

#### 4. BUILDING COOPERATION: PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING

One of the objectives of the Protected Areas Act is to “promote participation of local communities in the management of protected areas” (Section 2 (f)). When preparing a protected area management plan the management authority must consult municipalities, other organs of state, local communities and other interested and affected parties. As biodiversity and ‘wilderness’ can be considered to be a national and even international resource, stakeholders in protected area management can range beyond local and regional borders.

As the Strategic Adaptive Management cycle shows, stakeholders are involved at three main points in the review cycle, at which decision-making is strongly value-based, with multiple, often conflicting, objectives at stake. These are:

- Setting the vision.
- Evaluating the acceptability of predicted consequences of potential management options.
- Reviewing the outcome of management relative to the vision.

SANParks has developed the following principles to which all stakeholder participation processes undertaken by the organisation must conform:

- Have a clearly stated purpose.
- Identify the stakeholders to participate in the selected process.
- Define and communicate levels of decision-making and stakeholder involvement.
- Seek to notify stakeholders of participation processes through appropriate mechanisms.
- Seek to obtain commitment from all stakeholders to a participatory process based on relevance, integrity, mutual respect, transparency and inclusiveness in order to seek the best possible solution.
- Ensure that the process provides the opportunity for input from all stakeholders within reasonable timeframes, emphasising the sharing of information, joint-learning and capacity building.
- Ensure that processes recognise all knowledge, indigenous and ordinary, as well as the diversity of values and opinions that exist between stakeholders.
- Promote participation by stakeholders through timeous and full disclosure of all relevant and appropriate information.
- Provide feedback on the outcome of the process to stakeholders and demonstrate how their inputs have been considered in the decision making process.
- Ensure that methodologies accommodate the context of the issue at hand and the availability of resources (people, time, money) and do not conflict with these guiding principles.
- Promote effective co-operative governance at a national, provincial and local level.
- Give particular attention to ensuring participation by marginalised communities, communities with specific concerns, or communities that have contractual rights in the National Park.
- Effect capacity building within SANParks to support these guiding principles for stakeholder participation.

SAM ultimately proposes an approach to stakeholder involvement which is participatory and not merely consultative. Consultative management only requires managers to either consult with, or offer an opportunity for comment, to interested and affected parties. The manager does not need to act on that consultation. By contrast, participatory management requires that stakeholders have a role within, and influence on, decision making. This does not mean they make all the decisions because the ultimate responsibility always lies with the designated manager/management institution. It does, however, mean that stakeholders must have the opportunity to make constructive input to management decisions that concern them. The law, SANParks values and the park management plan set the boundaries of what constitutes an

acceptable decision. Moving beyond consultation to truly participatory management is a complex task. A balance must be struck between exercising the authority vested in National Park management, and co-operating with society to meet their expectations and ensure their rights.

Some central principles for achieving a more participatory management and decision-making process are:

- Focus on the future, shared needs and values.
- Use a consensus-seeking approach.
- Involve stakeholders early in the process, allowing them to take part in describing the context, defining the 'problem', determining the vision, objectives and operating principles for management.
- Aim to learn together and share information, not to educate stakeholders, or to present and defend a near-final plan or proposal for their approval.

