

Dialogue Workshop Methodology

Adapting the Interactive Problem-Solving
Method to an Environmental Conflict: Evaluation
of an Eastern Nile Basin Dialogue Workshop

Simon A. Mason

NCCR North-South Dialogue, no. 3

2007

dialogue



The present study was carried out at the following partner institution of the NCCR North-South:

Funding, research and organizational support:
Center for Security Studies, Swiss Federal
Institute of Technology, ETH Zurich.
www.css.ethz.ch



IP swisspeace of WP1 (Governance and Conflict), Bern.
Partnership Actions for Mitigating Syndromes (PAMS)



Funding and organizational support:
Swiss Federal Institute for Environmental Science and
Technology, EAWAG. www.eawag.ch

Funding and know-how support:
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
(SDC), Conflict Prevention and Transformation
(COPRET). www.deza.ch

OECONSULT

Know-how support:
OECONSULT, Amden



The NCCR North-South (Research Partnerships for Mitigating Syndromes of Global Change) is one of twenty National Centres of Competence in Research established by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). It is implemented by the SNSF and co-funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the participating institutions in Switzerland. The NCCR North-South carries out disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research on issues relating to sustainable development in developing and transition countries as well as in Switzerland.



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[2003¹]

Citation

Mason SA. 2007. *Dialogue Workshop Methodology: Adapting the Interactive Problem Solving Method to an Environmental Conflict: Evaluation of an Eastern Nile Basin Dialogue Workshop*. 2nd edition [2003¹]. NCCR North-South Dialogue 3. Bern, Switzerland: NCCR North-South

Editing

Theodore Wachs, NCCR North-South

Note on earlier version

The first edition of this publication was entitled *Dialogue Workshop Methodology: Adapting the Interactive Problem Solving Method to an Environmental Conflict: Evaluation of the Eastern Nile Basin Dialogue Workshop*, IP7: Environmental Change and Conflict Transformation, Working Paper 1.

Cover photo

Blue Nile Falls, Simon Mason, 2001

Cover drawing

Kalkur Mamta, Sampark, 2001

Distribution

The PDF version of this paper can be downloaded from: <http://www.north-south.unibe.ch> under “Publications”

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1 Introduction

The leading question in cooperative conflict management is not who is right or wrong (a legal question), and not who is more powerful (a military or economic question), but whether there are ways of transforming conflictive relationships and finding “win-win” solutions to satisfy the interests of all parties involved. “Multi-Track Diplomacy” (Diamond, McDonald 1991), “Alternative Dispute Resolution” (Weidner 1998), “Unofficial Conflict Management” (Berman, Johnson 1977), “Conflict Transformation” (Bush, Folger 1994) and “Interactive Problem Solving” (Kelman 1999) are some of the names found in the literature describing distinct aspects of cooperative conflict management.

Multi-track conflict management focuses on the synergies between conflict management by officials (track one), unofficial, informal representatives of society (track two), and efforts at the grass-roots level (track three) (figure 1). Track two has been defined as “informal interaction between members of adversarial groups or nations which aim to develop strategies, influence public opinion, or organize human resources in ways that may help resolve the conflict” (Montville, in McDonald, Bendahmane 1987: 7). The advantages of each track are used in order to develop and implement solutions accepted by all levels of society.

