

5. Complete situation analysis



Basic Practice Five

This document is a chapter from the Conservation Action Planning Handbook. The complete Handbook is available online at <http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/practices>.

The CAP Handbook is intended as a guidance resource to support the implementation of The Nature Conservancy's Conservation Action Planning (CAP) Process - a powerful instrument for helping practitioners get to effective conservation results. The CAP process is a key analytical method that supports Conservation by Design, the Conservancy's strategic framework for mission success.

Suggested citation: TNC, 2007. Guidance for Step 5: Complete Situation Analysis in Conservation Action Planning Handbook. The Nature Conservancy, Arlington, VA.

Citation for complete document: TNC, 2007. Conservation Action Planning Handbook: Developing Strategies, Taking Action and Measuring Success at Any Scale. The Nature Conservancy, Arlington, VA.

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For more information on Conservation Action Planning visit www.conservationgateway.org/cap.

CONSERVATION ACTION PLANNING

Step 5: Complete Situation Analysis

As summarized in TNC's [CAP Overview of Basic Practices](#):

This step asks you to describe your current understanding of your project situation - both the biological issues and the human context in which your project occurs. This step is not meant to be an unbounded analysis, but instead probes the root causes of your critical threats and degraded targets to bring explicit attention/consideration to contributing factors - the indirect threats, key actors, and opportunities for successful action. Specific questions that this step answers include:

“What factors positively & negatively affect our targets?”

“Who are the key stakeholders linked to each of these factors?”

Expected Outputs

- A situation analysis that includes indirect threats and opportunities behind all critical threats and degraded targets. In particular, a “picture” - either in narrative form or a simple diagram - of your hypothesized linkages between indirect threats and opportunities, critical threats, and targets, showing in particular where intervention would have the most impact.
- Identification of key stakeholders in the context of your situation analysis.

The Importance of Completing a Situation Analysis

Once you have evaluated the status of your conservation targets and identified critical threats you see the recurring and most serious threats at play across your system, it is time to drill further down into the “situation” at hand. It is through this process you gain a fuller understanding of what and who is really driving those critical threats, what would motivate these conditions to change, and who your allies might be in your efforts to change the trajectory you have defined so far.

A complete situation analysis involves assessing the key factors affecting your targets including direct threats, indirect threats and opportunities. Each factor can typically be linked to one or more stakeholders, those individuals, groups, or institutions that have an interest in or will be affected by your project's activities. Completing a situation analysis is a process that will help you and the other members of your project team work together to create a common understanding of your project's context - including the biological environment and the social, economic, political, and institutional systems that affect the biodiversity targets you want to conserve.

Terms at a Glance

Indirect Threats - Contributing factors identified in an analysis of the project situation that are drivers of direct threats. Often an entry point for conservation actions. For example, “logging policies” or “demand for fish.”

Opportunities - Contributing factors identified in an analysis of the project situation that potentially have a positive effect on targets, either directly or indirectly. Often an entry point for conservation actions. For example, “demand for sustainably harvested timber.”

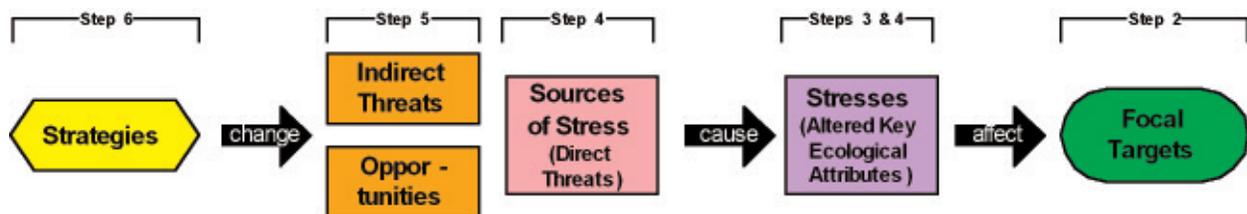
Stakeholders - Individuals, groups, or institutions who have a vested interest in the natural resources of the project area and/or who potentially will be affected by project activities and have something to gain or lose if conditions change or stay the same.

