



## **CEPA for wetland site managers**

### **Brief guidance to assist site managers in using CEPA tools to assist in effective site management**

#### **Note to trainers**

The brief guidance has been drawn up by the Ramsar Convention's CEPA Oversight Panel for use in training programmes for wetland site managers to introduce CEPA tools that will assist in effective site management.

#### **Using the guidance**

**What is a wetland site manager?** The term site manager is commonly used but rarely explained. In 2007 STRP developed a survey to investigate **how** and **who** were using Ramsar guidelines. The people surveyed included, among several other groups, site managers. A specific question for these site managers revealed that that this group was not a homogenous cohort but a more disparate group, evenly split between those with *largely day-to-day site management responsibilities* and those with *oversight responsibilities for wetland site management and policy*. These results were consistent with the work carried out by CEPA Panel member Chris Prietto (the current CEPA representative on STRP) during an STRP workshop in 2010.

Wetland site managers who have mostly site-based responsibilities and are thus directly connected to a wetland (although likely with some broader responsibilities beyond the wetland itself), would gain the most benefit from access to guidance across the full range of CEPA activities, from water quality to monitoring to community engagement to CEPA tools for interpreting and promoting their site. This brief text on CEPA for site managers is largely targeted at this group of site managers. It is intended primarily for use during site manager training programmes associated with some relevant hands-on exercises and should be customized as necessary to take account of local and regional differences that will require special CEPA interventions.



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#### **What is CEPA?**

Communication, education, and public awareness are regularly on the list of key strategies for the management of natural areas. Using CEPA effectively can build support for wetland conservation by facilitating increased awareness of wetland values. However, wetland managers often do not have the skills to develop complementary CEPA strategies and activities for their site plan.

There is a strong synergy between communication, education, awareness and participatory management, since directly involving people in a wetland builds awareness of its broad values. Indeed understanding the importance of participation of key stakeholders in wetland management and recognizing that participatory skills require more social skills than technical skills led the Ramsar Convention to re-define the acronym CEPA in 2008 to mean communication, education, *participation* and awareness.

These brief paragraphs that follow provide you with (a) advice on encouraging effective participation in the management planning process, (b) steps for identifying and building partnerships in the community, and (c) a list of strategies that can be used for building CEPA into a wetland management plan.

#### **Who needs to know about your wetland? Improving public awareness of wetland values as a management objective**

Improving public awareness of wetland values should be a priority for wetland managers. Communication and education processes will help to explain and to achieve management goals. Above all, it is important to identify the most critical aspects of the wetland that people need to understand to gain their support for the management objectives. CEPA strategies to increase public awareness and build support are briefly described below.

Once you have identified the information you wish to deliver, building and packaging the message is the next step. Simple messages can be used in a number of ways, forming the basis for fact sheets, brochures and signs in your wetland.

Providing opportunities for people to experience the wetlands directly can be beneficial and can provide valuable opportunities for awareness-raising.

Direct involvement in management activities is also a very effective strategy for building understanding of wetland values as well as providing training in relevant management skills.

#### **CEPA Strategies**

##### Awareness messages

Using a series of simple messages is an effective CEPA strategy.

#### **Building effective messages**

**Use positives**, familiar points that are already agreed upon: eg. *“Our wetland has supported the local community for centuries. Better management will guarantee its future.”*

**Localise the message.** A “message” may be used in many ways, as a theme for a brochure or a video, in presentations to local groups, or even through small products such as stickers and flyers. However, the message must be translated into the language and products that suit the target audience.

**Invite the response.** All messages have a purpose and should invite response from the audience. Be clear about what you want from the audience. Eg, *you can help by...*

### Using local communication tools

Using the local media facilities, whether this be newspapers, newsletters or word of mouth, can be effective in reaching a broad range of people. Web sites can also reach some target groups.

### Information products

Brochures, fact sheets and posters are examples of information products that can be developed. It is important to keep content simple and suitable for the target audience.

### Meetings, fora & consultations

Smaller or larger gatherings with specifically targeted stakeholders can be very effective – especially when a higher level of involvement is intended, or when implications of the measures will be high for a specific stakeholder group. It can also be very useful to target higher-level decision makers, who might be more willing to attend a lunchtime meeting than read a report or brochure.

### Visitor access

Allowing people to visit the wetland can provide personal experiences that build understanding and support very effectively. Encouraging and providing support for visitors is an excellent way to develop tourism potential that can contribute to the resources needed for managing the site.

### Interpreting the site for visitors

Interpreting the site for visitors through signage, visitor facilities and dedicated guides will enhance their experience. Local communities often represent a rich repository of knowledge built up over time and this can form the basis of locally-based interpretation for a wetland. Many sites and dedicated centres (see below on the latter) make effective use of both guides and volunteers in working with visitors.

### Special events, community awareness days

Special events on suitable days such as the Convention's annual campaign, World Wetlands Day (2 February), can be useful in building awareness and involvement over time.

### Community education initiatives and programmes

Where resources and expertise are available, education programmes are a valuable addition to the management of a site. Education programmes can be broad or specific to a particular audience, such as schools or local community centres.

### Dedicated facilities

Many wetlands around the world benefit from dedicated facilities which assist and enhance visitor access. Facilities can range from observation decks to bird hides to dedicated visitor's centres. The National Reports submitted by Contracting Parties for the Ramsar Convention's 8<sup>th</sup> Conference in 2002 indicated that over 400 wetland centres operate at or near Ramsar Sites. And for the 2005 and 2008 Conferences there was a consistency in reporting that 35% of Contracting Parties had established wetland centres during the previous three years, so centres continue to be established. While these facilities may vary in scope, dedicated facilities provide a strong focus for wetland-related activities and can contribute greatly to participatory management.