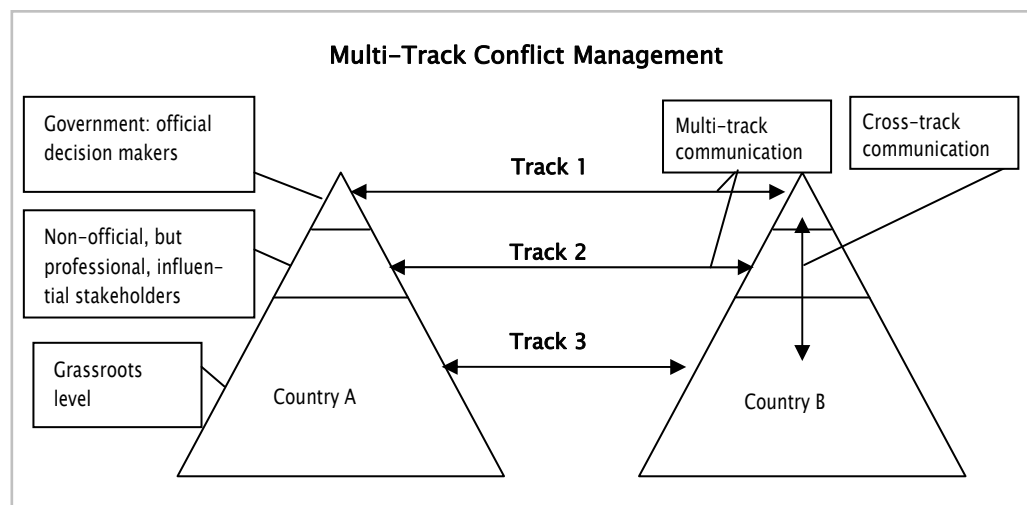


Figure 1: “Multi-Track” = communication between different tracks in different countries, “Cross-Track” = communication between different tracks within one country. Track one (official), track two (non-official) and track three (grassroots) diplomacy and conflict management are complementary.

One multi-track conflict management method used in international conflicts is the “Dialogue Workshop” or “Interactive Problem-Solving Workshop” method described in this paper. The method’s applicability is examined, followed by a summary of criticisms and limitations. The applicability of the method to an international river basin conflict is discussed, including a possible way to evaluate and implement the method. The paper summarises a series of three Dialogue Workshops on the Eastern Nile Basin that took place in 2002, 2003 and 2004. A detailed evaluation the Nile Dialogue Workshop of 2002 is given in the Appendix.

2 Description of Dialogue Workshop Method

“Interactive Problem-Solving Workshops” (Kelman 1999), “Interactive Conflict Resolution” (Fisher 1997) and “Problem-Solving Workshops” (Burton 1969), or the more generic term “Dialogue projects” (Ropers 2000) are a form of multi-track diplomacy in which non-official representatives of conflicting parties meet in an informal setting facilitated by a third party with the aim of non-polemical conflict analysis, transformation of antagonistic relationships, joint action, or problem-solving (Ropers 2000, Kelman 1999). Such a workshop usually takes place over a period of about two to five days. A limited number of people are involved, about six to twelve, to enable face-to-face interaction. The workshop is usually moderated or facilitated by a third party, who often is also the initiator of the workshop (Ropers 2000). The workshop is confidential or anonymous (Chatham House rule); no one is quoted without his or her express permission. This provides an opportunity to talk and brainstorm freely (Fisher 1997).

The term ‘Dialogue Workshop’ will be used in what follows, as the eclectic nature of the approach is of interest here rather than the “schools” of practice behind more specific terms, such as the Interactive Problem-Solving Workshop method developed by Burton and Kelman – though the following description is influenced by their approach. Kelman’s Interactive Problem-Solving Workshops have two aims: First, the participants are to gain insight into the conflict and the complexity of their opponents’ perceptions, thereby increasing the breadth of possible strategies. Second, changes at the individual level are to be fed back to the political level through participants’ input (Kelman 1999). Workshops with a “cross-track” orientation also have a third aim of linking different “tracks” within one party together, e.g. communication between official, non-official and sometimes also grass-roots levels in one country (Ropers 2000). Having representatives of Tracks 1 and 2 (and also, but less often, Track 3) at a workshop enables communication between the tracks, as well as making diffusion of knowledge between the tracks possible. This is represented by a vertical line in Figure 1.

The reason for this cross-track approach is to enlarge the basis of participating actors in contact with the other side, as well as to generate acceptance for an ongoing peace process, thereby increasing its impact. President Anwar Sadat of Egypt, for example, made great efforts on Egyptian television to win his own people over to the Camp David peace agreement of 1978.¹

Participants in a Dialogue Workshop are generally chosen for their knowledge about the issue, their influence, and their readiness to accept different views.² The argument for the non-official character of such workshops is that stakeholders are often more

¹ In discussion with an Egyptian academic

² Kurt R. Spillmann in discussion with the author, Spring 2000.

flexible in an unofficial setting, away from the eyes of media, than when they are defending a predefined position. In this way room is given to develop new ideas. A balance needs to be found between the advantages and disadvantages of Tracks 1 and 2. The more official the participants, the better the transfer of workshop results to the wider political context. Often these participants are also more knowledgeable about the ongoing official processes. The advantage of having less official participants, on the other hand, is that they are generally more flexible in their views. If participants hold an official position, it has to be made clear that they attend the workshop in their individual capacity, and not as a representative of a government or institution. This has also been termed Track 1.5, i.e., communication between officials in their personal capacity, as a track which lies between Track 1 and 2 (Ropers 2002).