This practice is one that is sometimes overlooked - at least explicitly - in conservation projects, yet it is one of the most important steps to consider. By understanding the biological and human context, you will have a better chance of developing appropriate objectives and designing strategic activities that will help you achieve them. The challenge here is to make your logic explicit without spending too much time on trying to develop a perfect model of reality. In many ways, it is the process of discussing the situation with your project team that is more important than the product that results to capture this discussion.

Without a clear understanding of what is happening at your project area, it is nearly impossible to develop objectives and strategic activities that make sense for your project area's conditions. In addition, often project team members may think they have a shared understanding of their project's context and what the main threats and opportunities are. In going through a formal process to document underlying assumptions about the project's context, however, project teams often find they have somewhat different perceptions of the same situation. For example, biologists tend to focus on the biological aspects of the project area whereas development organizations tend to focus on the socioeconomic factors. Completing your situation analysis helps all project team members come to a common understanding of your project area's context, its critical threats and the underlying factors you should be considering in your project planning.

Elements of a Situation Analysis

The basic elements of a situation analysis are shown in the diagram below and defined as follows. As you can see, through identifying targets and critical threats in *Step 2: Define Scope & Targets*, *Step 3: Assess Viability* and *Step 4: Identify Critical Threats*, you already have a good start on your situation analysis.



To achieve conservation we ultimately have to abate critical threats and restore degraded targets. To do so effectively, we must understand the factors that drive these problems and also identify promising conditions that may lead to solutions. This means understanding the biological, political, economic, and socio-cultural context within which our targets exist -in particular, the indirect threats causing each critical threat or degraded target and the opportunities upon which to build. For example, for a direct threat of overfishing, an indirect threat might be community need for food and an opportunity might be community interest in setting up sustainable fisheries management. The intention is to make explicit your assumptions as to what specific factors are contributing to each critical threat and degraded target so as to provide insights and prompt discovery of effective points of entry and courses of action.

Box 1. What is the Relationship of a Situation Analysis to a Stakeholder Analysis?

Numerous publications and guides talk about the importance of doing situation and/or stakeholder analyses and offer methods and tools for doing them as distinct processes. But these terms are often used interchangeably with one another, causing a great deal of confusion. As outlined below, the two types of analyses are distinct and yet related to one another.

In this step we are undertaking both activities. The articulation of the underlying circumstances and the significant individuals and organizations who are critical to addressing these circumstances or taking advantage of promising opportunities is purposefully combined here in an effort to ensure this analysis is directly linked and outcome focused.

- 1) **Situation Analysis** - An analysis of the factors (direct and indirect threats and opportunities) affecting conservation targets at your project area. Each factor will typically have one or more stakeholders associated with them (for example, subsistence fishing by local residents vs. commercial fishing by foreign fishing vessels).
- 2) **Stakeholder Analysis** - An analysis of the people and organizations who will be influenced by, have an impact on, or will help implement conservation actions at your project area. This analysis can be subdivided into the following questions that are addressed during different parts of the overall CAP process:
 - a) Who should participate in your project team? (This question is typically answered during Step 1: Identify People Involved of the CAP process.)
 - b) Who are the key actors that potentially influence and/or have a stake in what happens to biodiversity at your project area and thus need to be considered in your situation analysis? (Typically answered during *Step 4: Identify Critical Threats* and *Step 5: Complete Situation Analysis*.)
 - c) Who are the key actors that can potentially influence whether any strategy you plan to undertake will be effective? (Typically answered during *Step 6: Develop Strategies*.)
 - d) Can stakeholder participation in the project design and monitoring serve as a conservation strategy in and of itself? (Typically answered during *Step 6: Develop Strategies*.)
 - e) Who are the key audiences for the results of your project (this is also known as an “audience analysis”)? (Typically answered during *Step 10: Analyze, Learn, Adapt, & Share*.)

