and informed involvement of the State, communities and other civil society stakeholders, in the process of planning the Kanuku Mountains Protected Area (see Figure 2) has helped secure high levels of support for the declaration of the area. The process allowed for understanding of potential conflicts around land and resource rights and management in an open and objective manner, involving direct discourse amongst groups with differing interests and priorities. This has significant bearing on the issues of land rights. Both the boundary design and management plan were approved by consensus, and there were no matters left outstanding that could affect the effective and sustainable management of natural resources. In fact, despite expressing strong reservations and concerns at the beginning of the process, the communities lobbied strongly for the declaration of the area in the end.

The Kanuku Mountain Framework was utilized for the development of the Shell Beach Protected Area and influenced the design of Guyana’s protected areas legislation.

¹ This included communities that use the resources of the area, national agencies responsible for land and natural resource use and management, local and national government bodies, and civil society and private sector actors.

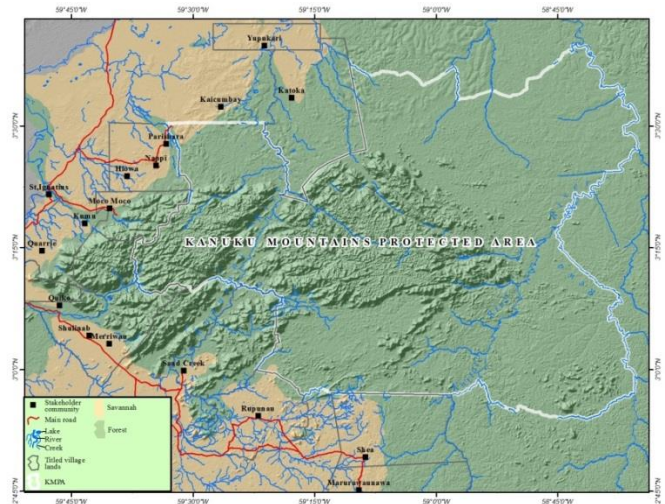
Challenges and Lessons

Consensus building in natural resource management is usually difficult because of diverse understanding of complex rights-based issues, and laws that are oftentimes inconsistent and/or conflicting. The process created an atmosphere for decision making by building consensus incrementally, through encouraging understanding of and respect for the varying points-of-view of stakeholders, and using such understanding to foster trust amongst stakeholders.

In the implementation of this process, a major challenge faced was addressing the concern of communities for security of land and resource ownership and use rights. Building consensus on the application of protected areas as a resource management mechanism to secure rights, access, benefits, and traditional use to and by communities, helped to address this concern. This could have only been possible through focused education and awareness efforts. These efforts also enhanced both the ability of the local communities to participate and the value of this participation to the process itself. Informed and knowledgeable communities – and other stakeholders – are much better able to contribute meaningfully to the success of protected areas.

A notable challenge is the significant up-front investment of resources necessary for success, especially the amount of time required. The effective participation of the wide cross section of stakeholders in decision making surrounding resource management relies heavily on trust being built between parties, and therefore cannot be rushed. This pays dividends in the medium to long term.

Figure 2: Map of the Kanuku Mountain Protected Area.



Conclusion

Long-term success of protected area management hinges on the effective participation of local people. The framework utilized in the Kanuku Mountains has helped establish a platform for successful management of the protected area in Guyana by ensuring effective participation of stakeholders, particularly local communities, in decision making regarding the area from initiation of the planning process.

References

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