One of the rationales behind Dialogue Workshops is that conflicts have a social-psychological component: “While conflict arises out of objective and ideological differences, the escalation and perpetuation of conflict is typically fuelled by factors such as misperception and distrust” (Fisher 1997: 62). Other rationales for the interactive approach include: the creative brainstorming quality that direct interaction can help to foster, as well as the networking quality of bringing together different actors. Workshops can support peace constituencies and cooperatively minded experts in a conflict context. Kelman pointed out the natural similarity of hardliners on the two sides of a conflict in disrupting peace initiatives. Following this line of thought, he shows the need to support cooperatively-minded people on both sides. The ground rules of the workshop as carried out by Kelman are summed up in Box 1 (Kelman 1999):

Workshop Ground Rules:

1. Privacy and confidentiality
2. Focus on each other (not constituencies, audience, third parties)
3. Analytical (non-polemical) discussion
4. Problem-solving (non-adversarial mode)
5. No expectation of agreement
6. Equality in setting
7. Facilitative role of third party

Box 1: Ground rules for Interactive Problem-Solving Workshops (Kelman 1999)

The assisting third party in a Dialogue Workshop gives less direction than a mediator; instead, the third party acts as a moderator or facilitator. This is a form of facilitative mediation. In classical mediation, dialogue is at first not carried out directly between the parties. The conflicting parties talk to the mediator, who hears the other parties, even if they are not directly addressed. In a Dialogue Workshop, however, face-to-face direct dialogue between the parties takes place from the start. The process is also less formalized compared to a classical mediation. Beardsley et al (2006), indicate that facilitative mediation is effective in supporting tension reduction, while other forms of mediation, e.g. manipulative mediation, are often more effective in reaching an agreement.

3 Method Applicability

Method applicability is influenced by at least four factors: 1) the level of escalation of a conflict, 2) power asymmetry between the parties, 3) alternative management options available to the parties, and 4) the legal, institutional and structural context of the conflict. Additional dimensions for analysing a mediation or facilitation process are described in Mason (2006), and Mason, Siegfried (2005).

According to Glasl (1990), the type of intervention in a conflict must fit the level of escalation. Interactive forms of conflict intervention are suitable in conflicts with low or mid-level escalation, where the parties involved are still willing to sit together to discuss the conflict. As the level of escalation increases, the third party has to intervene more forcefully, as the potential for self-help among the involved parties decreases. The forcefulness of the intervention therefore increases from Level One – where the parties accept conflict management intervention based on trust – to Level Nine, where parties often have to be forced to accept the intervention. The Dialogue Workshop method is useful up to Level Five of Glasl’s escalation model, as the moderator or facilitator does not intervene against the will of the workshop participants (Glasl 2002, Figure 2).

Fisher and Keaschly’s contingency model (1990, in Fisher 1997:166), which was partly based on Glasl’s escalation model (1982), also suggests the use of different conflict management efforts depending on the level of escalation. These authors see consultation or interactive conflict resolution as suitable either for pre-mediation, to improve relationships before mediation on the substantive issues begins, or at a later stage of escalation, as a form of conflict analysis (Fisher 1997: 167).

The level of escalation of the “group” involved must be differentiated from the level of escalation of an individual member of the “group.” The Dialogue Workshop method may therefore be used with cooperatively-minded people, even if the conflict and other representatives of their “group” have escalated to a higher level where the method would no longer work.

The questions of power asymmetry and BATNA (Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement) and WATNA (Worst Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement) are helpful in deciding if cooperative conflict management approaches can be applied in a given conflict. If one party is far more powerful than the other, or if one party’s BATNA is large and WATNA is small, then communication may help clarify things, but it is hardly likely to lead to a win-win solution (Fisher, Ury 1983) or a compromise, understood as a decision in which everyone’s minimal requirements are satisfied at the least (Weibel 2006).

Dialogue workshops must take the legal and institutional context of the conflict into account. Only by taking structural factors into account can the role of communication be assessed, and the applicability of the method evaluated.