Commonly Used Methods

As part of your analysis of the situation, you should describe the relationships between targets, direct threats, indirect threats, opportunities, and associated stakeholders. This description can be a diagrammatic illustration of these relationships (sometimes called a “conceptual model” - Box 3) or in text form (Box 4). Either way, a good situation analysis clearly expresses the context in which your project will take place and illustrates the cause-and-effect relationships that you and your team assume exists within the project area. In other words, the analysis helps articulate the core assumptions inherent in your project, and to communicate the intentions and expected impacts of your actions to other people outside of your project. Key steps include:

1. Assemble your project team

Plan to spend at least a few hours together - ideally an entire day. If you are using a diagram, prepare a workspace (e.g., large flip chart sheets taped together, a white board, a chalk board, or a sticky tarp as shown in Box 2). If you are using text, then make sure you have some recording device to capture the conversation.

Box 2. How to Make a Sticky Tarp

One of the most useful tools for stakeholder workshops is a sticky tarp that you can use for threat and situation analyses. A sticky tarp is simply a large (2x3 meters is a good size) nylon tarp that has been liberally sprayed with a “retractable” artist’s adhesive (e.g., 3M Spray Mount Artist Adhesive #6065 - make sure you use the white can!) on one surface and allowed to air-dry. This creates a tacky surface that does not dry out and allows any paper item to stick to it and yet be readily repositioned. Always remember to fold the sticky tarp onto itself (i.e., sticky surface to sticky surface) and to open it carefully not to dislodge the glue from the tarp. Over time you may need to reapply the adhesive to the tarp. Masking tape is useful to form the connecting lines.



2. Review the scope of your project and your focal conservation targets

If you are using a diagram, put the scope and targets on cards on the far right-hand side or the top center of your workspace. If you have species targets that are nested within habitat targets, you may wish to show this relationship (e.g., sharks nested in coral reefs). You may also want to show relationships between different targets (e.g., intertidal systems affecting seabirds).

3. Select one of the highest ranked direct threats to your targets

If you are using a diagram, put this threat on a card on your workspace and use arrows to connect it to the biodiversity targets that it directly affects. You may also show the altered KEAs (stresses) between a threat and biodiversity target if this additional detail is needed to show the logic connecting a threat to a biodiversity target.

4. Brainstorm factors behind this high ranked threat

For this direct threat, work with your team to brainstorm the various factors (indirect threats and/or opportunities) that lie behind it - in other words, to describe with greater precision what is causing the threat. For each factor, you may also want to list the relevant actor/stakeholder who is responsible for the factor and/or the motivation for their action (on the front or back of each card). If there are several drivers of one threat, you may also want to discuss the relative magnitude of impact of each of these drivers. It is also useful to identify opportunities and other promising trends that could reverse the situation. If you are using a diagram, put each factor on a card, put each card on your workspace, and then show the relationship to other cards.

5. As you work, you may rearrange, add, delete, or combine factors

In Box 3, for example, the team may have first written a direct threat of “fishing.” As they went through the analysis, however, they realized that there were two kinds of fishing - fishing by local residents and fishing by boats from the mainland. As a result, they tore up the fishing card and substituted the two you see here. Overall, try not to get hung up in any one section of the analysis, but instead to create an overarching picture of the situation. As discussed in the *Opportunities for Innovation* section below, the key is to show enough detail, but not too much detail. If there are uncertainties, you can note these using question marks and try to reconcile them later through further inquiry.

6. Repeat for other identified critical threats

Repeat this process for the other previously identified critical threats at your project area. Unless you have a relatively simple project, you probably will not want to include the lower rated (e.g., low and possibly medium) threats.

7. Capture work with a sketch or computer program

At the end of the meeting, capture what you have done in a small sketch or using a computer flow-chart program (e.g. CMP's Miradi Adaptive Management Software, Microsoft Visio, or the drawing feature of MS Word). You may also want to develop brief text paragraphs describing each part of the analysis. These will provide detail that will be useful for describing your analysis to others who did not participate, as well as for formally documenting group discussions and decisions.

