



“People and Wetlands: The Vital Link”
7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971),
San José, Costa Rica, 10-18 May 1999

Guidelines for establishing and strengthening local communities’ and indigenous people’s participation in the management of wetlands

1. RECALLING the *Guidelines for the implementation of the wise use concept* (Recommendation 4.10) and the *Additional guidance for the implementation of the wise use concept* (Resolution 5.6), which seek to encourage the involvement of local communities in the development of management plans for Ramsar sites and decision-making processes related to the wise use of wetlands;
2. AWARE of the relevant paragraphs of Resolution 1.51 of the World Conservation Congress in Montreal in 1996 in relation to indigenous people and the Narashino Statement from the International Wetland Symposium at the Yatsu-Higata Ramsar site in Japan in 1995, which called for active and informed participation by local people and communities in wetland management, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters adopted in Aarhus, Denmark, in June 1998;
3. AWARE of the International Labour Organization’s Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries;
4. ALSO AWARE that in many contexts indigenous people and local communities are already involved in managing and using wetlands sustainably, and have long-standing rights, ancestral values, and traditional knowledge and institutions associated with their use of wetlands;
5. FURTHER RECALLING Recommendation 6.3 which in particular called on the Ramsar Bureau, in consultation with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Kushiro International Wetlands Centre, the Caddo Lake Institute, IUCN - World Conservation Union, Contracting Parties, and other relevant NGOs, to evaluate the benefits of involving local and indigenous people in the management of wetlands and produce for consideration at this Conference guidelines on how the participatory approach can advance the adoption and application of the wise use principle of the Convention;
6. ACKNOWLEDGING that Operational Objective 2.7 from the Convention’s Strategic Plan 1997-2002 describes actions intended to *“encourage active and informed participation of local communities, including indigenous people, and in particular women, in the conservation and wise use of wetlands”*, including implementation of Recommendation 6.3;

7. NOTING that the case studies documented and analysed in preparing the Guidelines on how to implement the participatory approach have revealed that involving local stakeholders can accelerate the move towards achieving the Ramsar goal of wise use of wetlands in accordance with Article 3.1 of the Convention, when such participation is pursued within the full framework of actions encouraged by the Convention, and that the lessons learned from these case studies can assist Parties and others in fostering participatory approaches that avoid the mistakes encountered by others;
8. FURTHER NOTING that the theme of the 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties is *Wetlands and People - the vital link* and that Technical Session III of this Conference examined in detail the tools and mechanisms for promoting the involvement of local and indigenous people in wetland management;
9. ALSO NOTING that Technical Session III of this Conference considered and discussed the draft document prepared by IUCN - World Conservation Union, with the support of the Kushiro International Wetlands Centre, the Caddo Lake Institute, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and the Ramsar Bureau entitled *Guidelines for establishing and strengthening local communities' and indigenous people's participation in the management of wetlands*; and
10. THANKING the Governments of Australia, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom for their financial support for the development of the draft Guidelines and the associated case studies;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

11. ADOPTS the *Guidelines for establishing and strengthening local communities' and indigenous people's participation in the management of wetlands* contained in the Annex to the present Resolution as further guidance to the Contracting Parties in the implementation of the wise use concept of the Convention and the Convention generally;
12. CALLS UPON Contracting Parties to apply these Guidelines so as to encourage active and informed participation, and the assumption of responsibility, by local communities and indigenous people in the management of Ramsar-listed sites and other wetlands and the implementation of the wise use principles at the local, watershed, and national levels;
13. FURTHER CALLS UPON Contracting Parties, when applying the Guidelines annexed to this Resolution, to give priority and special attention to involving women, youth and their representative organizations wherever and whenever possible;
14. URGES Contracting Parties to include extensive consultation with local communities and indigenous people in the formulation of national wetland policies and legislation and to ensure that these instruments, when introduced, include mechanisms consistent with the Annex to this Resolution, for actively engaging and involving the general community with implementation;
15. FURTHER URGES the Contracting Parties to create, as appropriate, the legal and policy context to facilitate indigenous people's and local communities' direct involvement in national and local decision-making for the sustainable use of wetlands, including the provision of necessary resources;