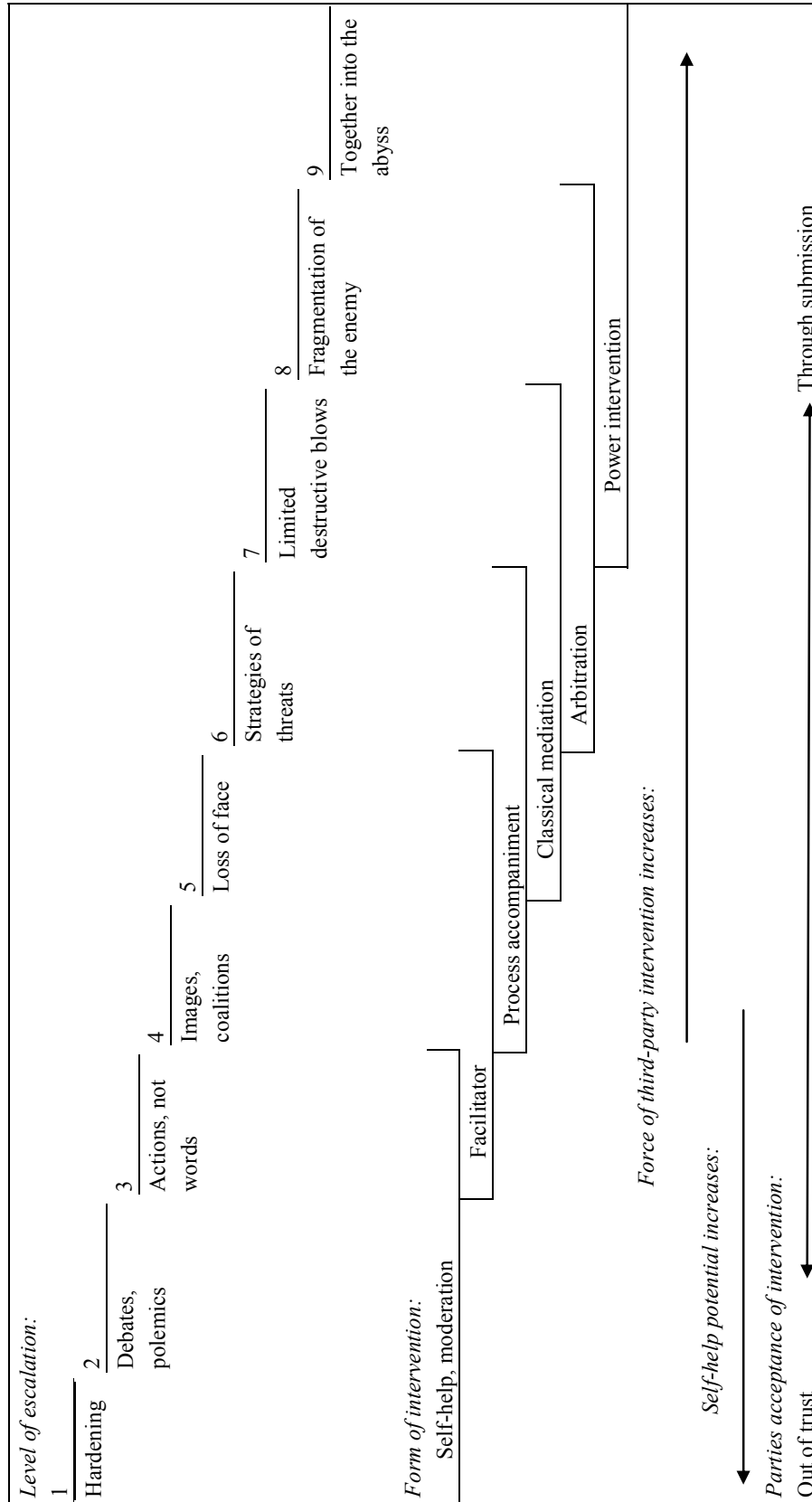


Figure 2: Form of intervention fits level of escalation. Glasl views escalation as a downward movement, a spiral into the abyss. This is not a linear movement, but one that takes place over a series of plateaus and falls. De-escalation requires an active effort (Glasl 1982, 2002).

4 Criticism of the Dialogue Approach

There are two types of criticism: the first concerns the importance of communication in general, the second concerns the effectiveness of communication in a Dialogue Workshop format (Ropers 2000).