8. Determine confidence levels

Discuss with your group your confidence level in the different portions of your analysis and which stakeholders or other experts you might need to consult to vet different assumptions. Make assignments as necessary.

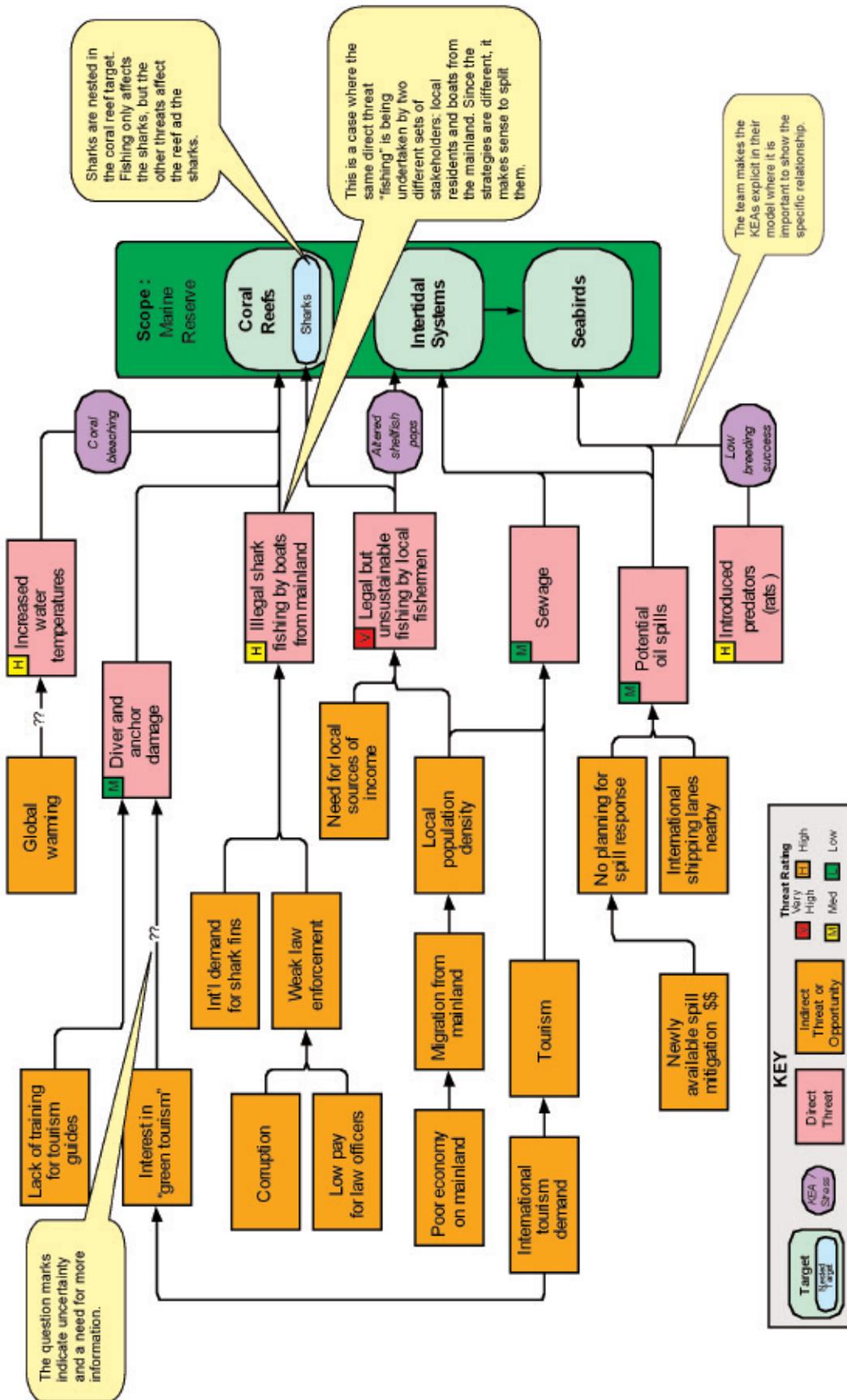
9. Consult with others as necessary

You might also want to consult with stakeholders and other experts and then reconvene with your team to discuss how you might change your analysis based on this input.