16. INVITES Contracting Parties to ensure that the stakeholders, including local communities and indigenous people, are represented on National Ramsar Committees or similar bodies, and that, where possible, these non-government stakeholders are represented in the national delegations to future meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties;
17. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to provide for transparency in decision-making with respect to wetlands and their conservation and ensure that there is full sharing with the stakeholders of technical and other information related to the selection of Ramsar sites and management of all wetlands, with guarantees of their full participation in the process;
18. FURTHER ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, technical experts, and local and indigenous people to work together in the planning and management of wetlands to ensure that the best available science and local knowledge are taken into consideration in making decisions;
19. REQUESTS Contracting Parties to give priority to capacity building for the implementation of participatory approaches with special attention being given to the training of government administrators and local people in facilitation techniques, consultative processes, cultural sensitivity, and the application of the Ramsar Wise Use Guidelines;
20. INVITES Contracting Parties to seek, as appropriate, the involvement and assistance of indigenous people's and community-based groups, wetland education centres and non-governmental organizations with the necessary expertise to facilitate the establishment of participatory approaches;
21. REQUESTS Contracting Parties to recognise that in many cases financial mechanisms and incentives provide a catalyst for fostering participatory processes and should therefore gain priority consideration in efforts to promote the involvement of local communities and indigenous people;
22. URGES the bilateral and multilateral donor agencies supporting wetland conservation and wise use projects, and integrated water resource management projects in general, to take into consideration the Annex to this Resolution and the priorities for action at the national level identified herein;
23. DIRECTS the Ramsar Bureau to establish a clearing house, create a focal point, and liaise with other international organizations, including the secretariats of international conventions, for information exchange related to participatory approaches and indigenous knowledge systems in support of wetland management, and for information on training and other topics likely to be of use by the Parties in implementing this Resolution, as human and financial resources allow;
24. URGES the Ramsar Bureau and partners to further elaborate on these Guidelines by COP9 in the light of new experiences in establishing and strengthening participatory processes at Ramsar sites and other wetlands, utilizing the experience of International Organization Partners, indigenous people's and community-based groups; and
25. DECIDES that as part of the National Reports to be prepared for COP8, special attention will be given to reporting on significant efforts in implementation of these Guidelines, and

in particular on efforts to enhance the extent and effectiveness of involving local communities and indigenous people in wetland management.

Annex

Guidelines for establishing and strengthening local communities' and indigenous people's participation in the management of wetlands

I. Introduction

1. Community involvement and participation in management decision-making for sites included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites) and other wetlands have been recognised as essential throughout the history of the Ramsar Convention, but very little guidance on this topic is available to the Contracting Parties. In recognition of this, Recommendation 6.3 of Ramsar COP6 (1996) called upon the Contracting Parties *“to make specific efforts to encourage active and informed participation of local and indigenous people at Ramsar listed sites and other wetlands and their catchments, and their direct involvement, through appropriate mechanisms, in wetland management”*, and assigned the Bureau of the Convention (secretariat), working with IUCN-The World Conservation Union, the World Wide Fund for Nature, Caddo Lake Institute (USA) and Kushiro International Wetlands Center (Japan), the task of commissioning case studies and developing guidelines to assist the Contracting Parties in such efforts.
2. These guidelines were conceived with the premise that local and indigenous people's involvement in wetland management can substantially contribute to effective management practices that further Ramsar's wise use objectives. As defined by Ramsar COP3 (1987), wise use of wetlands is *“their sustainable utilization for the benefit of mankind in a way compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem.”* Evidence from the 23 commissioned case studies and other experiences in participatory management indicates that local and indigenous people's involvement can, if carried out within the full framework of actions encouraged by the Convention, contribute significantly to maintaining or restoring the ecological integrity of wetlands, as well as contributing to community well-being and more equitable access to resources. In practical terms, the Ramsar Convention concept of “wise use” is equivalent to “sustainable use”.
3. These guidelines are intended to assist Contracting Parties in involving local and indigenous people in wetland management in a manner that furthers the wise use objectives of the Convention.
4. Experience has shown that it is advisable to involve local and indigenous people in a management partnership when:
 - a. the active commitment and collaboration of stakeholders are essential for the management of a wetland (e.g., when the wetland is inhabited or privately owned);
 - b. access to the natural resources within the wetland is essential for local livelihood, security and cultural heritage; and
 - c. local and indigenous people express a strong interest in being involved in management.