The first type questions the importance of communication and tends to see conflicts instead as a struggle for power. In this school of thought, power and the structural factors that cause conflict are not seen as being greatly influenced by mis-communication, perceptions, and differences of opinion. This sort of criticism applies to situations where the method is used without taking its applicability and limitations into account (see above section). Mediators coming from the field of organizational development rather than social-psychological disciplines point to the importance of structural factors. Glasl (2002), who addresses conflicts within or between organizations, for example, differentiates between friction, position and system-changing conflicts. Rather than negating the importance of communication, he points out that there is not much benefit from working on conflicts involving friction between an employee and his or her superior when the conflict originates in the structure of the organization. Thus, his answer to the question of structural factors is not that communication is unimportant, but that a conflict management effort has to focus on the actual problems and include the relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, the outcome of mediation may not be a change in perceptions, but a change in the organization's organigramme (Glasl 2002). On the international level this could mean that the final output of soft communication would be binding legal agreements (Wolf 1997). Another structure-oriented approach focuses on state reforms that enhance state capacity to prevent conflicts or deal with them in a constructive way (Baechler 2001).

The second type of criticism is more concerned with how rather than with whether perceptions and communication are fundamentally important (Ropers 2000). People in a conflict situation tend to react in an undifferentiated fight or flight mode (Spillmann 2002). One of the main aims of facilitating communication, therefore, is to help people to see things from different perspectives. A trusting atmosphere can help to widen the horizon, make it possible to discover options, and move from a black and white situation or perception to a multi-faceted way of seeing conflict. The informal setting of the Dialogue Workshop can help. Where the media are absent, participants can speak out under cover of confidentiality, and facilitators support participants in gaining access to information if required etc. Ropers (2002) answers the second type of criticism concerning the effectiveness with nine lessons learned, based on his own experience and on studies by Spencer (1998), Mott (1999), Haumersen, Radmacher and Ropers (2002). See also a more recent study on the Dialogue method as used in Georgia-Abchazia (Wolleh 2006):

1. The aim of a Problem-Solving Workshop can only be achieved within the framework of a long-term process of work and learning.

2. The choice of the initial participants is very important. Moderate and mainstream people may be the best participants to get some meaningful exchange going; hardliners may be integrated at a later stage.
3. The greatest challenge of dialogue projects is not the mastery of communication and facilitation skills, but organizational input – the financing and the organization to get participants to attend. This is especially true for a long-term series of workshops.
4. Third parties have an ethical responsibility for the intentional and unintentional consequences of workshops they organize. In highly escalated or protracted conflicts, the main task is to minimize security risks for participants.
5. The intervention methodology of Dialogue Workshops should be put on a broader and more flexible basis. This allows for different tracks as well as different phases and escalation levels of a conflict to be taken into consideration. In addition, it enables the process to benefit from the experience of other related disciplines (adult education, counselling, supervision, etc).
6. One frequently used method is to encourage a change of perspective by reflecting on a similar conflict in which the participants are not directly involved. It is easier to see the point of view of the other party in this case and to make a less prejudiced appraisal of the overall situation.
7. As the effect of workshops on the macro-political level is hard to assess, it is important to examine the impact on the meso-social level. Increasing the ownership of the dialogue process is a key measure. This may include different pre and post activities, e.g. capacity building or local back-up forums. Another measure of success is the expansion of the circle of participants in terms of numbers and/or movement towards the official level.
8. Dialogue processes need to be institutionally anchored, especially when the third-party initiator is replaced in the long-term process by participants with increased ownership. This can be done, for example, by governmental or semi-governmental commissions, joint task forces, etc.
9. The promotion of a dialogue-based dispute culture between, as well as within, the parties is perhaps the most important contribution of the dialogue approach.

5 Applying the Method to an Environmental Conflict: The Nile Basin

Fisher (1997) lists some 24 interactive conflict resolution interventions in the international arena between 1965 and 1995; no environment-related conflicts are included. There are many examples of interest-based negotiations concerning the shared use of natural resources on the intra-national level (Weidner 1998), but fewer on the international level (see Mason, Muller 2006 and Trondalen 1992). Jerome Delli Priscoli (1992 and 1996) highlights the need to combine water resource management, international relations, and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). He especially focuses on third-party possibilities for supporting this: “While lenders and donors certainly cannot solve all the world’s problems, they can assume a leadership role in encouraging and facilitating early collaborative and participatory efforts among parties that would otherwise conflict” (Delli Priscoli 1996: 33).

Environmental conflict management can use instruments developed in the context of general conflict management and adapt them to the specifics of environment-related conflicts – for example, by including questions of sustainability, or involving participants from all the countries using a natural system (e.g. a watershed). Translated into the design of the workshop, this could mean having participants and moderators from the social and natural sciences and/or engineering sciences involved, in order to take the social, economic and environmental realities of the case into consideration. Furthermore, it could involve moderators having a solid information background concerning the physical reality of the case.