10. Use for strategy development

Once you have developed your conceptual model, you can use it as a basis for strategy development as outlined in the next chapter. In particular, you can select specific "chains" within the model and brainstorm strategies that you can use to intervene at various points along the chain to restore degraded targets and/or counter threats.

Box 3. Conceptual Model Diagram for Island Marine Reserve Project



Box 4. Excerpt of Text Description for a Tropical Forest Project

The following example is based on a tropical forest project. For simplicity's sake, we present only a portion of what the narrative text might look like. Your team should use a similar process for each direct threat. How detailed you make this exercise depends on how you want to use the information and to whom you will be presenting it. If the information provides sufficient detail for your project team to identify areas for your strategic activities, you may not need further detail. If you are presenting this to a donor or an external audience, you may choose to write this up as a more detailed narrative.

Direct threat: Illegal timber extraction (mahogany and cedar)

Biodiversity targets affected: Riparian forests; Primary forest; and Beaches (rivers and turtles)

Indirect threats and other factors influencing critical threat:

- International demand for wood has resulted in high prices for wood, directly leading to more illegal extraction.
- High price of wood has also caused people to migrate to the area. These migrants do not have their own resources and are exploiting timber (and other resources) without regard to how they should be managed to ensure they are available over the longer term.
- A need for income and a lack of economic alternatives has prompted people to extract timber illegally (either directly or through middlemen).
- Drug trafficking in the area has led to the planting of coca and the cutting of trees.
- Weak community organization and capacity means that indigenous peoples are not knowledgeable about their rights, and they lack the capacity for developing sound community norms for managing their resources. This has resulted in an inability to control the illegal extraction of timber in their communities.
- A deficient legal framework has resulted in governmental weakness in management and enforcement; this, combined with a lack of environmental awareness on the part of both governments and communities has led to an overall lack of vigilance and an inability to control illegal timber extraction.
- The governmental policy of national integration and commercial logging interests have resulted in discussions to build a road to Vallemedio. If this road is built, this will lead to colonization of the area and an expansion into forested areas through illegal clearing of these areas.
- The new forestry department officials have shown some willingness to enforce the laws.

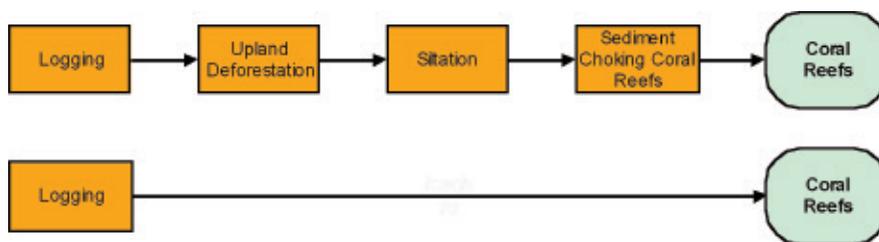
Opportunities for Innovation

- Finding Better Ways to Analyze Key Stakeholders** - As discussed above, each direct or indirect threat and opportunity factor typically has one or more stakeholders associated with it. Some situation analysis methodologies instruct the project team to do a detailed analysis of each stakeholder. For example, the Box 5 shows excerpts from the stakeholder analysis tools developed by CARE (Caldwell 2002).

On one hand, this table can contain useful information. On the other hand, it is a lot of extra work to ask a project team to complete these tables. It would be useful to develop a simple and user friendly way of more formally integrating this type of analysis with the broader situation analysis.

The Methodology to Rank Social and Institutional Stakeholders is another example of an existing tool. This tool was adapted by Nature Conservancy staff for a conservation planning exercise at the Chiapas Coastal Watersheds Platform Site in Southern Mexico. See the *Resources and Tools* section for a link to this tool.