5. The case for local and indigenous people's involvement is even stronger when:
 - a. local stakeholders have historically enjoyed customary/legal rights over the wetland;
 - b. local interests are strongly affected by the way in which the wetland is managed;
 - c. decisions to be taken are complex or controversial (e.g., different values need to be harmonised or there is disagreement on the ownership status of the land or natural resources);
 - d. the existing management regime has failed to produce wise use;
 - e. stakeholders are ready to collaborate and request to do so; and
 - f. there is sufficient time to negotiate among stakeholders in advance of management decisions being made.
6. It is not possible to provide a definitive list of criteria that will guarantee successful establishment of local and indigenous people's involvement. The breadth of the term "involvement" (from consultation to devolution of management authority) and the variety of local contexts means that there are few if any prerequisites to establishing participatory management. One consistent factor, however, is the possession of beliefs and values that support the Ramsar concept of "sustainable utilization".
7. Involvement of local and indigenous people in resource management falls within the general resource management approach known as *participatory management*. Terms such as collaborative management, co-management, or joint management are more or less synonymous.
8. In the context of these guidelines, *stakeholders* are taken to be bearers of separate interests and/or contributions for the management of a wetland, with a particular focus on interest groups within local and indigenous communities and the government agencies responsible for wetland management.
9. Note that the reference to "local communities and indigenous people" has been shortened to "local and indigenous people." Also, the term "indigenous people" may vary from country to country. Furthermore, "local" is a relative term; some stakeholders may live at a distance from the wetland (such as migrating fisherfolk or pastoralists) and still have traditional claims to its resources.

II. Summary of lessons learned from participatory management case studies

10. **Incentives for local and indigenous people's involvement and wise use are essential: everyone must benefit in the long term**
 - a. Local and indigenous people benefit from participatory management arrangements through the maintenance of sustainable livelihoods, including activities such as:
 - i. fishing and hunting;
 - ii. farming and haying;
 - iii. reed harvesting and collection of forest products;
 - iv. salt extraction;
 - v. recreational uses and ecotourism; and

- vi. water for domestic consumption.
- b. Other benefits of participatory management for local and indigenous people include:
 - i. maintaining spiritual and cultural values associated with a wetland;
 - ii. more equitable access to wetland resources;
 - iii. increased local capacity and empowerment;
 - iv. reduced conflicts among stakeholders; and
 - v. maintaining ecosystem functions (e.g., flood control, improved water quality, etc.).
- c. Government agencies benefit from participatory management arrangements through:
 - i. improved ecosystem viability;
 - ii. reduced management costs;
 - iii. assistance with monitoring and surveillance;
 - iv. fewer infringements; and
 - v. enhanced social sustainability and quality of life for communities dependent on wetlands.
- d. Incentives such as tax concessions, subsidies, conservation easements, special arrangements for licenses, increased market access, financial compensation schemes, increased infrastructure, and development activities can, if appropriately structured, further wise use objectives when directed to local and indigenous stakeholders.

11. Trust among stakeholders is essential and must be developed

- a. Development of trust among stakeholders takes time, effort and attention. Elements that contribute to building trust include:
 - i. a willingness to seek joint objectives cooperatively;
 - ii. mutual effort;
 - iii. mutual respect;
 - iv. open and ongoing communication;
 - v. clear and realistic expectations about process outcomes;
 - vi. satisfactory and timely completion of agreed tasks;
 - vii. following through on commitments; and
 - viii. participation of all sectors of the community.
- b. Participatory management works best when stakeholders' interests are openly stated.
- c. Clearly stated terms of reference and objectives assist in the establishment of management partnerships.
- d. Participatory management processes require strong facilitation that builds trust among stakeholders. Independent brokers with strong leadership skills are most effective (often this is a role for NGOs).

- e. Appropriate legal or policy frameworks (such as the right to organize, legal recognition of NGOs, conservation easements, etc.) assist in the establishment of participatory management arrangements.
- f. Forums, study groups, and workshops can be useful means to increase shared understanding of Ramsar principles and the value of resources being conserved or sustainably used.

12. Flexibility is required

- a. There is no one level of local and indigenous people's involvement that fits all contexts.
- b. There is no one approach or recipe that will make the process work in all contexts.
- c. For participatory management regimes to be successful, it may be necessary to meet basic development needs in the process of pursuing wise use objectives.
- d. "Learning by doing" approach (i.e., ongoing assessment of process and outcomes) allows for re-orientation as needed.

