



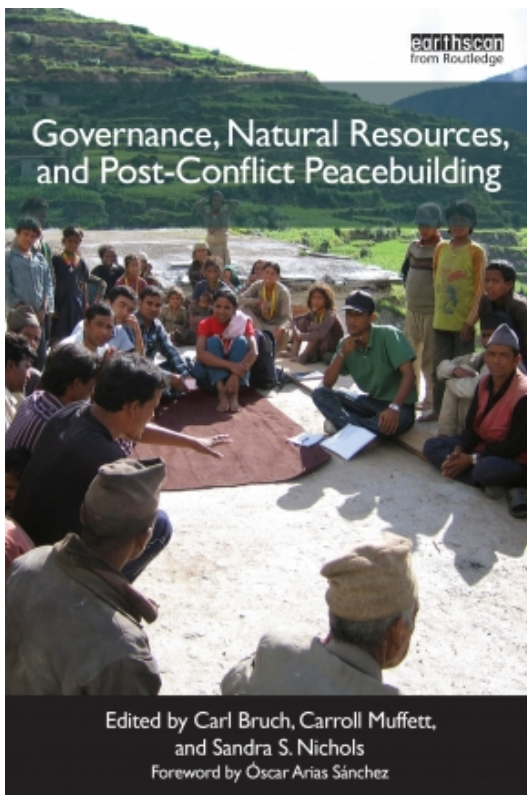
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Preventing Violence over Natural Resources
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Preventing violence over natural resources: The Early Action Fund in South America

Juan Dumas

As the world population continues to grow, competition over a finite supply of natural resources is becoming more frequent. Latin America is one area where environmental disputes are on the rise. Rural and indigenous communities in Central and South America often lack the resources or ability to challenge proposed or ongoing projects that affect the environment, and many times they are left out of the decision-making process altogether. This lack of leverage, combined with insufficient information and real or perceived threats to livelihoods, often leads to an escalation of tensions that erupt in violence.

In an effort to prevent violent clashes over environmental disputes, the Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano (FFLA) created, in 2003, the Early Action Fund (EAF, or Fondo Respuesta in Spanish) to provide a pool of readily available funding to support responses to urgent requests for intervention. The EAF enables immediate preventive action in areas of imminent conflict, while simultaneously encouraging longer-term dialogue and solutions.

This chapter begins with an overview of socio-environmental disputes in Latin America. It proceeds with a discussion of the EAF proposal process and details the nine cases that ad hoc EAF committees selected for use of EAF funds between 2005 and 2007. The cases involved potential impacts to air, water, and land from commercial activities such as mining, timber harvesting, fishing, power generation, and agriculture. The chapter outlines how the EAF pilot program directly and positively affected parties' ability to reach consensus and avoid violence. The chapter concludes with recommendations for improvement and for potential application to geographic areas beyond Latin America, not only in situations where conflict is imminent, but also in post-conflict situations.

Juan Dumas is the former executive director, general director, and senior adviser for the Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano. This chapter draws primarily from the author's personal experience in the design and implementation of the Early Action Fund in Latin America, and in the field of social and environmental conflict management.

ENVIRONMENT AND CONFLICT IN LATIN AMERICA

Latin America is increasingly entangled in ever more complex socio-environmental disputes. Rural and indigenous communities in Peru and Ecuador protest the social and environmental impacts of mining, and in Bolivia there are still echoes of the so-called Water War (O'Neill 2006). A highway that connects Argentina and Uruguay, historically friendly neighbors, was blocked for months due to fierce opposition by the Argentinean community of Gualaguaychú (a city northwest of Buenos Aires) to the Uruguayan decision to install cellulose processing plants on the bordering Uruguay River. Numerous communities in Panama and Ecuador are making their voices heard against the planning of hydroelectric projects aimed at satisfying national energy needs. And in various Central and South American countries, there is evidence of growing resistance by local communities to the creation of protected areas that they see as threatening to their livelihoods. Most of these disputes involve communities that depend, in some way, on commonly held natural resources.

It is possible to prevent the deterioration of relations between parties to a dispute to the point that their behavior can cause irreparable damage to natural resources and the loss of sources of livelihoods for whole populations. Disputes can be understood instead as expressions of social change that can be channeled peacefully and can represent opportunities for the definition of new public policies for sustainable development.

Unfortunately, many public institutions in Latin America have displayed limited capacity to respond adequately to socio-environmental disputes and to prevent cases of grievance from escalating into situations of crisis and violence. In most environmental disputes, when local community groups express their concerns about a project or action that is likely to affect their livelihoods and way of life, their voices are not heard by the relevant authorities. In an effort to balance power and make their claims (and often themselves) visible, they take confrontational action, violent or nonviolent, to resist the change they perceive as threatening.