The applicability of the Dialogue Workshop approach to an environmental conflict will be examined in more depth in relation to the Nile Basin. How can a Dialogue Workshop be used in the context of the Nile Basin? To determine this, the following questions need to be answered (questions summarized in Box 2). The answers are partly based on theoretical reflections, and partly on interviews with experts in Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia, carried out in 2000 and 2001 (for a description of the interview methodology, see Mason 2004):

Q: What is the level of escalation of the conflict? Is a Dialogue Workshop an appropriate tool?

A: According to the conflict assessment undertaken in this study, as well as developments in the official process in the Nile Basin Initiative, international relations in the Nile Basin are in a ‘pre-conflict’ phase and have been regarded as a conflict with a low level of escalation. According to the Glasl (2002) escalation model, Level Three is reached when actors no longer believe that talking helps and they take unilateral actions. While the Toshka project in Egypt and the micro-dam developments in Ethiopia can be seen as such unilateral actions (Waterbury, Whittington 1997), these are not directly aimed at harming the other party. Furthermore, there is a will to communicate,

as the Egyptian Ambassador to Ethiopia, Marawan Badr, said in July 23 1998: “We are saying that we should sit together and discuss the issue.” (Gelaw 1998). Thus, the Nile conflict is viewed as a low-level one, perhaps at Level one or Two, where direct communication and the Dialogue Workshop method can be used. A more simplified assessment of the escalation of the Nile Basin, and the potential role of Dialogue Workshops, is given in Mason (2005).

Q: Which tracks are already active in the conflict management process, and which tracks should be involved in the workshop?

A: Since Track 1 is already involved in the framework of the Nile Basin Initiative (Nile-COM, Nile-TAC)³, there is little point in having a workshop at this level. The series of Nile 2002 Conferences that many see as initiating dialogue on the Nile Basin and starting the dialogue process, can be viewed as a Track 1 and Track 2 effort, as both official representatives and non-officials attend. Because these conferences are large, with some 400 people attending, a moderated Dialogue Workshop on Track 2 would be of a very different nature. It would focus on direct interaction involving a much smaller group in an informal setting. Track 3 has only been included minimally so far. The Nile Discourse⁴ is such an endeavour which – after problems in 2004 – was re-launched at the end of 2005, with a secretariat in Entebbe re-opened in 2006. It aims to include Tracks 2 and 3, concerning issues such as capacity-building, the involvement of civil society, etc. The problem with Track 3 is that the basis is so broad that a small workshop with representatives would have little impact. Lederach (1996, 2005) suggests a “middle-out” or “web” approach to solve this dilemma: using Track 2 to link and influence Tracks 1 and 3. If the three aims of a Dialogue Workshop are recapitulated: 1) increasing the participants’ understanding of the other side, 2) output to the wider conflict context, and 3) cross-track links, then a Dialogue Workshop in the Nile Setting should include Track 1.5 and Track 2. In this way, official representatives in their personal capacity, or non-official representatives that can influence Track 1 (e.g. as consultants) or Track 3 (e.g. teaching in universities, giving speeches on television) would be included.

Again, all efforts on the various tracks are complementary and have to be kept up over a long period of time, as suggested by the concept of *dialogue accumulation*.⁵ Dialogue between different actors and representatives over a long period leads to communication. This gradually produces a breakthrough, as well as acceptance of a different mode of international interaction. On the other hand, one also needs to take the phenomenon of *dialogue fatigue* into account, i.e. various actors growing tired of all the efforts at communication (Ropers 2002).

³ Nile Basin Initiative www.nilebasin.org (15.11.2007)

⁴ The Nile Basin Discourse (NBD) is a network of civil society organizations from the 10 countries of the Nile Basin www.nilebasindiscourse.org/ (15.11.2007)

⁵ A term used by Magdy Hefny, in discussion with the author, 2002.

Q: How can the transfer of workshop output to the wider political and social context be supported by the design of the workshop?

