

COMMUNITY BASED WATERSHED MANAGEMENT: CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION

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Conflict prevention and resolution is an important component for a successful community based approach to watershed management, and is critical to ensure the sustainable and friendly coexistence between nature and people. In many countries, the rapid social, economic and infrastructure development has enormously improved the quality of life, but it has also created destruction of the world's natural resources and environmental quality. As environmental quality problems have grown steadily over the years, it has often resulted in major conflicts and disputes between government, industry, and civil society.

Around the world, important watershed protection programs are faced with balancing the tensions between environmental protection and economic development interests. In the State of Maryland, local fishermen and community groups have protested dredging projects in the Chesapeake Bay which would widen the shipping channel for the transport of goods to the Port of Baltimore. In Thailand, local fishermen and community groups have protested the construction of a gas pipeline to be built as a part of the Malaysia-Thailand regional development plan. In the Philippines, the courts have recently upheld legal challenges by environmental groups over the management of development in the Manila Bay.

As these public protests increase in intensity and frequency, countries have looked for legislative, institutional, and innovative approaches to prevent environmental conflicts and manage natural resource disputes. Fundamental to these approaches are three main principles: (1) involving the public in the decision making process; (2) integrating environmental and development interests; and (3) enhancing dialogue and consensus building for the sustainable management of the natural resources.

This paper will present case studies in the United States and in Asia on how governments and communities are exploring ways to prevent conflicts and resolve disputes in the context of community based environmental management.