Media coverage usually focuses on the communities' resistance but not on their underlying concerns. Public officials usually interpret resistance as an intolerable challenge to their authority, and they respond with police repression. Where the stakes are high, communities fight back. Negotiations that are held in such a pressure-filled context often result in agreements that are unsustainable and that are not fulfilled, thus frustrating the parties' expectations and deepening the distrust, polarization, and violence. Societies can then become caught in vicious spirals of conflict that undermine their capacity to address the structural problems hindering sustainable development.

Where the balance of power is asymmetrical and the weaker parties try to make themselves visible and their voices heard in confrontational ways, their actions can be perceived by the general public and the more powerful parties as belligerent and radical. However, in many cases, a weaker party has consciously chosen to radicalize its protest because it finds itself alone and there appear to

be no better alternatives to improve the situation. It need not be this way. Although disputes may need to escalate to a certain point in order to be properly recognized, parties should not have to resort to violence to bring social change. Crises can be prevented if the right dialogue processes are put in place early enough. The cycle of violence can be stopped, and space can be opened to discuss ways of addressing parties' rights and needs.

Only if societies move from crisis response to crisis prevention can they overcome these negative cycles and focus their collaborative potential on addressing the structural causes of disputes. Crisis prevention is an essential component in the larger continuum of conflict transformation, and it will serve its purpose only if it is followed by a dialogue process that can change an unfair status quo.¹

In the past twenty years, civil society organizations, state institutions, and academic entities have successfully developed crisis prevention methodologies and adapted them to the particularities of Latin America. Regrettably, most institutions that have the capacity to conduct dialogue interventions in crisis situations are constantly frustrated by the lack of resources to support timely intervention. Various early warning initiatives are being put in place around the world, but it seems that little is being done to enable early action. It usually takes at least four to six months to secure funding for an intervention, and by the time the money arrives, dispute dynamics may have shifted dramatically, making it almost impossible to act.

THE EARLY ACTION FUND

With these challenges in mind, FFLA created in 2003 the EAF, an innovative funding tool that provides a pool of readily available funds to support appropriate responses to urgent requests for intervention in environmental disputes in South America. The EAF pursued two objectives. First, the newly created fund sought to enable immediate preventive action in environmental disputes where tensions may escalate to a point where intervention is very difficult or impossible. This action could focus either on strengthening the capacity of the weaker parties to engage in a fair dialogue process or on third-party facilitation of communication between the parties in the dispute. Second, the EAF's work would serve as leverage to secure additional resources to cover the costs of a longer-term dialogue process as necessary to reach solutions. The EAF would not just put out fires; it would set the stage for sustained dialogue to address direct causes of a specific dispute and, ultimately, for discussion of policies that would address the structural problems that underlie it.

The EAF was intended to focus only on disputes that involved an escalation of tensions. On the basis of previous experiences in Latin America, five parameters or indicators were used to determine whether a dispute was escalating:

¹This is discussed more broadly in Dumas (2006a, 2006b); Dumas and Kakabadse (2008); Dumas and Luna (2008); FFLA (2003, 2008); FFLA et al. (2008); PLASA and UNDP (2006).

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Funding agency	Total funding (in US\$)	Funding for interventions (in US\$)	# of cases	Resource at stake	Geographic region	Scale	Months
A	100,000	85,000	8	Water	Andean region	Local	18
B	50,000	35,000	5	Forests	Southern Cone	Protected areas	12

Figure 1. Example of criteria used to limit discretionary use of funds

(1) communication between the parties is interrupted, poor, or nonexistent; (2) complaints have been recurrently presented before public institutions without adequate response; (3) high levels of misinformation about the underlying problems can be perceived; (4) at least one of the parties has resorted to demonstrations of force (including such actions as marches or road blockades) to make its voice heard; and (5) violent clashes have occurred between the parties or between one of them and the police. The effectiveness of an intervention funded by the EAF would be evaluated according to its capacity to stop the escalation of tensions by transforming one or more of these parameters in a short period of time (two to three months) and to create conditions for the causes of the dispute to be addressed through a dialogue process. During the pilot phase, the validity of this proposed set of indicators would be tested.

Although the goals of the EAF were of interest for most organizations working in the field of natural resource management, it took time to find funding agencies willing to support a proposal that could not clearly predict which specific disputes would be addressed and what outcomes would be achieved. FFLA therefore established a set of criteria that funding agencies could use to limit, as much as possible, the discretionary use of their funds (see figure 1). These criteria enabled funders to target their support to those disputes in which they were most interested. For example, a funding institution that would like to see water-related disputes properly addressed in a specific ecosystem or country could ensure that its funds would not be diverted to other regions or to disputes with different natural resources at stake.

In 2005 and 2006, FFLA piloted the EAF with seven cases in Ecuador. Piloting of the EAF was made possible through the support of the Andean Development Corporation and the country office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In 2007, with funding from Andean Development Corporation and the Inter-American Development Bank, the project was broadened to include two additional cases, one in Argentina and one in Brazil (see figure 2 for locations of the nine EAF pilot interventions).²The internal regulations of these

²The preponderance of cases from Ecuador is due to the UNDP-Ecuador country office focusing its support in this country.