### **Focus on the future**

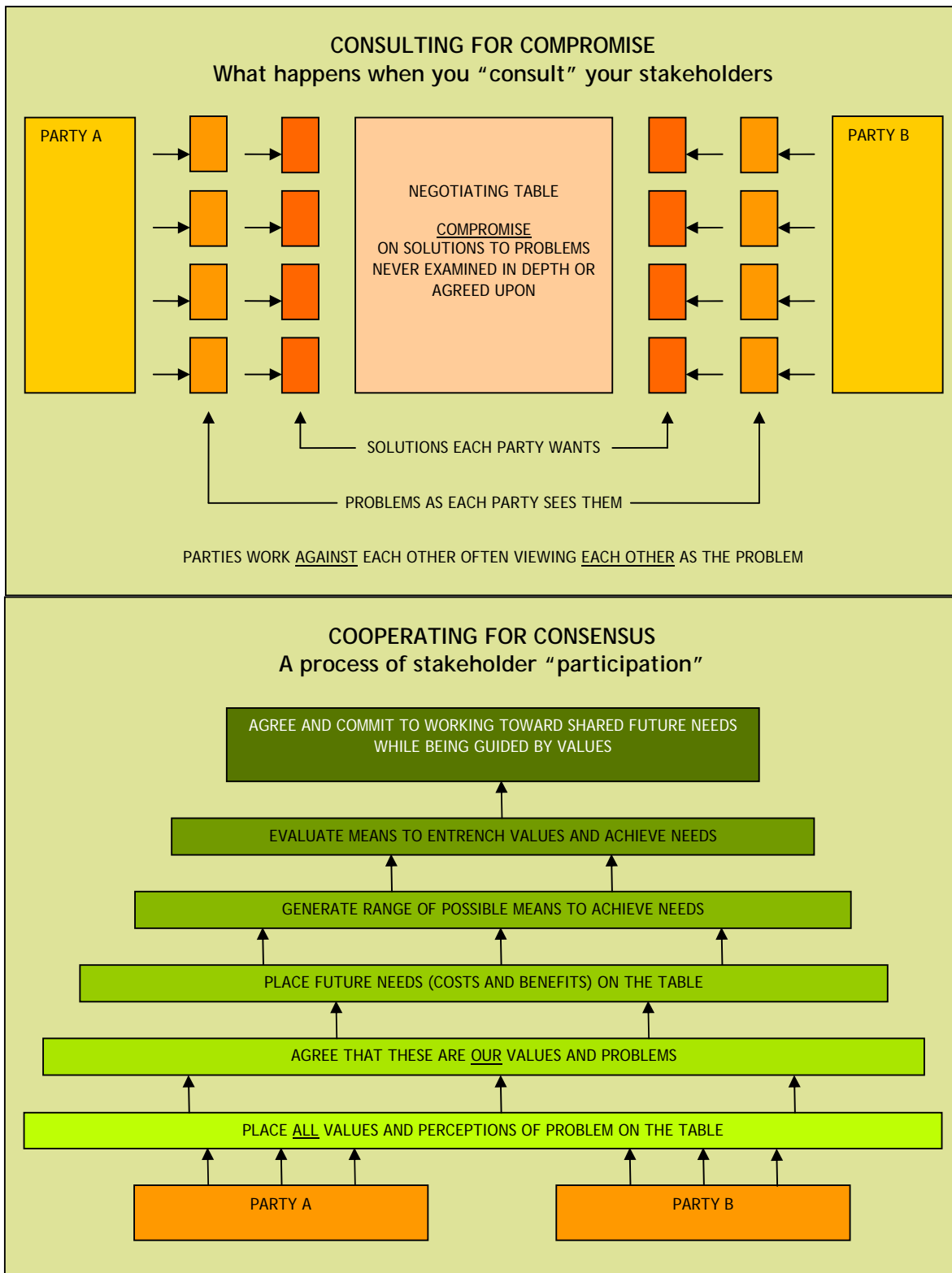
Processes aimed at reaching agreement on objectives within or between organisations will entail dealing with peoples' perspectives, sensitivities, values and prejudices. Since strategic and co-operative management is new to conservation, especially in South Africa, any attempt to initiate it, and to develop common objectives, will encroach on people's comfort zones. Resistance to change, if not properly managed, will lead to conflict, and decreasing commitment and motivation. It is important to recognise that this resistance is natural. It arises out of a fear of losing stability and of the unknown. South Africa is a country in change, a developing democracy, so implementing our new laws has the potential to attack old comfort zones. Rather focus on what the future can bring, than how the present or past will change.

Overcoming resistance to change hinges on developing an atmosphere of trust. The best way of achieving this is to ensure that the process of change focuses on future needs, of both individuals and institutions, rather than present or past problems. Needs involve values and a structured process of negotiation is the best way to integrate values and meet needs. A focus on values and the future has the remarkable tendency to dissipate the conflict that often arises from defence of current territory, personal desires/beliefs, or present ownership.

### **Avoid compromise; seek consensus**

To many people negotiation means reaching compromise on solutions to the respective party's problems. In general such negotiation for compromise (Figure 3.3) leads to pragmatic but short-term solutions. However they are value neutral and are not durable beyond the specific negotiation circumstances. Each time another problem arises, no matter how small, decisions have to be renegotiated. Annual wrangles between unions and employers are a typical example. This would clearly not be suitable for strategic management where one wants to develop a plan that takes one well into the future.

An alternative approach (Figure 3.3) focuses on developing a common understanding among parties of the values and needs which the future must hold. This is a far more useful approach toward conflict resolution. More importantly, it forms a firm foundation for value-based decision making so fundamental to effective conservation management.



**Figure 3.3: Consensus versus compromise**

Note: Consensus is defined as general, or widespread, agreement. Achieving consensus does not mean that everyone is in complete agreement with everyone else. Consensus can be achieved if people agree to hold different views on a subject, or even agree that there is more than one legitimate view. Sufficient consensus is when there is sufficient agreement to proceed with a course of action though some participants may disagree. Consensus is

therefore often a judgment call that must be made by the group of people concerned, in the best interests of the group.