13. Knowledge exchange and capacity building are fundamental

- a. Government agencies often require capacity building in participatory management approaches, such as those specified below for stakeholders.
- b. Stakeholders often require capacity building in:
 - i. establishing and maintaining appropriate organizations;
 - ii. effective relations with government agencies;
 - iii. negotiating and contributing to decision-making;
 - iv. technical aspects of wetland management and Ramsar's principles;
 - v. monitoring of wetland ecology and identifying changes in ecological character;
 - vi. evaluation of participatory processes; and
 - vii. elaboration and design of project proposals to obtain funding.
- c. Local environmental knowledge can make a significant contribution to wetland management strategies, especially when blended with the best available science.
- d. Engaging local stakeholders in site monitoring and process evaluation makes a valuable and substantive contribution to achieving participatory conservation objectives.
- e. A multidisciplinary approach utilizing biological and social science expertise is vital for establishing participatory management regimes.
- f. Site monitoring can take advantage of a "marginal cost" approach: technical experts may be engaged, and established facilities (such as university laboratories) may be used at minimal cost.

- g. Networking mechanisms such as regular meetings, newsletters, and radio programmes fulfil information exchange and educational purposes.
- h. Basic Ramsar concepts, stewardship principles and ecological values can be conveyed through the educational curriculum of local schools.
- i. Wetland Centres can:
 - i. catalyse active and informed participation of local and indigenous people;
 - ii. serve as demonstration sites for sustainable wetland management;
 - iii. support formal, informal and non-formal educational programs that involve a wide range of stakeholders;
 - iv. help to bring local and indigenous people's concerns to the attention of decision-makers; and
 - v. provide information and advice on wetlands and their management.

14. Continuity of resources and effort is important

- a. Establishing participatory management takes time.
- b. As with any management regime, participatory management may never be fully self-financing.
- c. Financing through donor and/or government channels is important for sustainability.
- d. Appropriate legal and policy frameworks at national and local levels contribute to continuity.
- e. High-level political support, ideally from a number of the appropriate Ministries, is important for maintaining government commitment to participatory management regimes.

III. Engaging local and indigenous people

15. When involving local and indigenous people in the participatory process, those who facilitate or coordinate such efforts should:
- a. Ensure that all stakeholders understand the role of the facilitators/ coordinators.
 - b. Regularly verify that all stakeholders agree upon the basic objectives of the initiative.
 - c. Raise awareness of wetland conservation and sustainability issues. Involve local and indigenous people in preparing and running awareness-raising activities.
 - d. Ensure the involvement of influential individuals in the community and all sectors of the population, and especially the women and youth of the community.

- e. Encourage stakeholder ownership of the process and participatory management arrangements, ensuring that no key participants are excluded.
- f. Involve and strengthen local organizations and traditional structures that represent different stakeholders among local and indigenous people. Assist in the establishment of such organizations if they do not already exist.
- g. Develop local capacity including organizational and negotiating skills, keeping of records and financial accounts, and conflict management, and provide (as necessary) the meeting place, telephone access, basic equipment, and transportation.
- h. Ensure that persons acting as facilitators and coordinators are properly trained in participatory assessment and planning techniques and possess the necessary facilitation skills.
- i. Work with public-sector stakeholders to build capacity for developing and administering participatory management processes.
- j. Ensure that key parties have a clear understanding of each other's needs, responsibilities and limitations.
- k. Ensure that local and indigenous people learn participatory assessment and planning techniques so that they can be applied to other community concerns.
- l. Ensure that all commitments are met.
- m. Develop a site monitoring and process testing programme using local resources to check progress.
- n. Ensure that tasks taken up by various stakeholders are within their capabilities.
- o. Keep funding agencies aware of issues and progress of participatory management approaches.
- p. Establish networks among communities involved in wetland management and encourage regular contact and sharing of experiences.
- q. Support the application of traditional knowledge to wetland management including, where possible, the establishment of centres to conserve indigenous and traditional knowledge systems.

IV. Measuring local and indigenous people's involvement

- 16. The following list is a brief, non-exhaustive checklist of indicators that can assist to measure the extent of local and indigenous people's involvement. The sections below correlate with those in Section II (paragraphs 10-14) to assist cross-reference.
- 17. **Incentives**

- a. Local and indigenous people have achieved an economic stake or other interest in the wise use of wetland resources.
- b. The government agency has stated policies supporting participatory management.
- c. Appropriate legal and financial incentives for participatory management are in place.
- d. A more equitable sharing of benefits among stakeholders has resulted from the participatory management process.
- e. Stakeholders have expressed satisfaction with their involvement in the process.