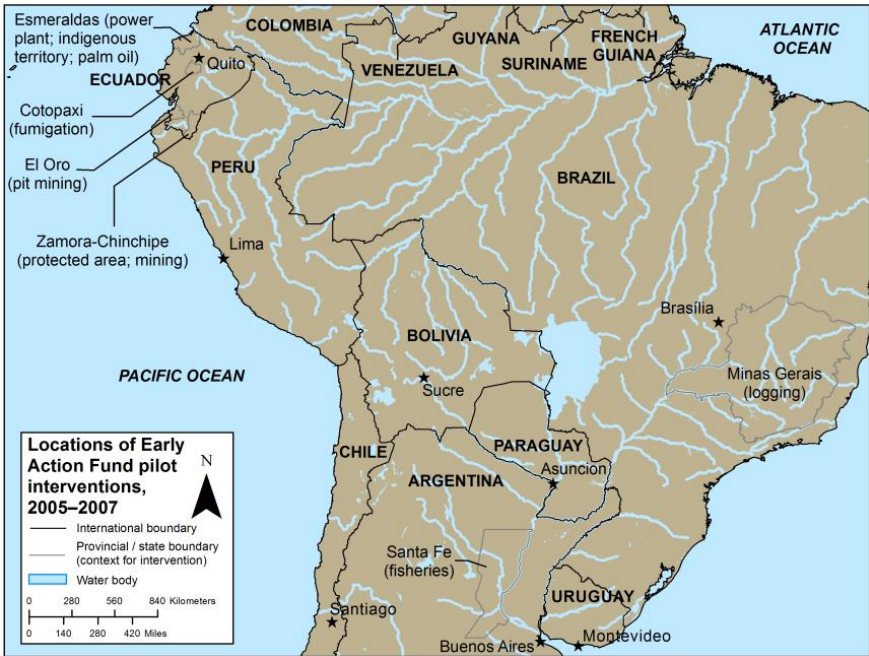


Figure 2. Locations of Early Action Fund pilot interventions, 2005–2007

funding institutions required that funds be allocated through calls for proposals and used in very short periods of time. That meant that, in most cases, FFLA would not serve as the main intervener in disputes and that it would act mostly as an administrator of the fund. This was not what FFLA had originally envisioned, and it was possible that these constraints would jeopardize the rapidity and flexibility that constituted the essence of the EAF, but a decision was made to take the risk, adapt, and move forward with the pilot program. After all, it had taken quite a while to get funding institutions to support this innovative idea, and the opportunity had to be seized.

The proposal process

Applicants for funding provided a brief description of the dispute in which they would intervene, their strategy, the methodology of intervention, their capacity and legitimacy to conduct the intervention, a work plan, and a simple budget between US\$5,000 and US\$10,000 per case. In Ecuador, per request of UNDP, only those organizations that belonged to Platform of Socio-Environmental Agreements (Plataforma de Acuerdos Socio-Ambientales), a collective of twenty civil society institutions interested in sharing experiences on environmental conflict transformation, were invited to submit proposals.

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In all, forty proposals for rapid intervention were received from eight different countries in South America. Almost all of the proposals were oriented toward disputes in which at least one of the main parties was a vulnerable social group, such as subsistence farmers and fishers—often indigenous or Afro-Latin American people whose income falls under the poverty line and for whom natural resources are central to both livelihoods and cultural identity. The majority of proposals identified water as the natural resource most at stake in the disputes. Disputes also involved landownership and use, air quality, and the integrity of fragile ecosystems. Extractive industries, especially mining, were the economic activity most recurrently presented as the cause of disputes to be addressed. Overfishing, large-scale agriculture, and timber production appeared repeatedly, too. Finally, almost half of the proposals called for strengthening the ability of the weakest parties to access information and to decide on their best strategic options to solve the dispute, while the other half involved the applicant playing the role of a third party that would convene and facilitate a dialogue process. A small number of proposals combined the two approaches.

A difficult balance needed to be achieved between carefully reviewing and comparing all of the proposals, and rapidly deciding on the allocation of funds to respond to the urgency. Ad hoc committees were established that used structured instruments to make the final decision on the basis of information provided by FFLA. The following nine interventions were selected for support.

Fisheries in Santa Fe Province, Argentina

Artisanal fishing communities along the Paraná River in Argentina had experienced a sharp decline in productivity. With their livelihood at stake in a region where 68 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, they were in a vulnerable position. They managed to obtain a temporary ban on shad fishing, but it was prematurely lifted due to pressure from commercial fishing groups. The artisanal fishers lacked access to information and opportunities to participate in the decision-making process related to their fisheries, and provincial and national authorities failed to respond to their concerns. As the artisanal fishers contested their marginalization with demonstrations, roadblocks, and public statements, the situation grew especially tense around the Jaaukanigás wetlands, a fragile area and Ramsar site in Santa Fe Province that needed special protection.³

Fundación Proteger proposed an intervention that would combine training courses, outreach, and a consultation process intended to bring all stakeholders together to agree on a set of ground rules for the conservation of the Ramsar site and to set the stage for the development of an overall management plan.