### Respect the rules

The key to consensus and acceptance is how one gets there rather than the specific end point achieved. The most important procedure in this alternative approach to negotiation is to have all parties lay their values, needs and problems on the table, at the start of the exercise. The best way to achieve this is simply to go around the room and ask each person to say what they think the problem is, and what they think a good future situation would be. Write each comment down on a flip chart with the persons name next to it. To avoid people keeping their agendas hidden and/or having unreasonable demands the facilitator should introduce the only three rules of the “game”:

- Recognise that the best way to achieve what you need is to help others achieve what they need.
- Follow the maxim – Seek first to understand then to be understood.
- Accept other people’s views and understanding of the issue at hand. Ask another person to explain what they said in more detail, or why they feel the way they do, but their perspective must be accepted. It is part of the playing field.

Following these three rules means that all the ‘cards’ are laid on the table and each person knows how others see the problem and the future. The resultant list of perceptions of the problem and the future forms the basis for all other steps. Everyone now knows what the others want and what they value. This basic procedure, laying all the cards on the table before attempting to discuss their merits, can be used at any point in a planning process. Now all parties have been *exposed to ALL the possible solutions to a problem before attempting to select one to implement*. All too often people try to select the best of the immediately obvious solutions without sufficient analysis of either the problem, or the possible solutions. Unnecessary, or even antagonistic, debate is then inevitable because the foundations for making a decision have not been properly laid.

### Level the playing field for mutual learning

All too often consultation processes are tacked on to the end of an internal or expert planning process and then used to ‘sell’ or defend a near-final decision or proposal to stakeholders. This cannot achieve stakeholder buy-in or cooperation or elicit the stakeholder needs, values, knowledge or experience that can create wise, fair or durable decisions. Instead, from the earliest stages everyone must be given the opportunity to voice their perception or analysis of the “problem” in a ‘round table’ setting where specialist, management and stakeholder contributions are given equal consideration. Honestly look for the best outcome using everyone’s suggestions. Everyone should be prepared to accept an outcome that may be different from their original perceptions, as long as this is still within the law, value set and policy. This can be a source of anxiety for managers who are used to making their own decisions, but it is the only way to build cooperation toward a truly shared vision of the future.

### Lay a firm foundation for long-term cooperation

Successful participatory management does not involve or require continually polling or assembling all the stakeholders every time a decision needs to be made. Most stakeholders are just as busy as protected area managers and will quickly develop ‘participation fatigue’. If one

can get agreement on the overall objectives and principles through a truly inclusive process early on – and build trust, consensus, mutual understanding and ongoing relationships along the way – one can largely proceed to make the day to day decisions without continuous consultation. Occasional meetings will be needed to keep everyone informed and to discuss a way forward for new issues that arise. But, when these new issues arise, the original objectives and principles provide the guidance needed to keep things on track.

**BOX 3: Definitions for terms used in SANParks participation processes**

**“community/ies”** means any group of persons or part of such a group who share common interests and who regard themselves as a community<sup>1</sup>

**“facilitation”** is a process used to enable dialogue between stakeholders to allow for sharing and learning about diverse interests and need in a non-adversarial, open way.

**“local community/ies”** means any community of people living or having rights or interests in a distinct geographical area.<sup>2</sup>

**“organs of state”** mean-

(a) any department of state or administration in the national, provincial or local sphere of government; or

(b) any other functionary or institution –

(i) exercising a power or performing a function in terms of the Constitution or a provincial constitution;

(ii) exercising a public power or performing a public function in terms of any legislation<sup>3</sup>

**“park forum”** The recognised stakeholder forum through which stakeholder participation for SANParks is to be achieved.

**“stakeholders”** means municipalities, other organs of state, local communities and any other affected parties which have an interest in the area<sup>4</sup>, but are not limited to this group and may also include *inter alia*;

- Individuals
- Neighbours
- Visitors to parks
- Private companies or individuals whose business relates to or could be impacted on by protected areas
- Community/ies
- Groups with specific interests and concerns
- Park Forums
- National and international groups with an interest in conservation or the management of protected areas
- Non-government organisations;
- Community based organisations;
- SANParks
- Vulnerable and disadvantaged persons

1. National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998, Section 1: Definitions

2. National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003, Section 1: Definitions

3. Section 239 of the South African Constitution

4. National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003, 39 (3)