### Participatory approaches to management planning

While the wetland manager bears the ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the management plan, building partnerships to develop the plan will help ensure support for its implementation. Involving relevant stakeholders in the management planning process, particularly local communities and indigenous peoples, will be beneficial in a number of ways.

- A participatory approach to identifying the values will build commitment towards managing for those values in the long term.



- Relevant stakeholders can hold important knowledge about the site. Incorporating knowledge from those directly related to the wetland facilitates valuable exchange of knowledge, combining traditional or historical knowledge with scientific knowledge.
- Involving stakeholders in the planning process will, in the long term, assist in developing a shared vision for the wetland and in crafting measures for achieving desired outcomes.

## **Ensuring stakeholder involvement**

### ***Building trust among stakeholders***

Identifying and informing stakeholders of the management planning process is the first step. A 'stakeholder' is any individual, group or community living within the influence of the site, or likely to influence the management of the site, especially those dependent on the site for their livelihood. (Managing Wetlands, Ramsar Handbook 18, 4th Edition, 2010). This can include wetland neighbours, indigenous communities, historical users and special interest groups such as birdwatchers for whom the site has special significance. Local and historical knowledge of the wetland can contribute significantly to the development of management strategies, especially when combined with the best available science.

The management planning team should use comprehensive communication to actively seek participation in the planning process. It is also important to consider how people in the local community obtain information. What are the sources and methods of communication to which they have easy access? What methods do they prefer? Are there local leaders who will have strong credibility as messengers?

It is important for managers to be aware of factors that could affect possible participation or non-participation of stakeholders. This knowledge will influence the approach a manager may take to seek participation. For instance, stakeholders may perceive that the aim of the planning process conflicts with their interests. CEPA processes can be instrumental in increasing understanding of the planning process, as well as increasing willingness to participate.

### ***Building awareness among the stakeholder groups most relevant to the management objective***

Once the management objectives have been determined, CEPA strategies should target those sub-groups who are most critical to achieving the objectives. Stakeholders may benefit from awareness-building and education to fully appreciate the values of the wetland, allowing them to fully participate in the planning process.

For instance, if the management objective is about securing water for the wetland, the target group may be local irrigators. If the management objective is about invasive species, the target group may be wetland neighbours.

Finding out what stakeholders know and what they don't know is an important step as it is more effective to build on what people already know. Information gained through consultation for the management planning process can help in clarifying the knowledge and appreciation that people hold about the wetland. Answering such questions will help decide what additional information and learning needs to be offered and how they should be delivered to build support for the management objectives.

### ***Gaining support through incentives***

Involving local communities should include an incentives approach. If local stakeholders are to be effectively involved they will need to understand how their involvement will deliver benefits to them. More importantly, those benefits must be attractive. A management plan must aim to identify management objectives which will deliver benefits to the wetlands but also to the local community.

Here again, education may be effective in making clear the links between stakeholder interests and the ecosystem values of the wetlands. A local stakeholder may not care if biodiversity values fall unless it affects his/her own values or interests. A CEPA approach could focus in the first instance on the values/interests of the stakeholder and build understanding of how these interests relate to the wetlands. Through the planning process the links could be made more explicit and appropriate.

Participatory skills (Ramsar Handbook No. 7, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2010) includes extensive guidance and case studies on incentives. The examples include incentives related to the maintenance of sustainable livelihoods, including activities such as:

- maintaining spiritual and cultural values associated with a wetland;
- more equitable access to wetland resources;
- increasing local capacity and empowerment;
- reducing conflicts among stakeholders; and
- maintaining ecosystem functions (e.g., flood control, improved water quality, etc.).

### ***Building capacity for continuing involvement***

Stakeholders who wish to become actively involved in the implementation of the management plan may need training in other areas such as organizational, facilitation, and negotiation skills, keeping of records and financial accounts, and basic administrative skills. Engaging local stakeholders in site monitoring and process evaluation makes a valuable and substantive contribution to achieving participatory conservation objectives. This however, will require training to provide stakeholders with the necessary tools and skills. To ensure continuity and financial stability it may be useful to explore cooperative or legal arrangements covered by a written agreement.

### **Where to find further information:**

**Ramsar Handbook 6 Wetland CEPA:** The Convention's Programme on communication, education, participation, and public awareness (CEPA) 2009-2015. [www.ramsar.org/pdf/lib/hbk4-06.pdf](http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/lib/hbk4-06.pdf)

**Ramsar Handbook 7 Participatory skills:** Establishing and strengthening local communities' and indigenous people's participation in the management of wetlands. <http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/lib/hbk4-07.pdf>

**A Guide to Participatory Action Planning and Techniques for Facilitating Groups.**  
[www.ramsar.org/pdf/outreach\\_actionplanning\\_guide.pdf](http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/outreach_actionplanning_guide.pdf)

**Assessment of World Wetlands Day.** [www.ramsar.org/pdf/wwd/wwd\\_assessment\\_2009.pdf](http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/wwd/wwd_assessment_2009.pdf)

**CEPA Toolkit.** Produced primarily for the Convention on Biological Diversity, this toolkit is equally relevant wetland site managers. [www.cbd.int/cepa/toolkit/2008/cepa/index.htm](http://www.cbd.int/cepa/toolkit/2008/cepa/index.htm)