³The Jaaukanigás wetlands was officially recognized on October 10, 2001, under the Ramsar Convention as an internationally important wetland (Ramsar Convention Secretariat 2012).

Logging in Cana Brava, Minas Gerais, Brazil

The farmers in Cana Brava—a district in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil—argued that a multinational logging company well known as a major producer of eucalyptus wood and charcoal was affecting their environment and traditional lifestyle by blocking access to the land where they collected dry wood. The company stated that it had to hire additional private security because of increasing timber thefts by a local criminal network. In February 2007, a farmer was killed on the company's plantation, and the murder was immediately blamed on the company's armed guards.

The Instituto Ambiental Brasil Sustentável proposed a series of bilateral meetings with the parties to discuss their demands and motivations. If the parties proved willing, these meetings would be followed by a joint discussion of the conditions and rules for a dialogue process.

Pit mining in Buenavista, El Oro Province, Ecuador

Inhabitants of the three different communities in the county of Buenavista, in Ecuador's El Oro Province, had begun to complain about the environmental impacts of an intensification of pit mining. Concerned about water pollution and loss of lands for agriculture, community members formally requested that the provincial authorities provide access to the environmental impact assessments of the mining projects and effective control over the mining companies' activities. However, despite repeated requests and demonstrations, the authorities never responded to the community members. Instead, agreements were reached between the mayor of Buenavista and the mining companies over a tax for natural resource exploitation. As armed citizens began to threaten community members, it seemed that only a spark was needed for violence to erupt.

The Asociación Latinoamericana para el Desarrollo Alternativo proposed a combination of alliance-building and outreach activities that would bring national attention to the dispute and would force the authorities to act and enforce relevant laws, a precondition for a dialogue process.

Fumigation in Mulalillo, Cotopaxi Province, Ecuador

The José Peralta School in Mulalillo, a town in Ecuador's Cotopaxi Province, filed a complaint at the provincial ombudsman's office, accusing a flower company of negatively affecting the environment and the health of the students with its fumigation activities. Simultaneously, students rallied near the company, demanding that the fumigations be suspended until an independent scientific study could be conducted to determine the impact on their health.

The Corporación para el Desarrollo de la Producción y el Medioambiente Laboral proposed to conduct a scientific study on the effects of flower production on students' health, followed by workshops to disseminate the results in ways that would be understandable to the company and the affected population.

Creation of a protected area in Nangaritza, Zamora-Chinchipec Province, Ecuador

The declaration of a protected area in the highlands of the Nangaritza River triggered a violent response from subsistence farmers who found that their land-titling processes had been discontinued because, in Ecuador, no new individual land titles can be granted in a protected area. Environmentalists who had supported the declaration of the protected area were held hostage and beaten for three days. The intervention of the local priest allowed for the liberation of the hostages, but tensions remained high in the area. Community members insisted that no official from the Ministry of Environment would be allowed in the area until the status of protected area was withdrawn.

FFLA proposed that a dialogue table be convened, with participation of all stakeholders and based on accurate and updated information on land possession and property rights.

Mining in Yacuambi, Zamora-Chinchipec Province, Ecuador

The effects of artisanal and medium-scale mining on water resources prompted community members of Yacuambi Canton, in Ecuador's Zamora-Chinchipec Province, to initiate protests and demand eradication of mining activity from their area.

The Center for Conflict Analysis and Resolution of the National University of Loja, in Ecuador, proposed a combination of participatory conflict mapping and dispute-resolution training for local authorities before a dialogue process could be carried out.

Power plant in the city of Esmeraldas, Esmeraldas Province, Ecuador

Alleged air pollution and contamination of the Teaone River by a thermoelectric plant lay at the heart of protests conducted by twelve neighborhoods in the southern part of the Ecuadoran city of Esmeraldas. Community leaders claimed that the power company never responded to their concerns. Tensions reached a point of violent clashes and then gradually decreased, but without any significant actions being taken to resolve the underlying problems. A relapse into violence was possible.

The Fundación Ambiente y Sociedad designed a strategy for working with both parties to reach agreement on a code of conduct that would guide a series of dialogues aimed at addressing the direct causes of the dispute.

Consolidation of indigenous territory in Esmeraldas Province, Ecuador

The Chachi indigenous territory in Esmeraldas Province, Ecuador, faced significant pressures from land trafficking (large-scale land acquisitions by private individuals),

deforestation, and extractive industries. The main disputes involved illegal settlers who made a living in the timber trade. The Chachi people would destroy the small dams that the settlers built to take out timber, and the settlers would respond with armed threats.