- Helping Practitioners Find the Right Level of Detail** - The key to any situation analysis is finding the right balance between presenting enough detail to make assumptions explicit and showing so much detail that the analysis becomes overwhelming. For example, the same relationship in a conceptual model might be expressed either as:



Box 5: An excerpt from CARE's stakeholder analysis tool (Caldwell 2002).

Table 5: Stakeholder Analysis Profile Matrix

| Stakeholder | Interests in the project | Effect of project on interest(s) | Capacity/motivation to participate | Relationship with other stakeholders (partnership or conflict?) |
|-------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Key stakeholders can significantly influence or are important to the success of a project. Influence refers to the degree to which a stakeholder has power over the project and can therefore facilitate or hinder project interventions. Importance refers to the degree to which achievement of project goals depends up on the involvement of a given stakeholder. A simple matrix such as the one presented in Table 6 can be useful to assess the relative influence and importance of stakeholder groups. (Place the name of the stakeholder group in the appropriate cell, depending on its influence on and importance to the project.)

Table 6: Relative Influence and Importance of Key Stakeholders

| Influence of Stakeholder | Importance of Stakeholder to Project Achievement | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|-----|----------|-------------|---------------------|
| | Unknown | Low | Moderate | Significant | Critical Importance |
| Unknown | | | | | |
| Low | | | | | |
| Moderate | | | | | |
| Significant | | | | | |
| Highly Influential | | | | | |

Obviously, the top chain shows more detail than the lower one. But it is not necessarily more correct. And if a model had 20 chains with the same detail as the upper one, it might become overwhelming. Effectively probing the situation to get to the real “heart of the matter” is as much an art as it is a science. And often it is a combination of having someone who knows how to ask the right questions, the people in the room who really understand the social, political and economic framework, and the presence of a person or persons in the process who has the ability to see connections that makes this process fruitful. The challenge to all of us to get better at articulating those questions that bring focus and content to bear, make the right amount of effort to assemble meaningful information and be certain those individuals with strong strategic thinking skills are part of the dialogue.

- **Building Links to Strategy Development Tools** - The Conservation Strategy Development Tool outlined in Low (2003) covers a good deal of ground that is also covered in this step. It essentially “works the problem from the other side” by starting with the strategy that you will employ and then using probing questions to determine the situation to which you will apply this strategy. It would be interesting to see if that tool can be explicitly extended to map out the situation before the project team takes action.

Resources and Tools

Basic guidance and examples of conducting a situation analysis can be found in the following sources:

Caldwell, R. 2002. Project Design Handbook. CARE.

www.aprscp.org/new%20materials/CARE%20Project%20Design%20Handbook.pdf

IUCN. 200x. Situation Analysis: IUCN’s Situation Analysis Approach and method for Analyzing the Context of Projects and Programmes.

http://www.iucn.org/themes/eval/documents2/situation_analysis/approach_and_method.pdf

Margoluis, R. and N. Salafsky. 1998. Measures of Success: Designing, Managing, and Monitoring Conservation and Development Projects.

www.IslandPress.org (English in hardcopy only)

www.FOSonline.org (Spanish online)

WWF. 2000. WWF Assessing Root Causes Guide.

<http://assets.panda.org/downloads/rcuser.pdf>

Software that can be useful for doing conceptual models includes:

Miradi Adaptive Management Software.

www.miradi.org

Microsoft Visio.

www.office.microsoft.com/visio/

A standard listing of direct threats that you can browse to see if you have missed any possibilities in your situation analysis can be found at:

Conservation Measures Partnership. 2005. Taxonomy of Direct Threats.
www.conservationmeasures.org/CMP/Site_Page.cfm?PageID=17

Existing tools to support an analysis of stakeholders include:

Methodology to Rank Social and Institutional Stakeholders is available in Spanish and English
<http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/practices/supportmaterials/bp5sm/stakeholders/download>
<http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/cbdgateway/cap/practices/supportmaterials/bp5sm/actores/download>

Caldwell, R. 2002. Project Design Handbook. CARE.
www.aprscp.org/new%20materials/CARE%20Project%20Design%20Handbook.pdf