A: The question of transfer of workshop output depends greatly on the specific situation. A jointly written document is often avoided in more highly escalated conflicts, as this may cause problems for the participants. As the situation in the Nile Basin is cooperative, however, a joint publication could be a more tangible outcome with increased potential impact in the wider political and civil context. Furthermore, in the literature consulted by the author, there are no academic publications written jointly by experts from the different countries of the Nile Basin. The conference proceedings of the Nile 2002 Conferences are an accumulation of different papers written without a similar concept in mind. The Nile Basin Initiative publications (NBI 2001) come closest to this, but they are of a Track 1 nature, aimed at donors, rather than being written by academics for academics, practitioners and a wider public.

Q: How can the specifics of the conflict, e.g. an environmental conflict, be taken into account in terms of workshop design, choice of moderators, participants, and venue?

A: A key requirement of environmental conflict management is to include both hard and soft factors. Inviting participants from different disciplines is one way to heighten the importance given to the political, social and physical realities. It may also be helpful for moderators to represent different disciplinary backgrounds besides training in moderation and mediation skills. Background material is advantageous in providing knowledge of the issues at stake. One way of doing this is to use PhDs to research the case and prepare material for the moderators.⁶ The boundaries of natural systems should be taken into consideration as far as possible when choosing participants, e.g. by inviting people living in the different states that are part of the natural system, such as a watershed or sub-basin. In the case of the Nile, the Eastern Nile Basin sub-basin was chosen, with experts from Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia. Eritrea was left out, because even though it is part of the Eastern Nile Basin, it is only a minimal contributor to runoff in the Eastern Nile System, and is also not greatly dependent on it.

Q: How do people involved in or affected by the conflict view the Dialogue Workshop method? What ideas are associated with adaptation of the method to their specific case? How do they view potential organizers, venue, participants, and moderators?

A: One of the key questions raised by people when asked about the workshop method is how it fits into the official / non-official continuum. The academic character of the workshop is one way to place it outside of government activities on the one hand, and NGO activities on the other. NGO representatives viewed work at the intra-

⁶ ECONILE, Environment and Cooperation in the Nile Basin, Yacob Arsano (2007) "Ethiopia and the Nile" and Simon Mason (2006) "From Conflict to Cooperation in the Nile Basin". Online in: „CSS Environment and Conflict Transformation" at www.isn.ethz.ch > „Publishing House" > "Publication Series"

national level as their primary focus. Although they were also interested in an international NGO network, they did not have much knowledge about the issues at stake in the international arena. The NGO Track has been taken up in the Nile Discourse, supported by World Bank, IUCN and others, in order to increase their expertise, as well as to open the Nile Basin Initiative to their input.

The academics interviewed generally thought it was important to have experts who were close to the official cooperative process and knowledgeable about it, as well as participants from a more purely academic background. The idea of a joint publication was developed in discussion with experts from the Nile Basin in order to give the workshop a tangible aim and a *raison d'être*. A joint academic publication would complement the other activities going on, rather than try to do what is already being done. Switzerland in general, and academic institutions in particular, were seen as objective and unbiased. The choice of participants was carried out in close coordination with experts on the Nile Basin, thus ensuring that a knowledgeable and cooperatively-minded group would come together that could also rely on existing relationships between the different participants.

In conclusion, this analysis suggests organising a dialogue workshop on Track 1.5 to 2. The objectives of the workshop would be twofold:

- To enhance cooperation in the Nile Basin and prepare a joint publication by academics from Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan.
- To adapt the method of “Dialogue Workshops” and “Interactive Problem-Solving Workshops” to an environmental conflict situation and evaluate this method for use in mitigating environment-related conflicts in general, and upstream-downstream conflicts in particular.

Key questions for a Nile Dialogue Workshop, sent to the potential participants before the workshop, were:

- What are the interests and needs of your country concerning the use and management of water resources in the Nile Basin (minimum and maximum options)?
- What does your country expect from international cooperation, and what is it prepared to offer in order to enhance cooperation?
- From your point of view, on which issues is there a consensus among the three countries concerning the use and management of water resources in the Nile Basin?
- What questions are still open?
- What options are there for dealing with these open questions?

6 How to Evaluate a Dialogue Workshop

Christopher Mitchell (in Sandole & van der Merwe 1993: 78-94) distinguishes between micro-, meso- and macro-level theory when examining interactive workshops. Micro-level theory looks at the relationships between workshop structure and procedure and their effect on the participants; meso-level theory looks at the outcome of the workshop and focuses on its impact on the dynamics of conflict. Macro-level theory uses theories about the causes, origins and solutions of conflicts, and tests them in the workshop setting. Meso-level theory is regarded as more difficult to develop than micro-level theory. The difficulties of meso-level theory are linked to the lack of empirical evidence concerning the effectiveness of such workshops on the resolution of a conflict (Fisher 1997). Micro-theory concerns formative evaluation, e.g. evaluation of the workshop process, and meso-theory concerns summary evaluation, e.g. evaluation of the outcome and impact of the workshop (Trochim 2000).