The Corporación EcoPar proposed to work separately with settlers and Chachi leaders to understand their needs, map their disputes, and conduct workshops on collective rights, agrarian legislation, and institutional mechanisms to resolve their differences.

Palm-oil company in Esmeraldas Province, Ecuador

The 700 members of the Afro-Ecuadorian community of Carondelet in Esmeraldas Province, Ecuador, claimed that a palm-oil company had illegally acquired community lands, had violated their labor rights, and was polluting their soil and water with toxic waste. When their complaints were ignored, violent clashes and damages to the company's facilities followed, resulting in criminal lawsuits against some community members. The spiral of violence stopped before the intervention, but tension remained.

The Corporación de Gestión y Derecho Ambiental, known as ECOLEX, proposed to help the community of Carondelet to strengthen its capacity to analyze the dispute and to better understand its rights and the institutional mechanisms available to enforce them.

Implementation of projects

After EAF resources were disbursed, the implementing organizations had three months to complete their interventions and report on the outcomes. Although this was a narrow window of time to deliver results, as suggested by the efforts to systematize the experience,⁴ the majority of interventions funded by the EAF were found to have had a direct and positive effect in disputes where tensions were increasing. They had created basic conditions under which parties suspended escalation of their confrontational actions and could engage in fair dialogue processes. This conclusion is distilled from an analysis of each of the dispute-escalation indicators.

In almost all of the disputes addressed, communication between parties improved substantially. For example, in the dispute between a power plant operator and the neighboring communities in Esmeraldas, the poorest and most violent province in Ecuador, a code of conduct was established that governed the subsequent flow of communications.

In the cases in which at least one of the parties had chosen to make its voice heard by resorting to demonstrations of force (for example, with road blockades or marches), these demonstrations were significantly reduced and, in two cases,

⁴ For a detailed account of the experience of the EAF in Ecuador, see Dumas (2006a).

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were replaced by direct dialogue among the parties. In the dispute over fisheries at the Jaaukanigás Ramsar site in Santa Fe, Argentina, the fishing industry had used demonstrations to put pressure on the authorities to overturn decisions about the limits placed on capturing certain species. After a short intervention that combined training, dialogue, and public outreach, a major breakthrough was achieved when all relevant stakeholders formally agreed to begin a participatory process to build consensus on a management plan for the site.

During implementation of the interventions, no physical aggression was reported in any of the cases. Even in the dispute in Nangaritza, where subsistence farmers had kidnapped and beaten environmentalists to resist the creation of a protected area, no new episodes of violence were reported. Threats there were reduced to a minimum, giving way to a cooperative effort to solve the dispute. For more than four years after that intervention, no physical aggression was reported.

In a majority of the cases, implementing organizations were able to engage public authorities who had not provided adequate institutional responses to complaints submitted repeatedly in the past. For instance, in Buenavista, Ecuador, the project resulted in the first response ever from the Ministry of Energy and Mines to local citizens' requests for a solution to the environmental problems they faced as a result of the exploitation of mining pits on their river banks.

All of the implementing organizations claimed to have reduced tensions by increasing parties' access to information, especially that of parties who appeared to be the weakest and did not have reliable and understandable data to support their claims. In the dispute over fumigation on a flower plantation in Mulalillo, Ecuador, the production of a scientific report and the dissemination of its conclusions leveled the playing field and provided valuable input for a dialogue process to take place.

Although the reported outcomes are encouraging, they should not be taken entirely at face value. It has not been possible in all cases to establish the extent to which activities undertaken under the EAF can be credited for the changes observed in dispute dynamics. On the other hand, it would be inaccurate to state that all of these changes would have happened regardless of the interventions facilitated by the EAF. It seems reasonable to state that some kind of direct positive influence can be attributed to the EAF but that given the resource constraints and short time horizons, it has not been possible to fully understand the causality links.

The Nangaritza case

The case of the Nangaritza protected area in southern Ecuador provides an especially informative demonstration of how an intervention supported by the EAF can defuse tensions and set the stage for a dialogue process that can help resolve a dispute and even transform public policies.

For more than twenty years, subsistence farmers had taken possession of small lots of land near the Nangaritza River and had formed the communities of Zurmi and Las Orquídeas. As national laws dictated, after long-term undisputed possession, they were entitled to claim property rights, and they had initiated the corresponding administrative processes. The area is also home to Shuar indigenous peoples, whose territories have been formally recognized by the state, and to cloud forests with endemic flora and fauna. Furthermore, the area is located in the heart of the Cordillera del Cóndor region, known for its reserves of gold and other metals.⁵

In an attempt to set limits on advancing mining interests in the region, the Ministry of Environment, with support from national and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), established a low-level protected area, called the High Nangaritza Protected Forest (Bosque Protector Alto Nangaritza). In the very limited participatory process that took place prior to its establishment, the communities of Zurmi and Las Orquídeas were not properly informed that according to national laws only collective land titles and no new individual titles could be granted in the protected area. The subsistence farmers learned too late that they would not be able to secure property rights to the lands they had long been occupying and working.