18. **Trust**

- a. There is a clearly stated and widely known policy or legal document that makes a commitment to involving local and indigenous people.
- b. All key stakeholders (particularly government) acknowledge participatory management as legitimate and desirable.
- c. Local and indigenous people are now involved in making substantive decisions affecting the wetland resource use and management.
- d. Local organizations to advance participatory management are respected within the community.
- e. Representatives of the local and indigenous people are truly representative and accountable to them.
- f. There are resource use and participation rules which are appropriate to the local situation.
- g. A management agreement exists between stakeholders (oral or written, formal or informal).
- h. The management agreement has clearly defined boundaries and membership.
- i. The management agreement specifically defines stakeholders' functions, rights and responsibilities.
- j. The management agreement has been approved by at least the resource-using stakeholders and key decision-making groups.
- k. Parties to the agreement meet their commitments.
- l. Non-compliance with approaches, rules, rights, and responsibilities outlined in the management agreement is deemed to be at an acceptable level.
- m. Any system of graduated sanctions for infringement of rules has been agreed upon by all key parties.

- n. There is evidence that resource management controls are being implemented.

19. **Flexibility**

- a. There is the potential for collective modification of the rules relating to resource use by those affected.
- b. There are “nested” management units (different bodies at different levels).
- c. There is evidence that the local and indigenous people can influence the speed and direction of change in relation to the resources with which they are concerned.
- d. Facilitators/coordinators practice “learning by doing” and adaptive management.

20. **Knowledge exchange and capacity building**

- a. There is an awareness among stakeholders of new management approaches, rules, rights, and responsibilities.
- b. There is a two-way flow of information and communication between local and indigenous people and relevant government agencies.
- c. Information reaches local and indigenous people in a timely and accurate manner, and in a form which is readily understandable.
- d. Local and indigenous people participate in site monitoring and in evaluation of the participatory process.
- e. There is evidence of respect by key government agencies for local human systems and local ecological knowledge.
- f. Stakeholders are demonstrating necessary skills and empowerment (e.g., capacity to make decisions, monitoring skills, etc.).
- g. Measurement methods, established by the stakeholders, demonstrate and quantify the degree to which local participation was intended to, and actually has improved or conserved the recognized “functions and values” of the wetland and its wise use.

21. **Continuity**

- a. There are one or more organizational structures that facilitate local and indigenous people’s involvement (e.g., a council, management body, women’s group, etc.).

- b. A random sample of local and indigenous people are able to identify the community's role in wetland management, and the individuals who are directly involved can accurately describe the objective of their involvement.
- c. The government agency and its staff have a demonstrated commitment to participatory management, and can accurately describe the objective of local and indigenous people's involvement.
- d. There is an appropriately long-term source of funding for ongoing participation and resource management.
- e. Local and indigenous people have provided in-kind support (time, labour, traditional knowledge and expertise) to implement the participatory management agreement.
- f. Conflict management mechanisms exist, and there is an appeals process in case of conflicts within the management partnership.
- g. There is integration between local wetland management and management of the entire catchment.

V. Testing the participatory approach

22. Local participation in wetland management is a tool for advancing the Convention's objective to achieve wise use of all wetlands. Administrative Authorities of the Ramsar Convention, managers, and process facilitators and coordinators need to be aware of existing wise use guidance and need to continuously apply this guidance in the participatory management decision-making process. The decision-making process should, at each stage, consider the implications of actions in terms of the following Ramsar standards and principles:
- a. Ramsar's Wise Use Guidelines (Recommendation 4.10 and Resolution 5.6);
 - b. Ramsar's Management Planning Guidelines (Resolution 5.7);
 - c. Monitoring ecological character of the site (Article 3; Recommendation 5.2, Resolution VI.1, and Resolution VII.10).
 - d. Standards for managing for wise use:
 - i. there is an increase or maintenance of species diversity, size of wetland area, and water quality;
 - ii. resource use is sustainable;
 - iii. the precautionary principle is being applied;
 - iv. cost-benefit analyses consider wetland functional values;
 - v. the participatory process takes a catchment perspective and decisions within that framework consider what is best for the wetland(s); and
 - vi. degradation of wetlands has been replaced by efforts to restore and rehabilitate them.