When staff from an environmental NGO next showed up in the area, community members kidnapped them and beat them for three days and demanded withdrawal of the protected status. Police stormed the area but were not able to release the hostages; only when the local priest intervened did the communities agree to release them. However, the communities warned that no NGO or Ministry of Environment staff members would be allowed in until protected status was withdrawn. Tensions in the area remained high for more than a year. Finally the governor of the province, a prestigious indigenous leader, reached out to both parties, and an opportunity was found to bring the parties to a dialogue table to try to negotiate a way out of the dispute. FFLA was able to rapidly respond to the governor's request that it act as a mediator. After intense negotiations, stakeholders agreed to work jointly to redefine park limits and to conserve critical biodiversity areas. It took one year to implement the agreements to the satisfaction of both parties.

The successful outcome of the Nangaritza project allowed FFLA to leverage additional resources to expand the scope of its work. It collaborated with the Ministry of Environment to introduce changes in national legislation that would harmonize biodiversity conservation and land tenure rights in protected areas, preventing the emergence of similar disputes elsewhere. Also, FFLA continued to work in the area, engaging diverse stakeholders in a vision-building effort that would address the various challenges posed by mining and infrastructure projects.

⁵ For an analysis of peacebuilding in the Cordillera del Cóndor region, see Yolanda Kakabadse, Jorge Caillaux, and Juan Dumas, "The Peru and Ecuador Peace Park: One Decade after the Peace Settlement," in this book.

Factors affecting outcomes

FFLA identified enabling and limiting factors critical to the success of the EAF-funded interventions. In those cases where positive outcomes from EAF-funded interventions were evident, at least one of five key factors was present: the project had a clear strategy and the participants possessed the capacity to carry it forward; the project was legitimate in the eyes of the parties; additional resources were secured; there was adequate information; or state institutions were involved.

Those organizations with specific capacity for conflict transformation achieved the best results by designing a clear intervention strategy and consistently applying a chosen set of methodological guidelines. Conflict transformation goes well beyond the mere application of participatory methodologies to a conflict situation; it requires careful consideration of specific strategic options that stem from a solid conceptual understanding of conflict dynamics.

The most successful interventions were conducted by those organizations that had a proven track record in the geographic area and had consolidated working relationships with one or more local stakeholders. Without this capital, it was very difficult to establish trust with the parties in the short period of time in which the EAF expected the interventions to be conducted.

Although all of the organizations considered the financial resources granted by the EAF to be adequate for the purpose of their interventions, those that secured additional resources from other sources were able to achieve better results by implementing the agreements that were reached, by following up on commitments made by the parties, or by engaging technical resources where needed.

Communities that improved their access to information about the underlying problems and their strategic choices in the disputes in which they were involved opted out of violent strategies or demonstrations of force and chose to channel their complaints through institutional mechanisms. Finally, in those cases where public authorities became involved in a dialogue process, threats of violence became less frequent.

FFLA has also identified several factors that may have limited the pilot project's ability to go beyond the achieved outcomes. These factors include inadequate qualifications or a general lack of experience among those submitting applications, failure to identify longer-term financing opportunities, and the requirement that organizations seeking funding submit proposals through an open and competitive process.

The main factor that constrained the outcome potential of this pilot phase of the EAF was the funders' request that the project conduct an open and competitive call for proposals. A call for proposals must not be kept open for very long if the purpose of the EAF is to prevent imminent crises. An organization that has submitted a proposal to conduct an intervention that needs to happen in a matter of days cannot wait two months for a decision to be made. On the other

hand, if the period to submit proposals is too short, it may not coincide with an upsurge of a crisis situation. The process of designing and launching a call for proposals, selecting projects to fund, allocating funds, and evaluating outcomes after the projects are executed consumes too much time and too many resources. The process is further complicated by some applicants' failure to take the EAF's essential premises and objectives seriously. For example, some organizations invented or exaggerated crisis situations in order to apply for money that would complement funding for their ongoing projects.

Most of the applicant organizations did not appear to possess the capacity to conduct the interventions they were proposing. Only a few presented clear strategies and methodologies, while most others displayed confusion about the role they would play in the dispute. Many proposals called for training, dialogue, social participation, or other basic methodologies without making clear how these would affect escalating tensions. FFLA had to work closely with a few of the nine organizations selected for funding to better define the scope of their proposed interventions and to refine their objectives and strategies.

Finally, the financial sustainability of the interventions was not adequately addressed. Only a few of the proposals conveyed a clear idea of how implementing organizations would transition from the deescalation of tensions to a process of sustained dialogue to find solutions. Moreover, some organizations, paying little or no attention to the fact that the EAF expected them to leverage additional funds to sustain the effects of their interventions, were looking forward to what they called a Phase 2 of the EAF.

Some analysts would argue that the financial unsustainability of interventions in the longer term is a limitation inherent in a rapid-response approach. However, a few interventions did create the conditions for their own sustainability beyond the three-month window. Those organizations that had carefully planned for the longer term were able to continue their work without EAF support.

In two of the nine cases, the implementing organizations designed their projects to include a transition from a short-term intervention aimed at diffusing tensions to a longer-term dialogue process intended to address the substance of the dispute. In some of the other cases, the organizations provided an outline of what they intended to do after funding from the EAF ended, but they fell short when it came to implementation. The most notable example of this shortcoming happened in the dispute over logging in northern Minas Gerais, Brazil. In this case, a member of the community had been shot to death by guards who were in the security service hired by the logging company. During its EAF-funded intervention, the implementing organization created the enabling conditions for a fair dialogue process to begin. However, the organization was not able to leverage additional funds to follow through, and the process was aborted.

Also, given the financial limitations of this pilot phase of the EAF, in only one case was it possible to return to the area a year later and evaluate how dispute

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dynamics had unfolded. This is a major constraint to adequate assessment of the outcomes of this model for rapid response. It is possible that tensions reescalated soon after some of the interventions were completed. However, it may also be the case that tensions were successfully defused and that collaborative patterns of behavior were catalyzed. Without the longer-term follow-up, though, it is not possible to know.

LESSONS LEARNED

Analysis of the pilot project yields several lessons that will be valuable for future efforts. First, a different project-selection process will be necessary if interventions are to be timely and allocation of resources efficient. Second, identifying and building capacity of local leaders who are well positioned to be conveners will set the stage for effective intervention at times of crisis. Third, refinement of dispute-escalation indicators will improve selection of projects and assessment of the interventions, as well as help the EAF to remain true to its established purpose. Finally, longer-term interventions are necessary to reverse conflict trends and to prevent reescalation.

Project-selection process

An open and competitive project-selection mechanism is not adequate for continued operation of the EAF. Other approaches are necessary to allow more timely and efficient allocation of resources, thus increasing the effectiveness and potential of this model.

Funders may be concerned that it is risky to fund projects without a competitive selection process. But risk taking is inherent in the work that the EAF does, and essential for its success. The nature of crisis prevention requires funders' willingness to take risks when deciding whether an intervention in a given dispute deserves to be supported. Although it is always preferable to gather as much information as possible to assess the legitimacy of those applying for funds, the feasibility of their strategy, and the ripeness of the opportunity to act, sometimes a decision must be made quickly if a timely response is to be made. If the organization considering the application for funds is too risk averse, it will miss opportunities to realize the full potential of the EAF.

Ideally, the door will be open for proposals year-round, and decisions will be made as proposals are received. Funded projects will have to meet key quality criteria. The EAF will continuously monitor specific disputes in a given region, and when it identifies escalating tensions, it will let parties know that the EAF can provide expert support. It will then facilitate parties' engagement with the EAF, if parties ask for such assistance. Finally, funding agencies ideally will keep a specific amount of money in their annual budgets so it is available when it is requested to fund timely intervention to prevent the escalation of violence.

Capacity building

Awareness raising among local leaders is critical for effective crisis prevention because when tensions escalate toward crisis, conflicting parties are more likely to participate in discussions if they are invited by a convener they trust and respect. In Latin America, church representatives, ombudsman's offices, and prestigious individuals have been looked to as legitimate conveners. Although these respected persons or institutions may have the moral authority to engage all parties in a dialogue process, they seldom have the technical capacity to conduct the process, and they rarely seek professional support from capable persons or institutions. It is therefore essential to continuously update local leaders and other possible conveners on the various kinds of dialogue processes they can lead and on the available technical resources in the region. This is probably a more effective approach than trying to assess the legitimacy of every organization seeking funding for an intervention in a dispute.

Adequate technical capacity is needed to conduct dialogue processes in crisis situations. Capable professionals are working to resolve environmental disputes across the developing world, and it is imperative to broaden the resources available so they can provide technical support to conveners. Building such capacity can take years. Training courses are an essential and useful first step to raise awareness and to provide trainees with practical tools that can be easily internalized. These courses also often yield information that can help experts to identify disputes, both latent and overt, that need to be addressed in the short term if social and environmental damage is to be prevented. For trainings to be fully effective, they must be complemented with ongoing assistance or mentoring by trainers to help trainees apply the tools they have acquired, with the trainers either acting as third parties to disputes or requesting external assistance. Conveners can also play these key supporting roles. To facilitate timely response in crisis situations, all trainees should be linked to an EAF support mechanism.

Dispute-escalation indicators

The set of indicators chosen to define an escalating dispute for the purpose of the EAF has proven useful for assessing the results of the interventions, but they leave too much opportunity for discretionary interpretation. For example, except in situations where these factors are self-evident, determining whether communication between parties is poor or whether public institutions' responses are adequate is a subjective process. That is not to say that qualitative indicators are useless. On the contrary, they have helped researchers to identify trends in the dynamics of a dispute. However, more detailed indicators—for example, indicators that specify elements of poor communication between parties—could help analysts to better identify escalating trends and to more accurately assess the outcomes of an intervention.

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Limitations on assessment capability have long been a challenge in the conflict transformation field (Nanthikesan and Uitto 2012). Only in recent years have efforts begun to bridge this gap, and no comprehensive pool of indicators has yet been developed or borrowed from other social sciences. Considering that these indicators would vary by region and culture, it would be beneficial to engage a variety of organizations in a dialogue about underlying assumptions and theories of change that would lead to the definition of meaningful indicators.

It is also important to allow for some flexibility regarding the kinds of conflict-escalation situations that can be addressed by the EAF. Although some of the funded interventions responded to exactly the types of situations the EAF was originally created to address, others were designed to begin preventive dialogue where imminent escalation could be reasonably expected. Some others had the goal of preventing relapses into violence and of consolidating a fragile and incipient collaboration among parties that had been clashing until not long before the intervention.

It is difficult to determine where crisis prevention ends and dispute resolution starts, but it is not necessary to draw a line between them; they will sometimes overlap. On the other hand, it is important not to lose sight of the purpose of the EAF. If its scope is broadened to support every kind of dialogue effort in an environmental dispute, whether tensions are escalating or not, the program's added value will be lost, and it may become simply another funding mechanism that promotes participatory natural resource management.

Longer-term intervention

Effective crisis prevention may require more than three months to reverse an escalation trend. Some organizations have been able to positively affect escalating disputes in such a time frame, but with additional time it is more likely that the intervention will not only stop an escalation spiral, but reverse it, and then consolidate a deescalating trend and prevent relapses. It thus seems reasonable to extend the time frame of EAF-supported interventions to nine or twelve months.

In some cases, it has been possible to prove that the funding provided by the EAF can be used to leverage additional resources to begin and sustain good governance processes for sustainable development, but this transition needs to be better planned for at the outset of an intervention. It is essential to strategically link these peacebuilding efforts with development initiatives already under way that can help to implement agreements; after all, it is through concrete actions that honor the words said in a dialogue process that trust is built. If no financial provision is made for implementation of agreements, frustration will result, and the risk of a relapse into violence will increase. The project recipient, rapid-response funders, and relevant agencies should also work together to secure longer-term resources that will allow for the ongoing monitoring of conflict transformation outcomes, including after the intervention has concluded.

Instead of being used as an isolated mechanism, the EAF can help to strengthen ongoing conflict transformation efforts. In a thirty-six-month experience in Ecuador (2009–2012), with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the EAF was utilized to respond to escalating tensions within environmental governance initiatives where FFLA was already working. The synergy between longer-term funding and short-term resources to prevent further escalation of disputes proved effective.

CONCLUSION

A third-party intervention that facilitates dialogue between conflicting parties is not the only approach that can successfully deescalate tensions in an environmental dispute. Where there is asymmetry in the balance of power, the weakest parties may try to make themselves visible and their voices heard in confrontational ways. When they do this, the general public and the most powerful parties perceive them as belligerent and radical. However, it is likely that they chose to radicalize their protest because they found themselves alone, or because this was the only way they could make their voices heard in the past, and they do not know or trust other alternatives that could improve their situation. Under the EAF it is, counter-intuitively, possible to take sides with the weakest party by strengthening its ability to understand its strategic options in a dispute and to choose the option that best serves its interests and needs. Frequently, the weaker party then finds ways to make its complaint visible without having to initiate a spiral of tensions.

If there is any doubt regarding the need for, and benefits of, an innovative mechanism for funding timely interventions to prevent crises in environmental disputes in South America, the region's enthusiastic positive response to the pilot program is a clear indication that the EAF fills a strongly felt gap. There is no question that if governance in South America is to be strengthened, better technical and more financial resources are needed to address the growing number of disputes that emerge daily regarding access to and control over natural resources. The time seems ripe for a major investment to build and strengthen environmental crisis prevention capacities, and to dramatically scale up the EAF in Latin America and in other parts of the developing world.

FFLA encourages private and public institutions in various countries and regions to either replicate the EAF model or build on it to create similar or more effective mechanisms to respond in a timely manner to requests for intervention by conveners or stakeholders in environmental disputes. These mechanisms should allow for a rapid assessment of situations that will determine, on the basis of a set of proven dispute-escalation indicators, what kind of response should be provided. Priority should be given to those disputes where poor communities' livelihoods are, or are perceived to be, in jeopardy. FFLA's experience is not centered in post-conflict countries, but EAF-style interventions may also contribute positively to peacebuilding efforts in post-conflict situations where the stakes are higher and the challenges more daunting.

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