Evaluation of the workshop process (micro-level) will pursue the idea of triangulation using three independent methods of evaluating a Dialogue Workshop: a “triple check”. In the planned workshop, the three evaluation inputs will stem from observation of the process by the author of the present paper, feedback from the participants after the workshop, and self-evaluation by the moderators. Interviews beforehand will not be carried out, as this could interfere with the process. The aim of producing a joint publication makes the potential for transferring what happened in the workshop to the actual political and academic discussion more concrete, and may thus be a building block for the future development of meso-theory or for outcome and impact evaluation. The questions in boxes 2-4 build the structure for evaluation of the workshop. The implementation of the Nile Workshop followed the three steps of action research (Lewin 1948):

1. **Planning:** In this case, planning entailed two PhDs in the Eastern Nile Basin and contacts with experts in the countries on the issues involved, as well as on the applicability of a Dialogue Workshop. It also included discussions on the concrete aims of such a workshop and the relationship between the official and non-official actors. From the beginning, the participatory approach was chosen.
2. **Action:** Organization of the Dialogue Workshop – in this case, a two-day workshop.
3. **Evaluation:** The evaluation of the workshop was based on observation, moderators’ self-assessment, and participants’ feedback.

Questions concerning the micro- and meso-level *prior to the workshop*:

1. What is the level of escalation of the conflict? Is a Dialogue Workshop an appropriate tool?
2. Which tracks are already active in the conflict management process, and which tracks should be involved in the workshop?
3. How can the transfer of workshop output to the wider political and social context be supported by workshop design?
4. How can the specifics of the conflict, e.g. an environmental conflict, be taken into account in the workshop design and in the choice of moderators, participants and venue?
5. How do people involved in or affected by the conflict view the Dialogue Workshop method? What ideas concern adaptation of the method to their specific case? How do they view potential organizers, moderators?

Box 2: Workshop applicability, needs and design evaluation

Questions concerning the micro-level process evaluation *during* the workshop:*Workshop in general:*

1. Were the goals of the workshop clearly set and attained?
2. Were the ground rules set and adhered to?
3. Was there ever a creative “brainstorming” atmosphere?
4. What was the balance between focus on the past vs. focus on the future?
5. What was the balance between one-way presentation and interaction?
6. What was the balance between communications among the different country representatives vs. communication between the representatives of one country? Were there any instances of “cross-track” communication, i.e. a diffusion of knowledge between the tracks?
7. How were specific environmental issues taken into consideration (sustainability, natural systems boundaries)?
8. How were sticky issues dealt with? What helped to create a relaxing atmosphere?
9. What went well, what went badly, what were the decisive turning points, and why?
10. How were cultural aspects taken into consideration during the workshop?

Participants:

11. What was the mood of the participants during the workshop in comparison to their written work and/or their style during public conferences (impact of informality)?
12. Did all participants participate actively during the workshop?
13. What was the disciplinary (social, natural, and engineering sciences) and Track (1 and 2) mix of the participants?
14. Were there moments when the participants expressed recognition of other perceptions and interests?
15. To what extent did the participants differentiate between positions, interests and needs, as well as between different issues?
16. To what extent were participants from other countries seen in a differentiated or stereotypical way?
17. Were participants satisfied with the organization and venue?
18. Were participants satisfied overall with the workshop?

Moderators:

19. What did the moderators do to initiate certain subjects?
20. How did the moderators deal with unforeseen circumstances?
21. How did the moderators support recognition and empowerment?
22. What did the moderators do to structure and visualize the process?
23. Were the moderators all-inclusive and even-handed with the different parties?
24. How did the participants rate the moderators?

Box 3: Workshop process evaluation

Sources for some questions: DEZA-COPRET-Inmedio 2002, Ropers 2000, Baechler 2002, Fisher 1997: 238–240, Mason, Muller 2006.

Questions concerning the meso-level, output, and impact evaluation *after* the workshop:

1. To what extent did the workshop enhance peace constituencies, i.e. the network of cooperatively-minded actors?
2. How did the workshop fit into the wider context of different dialogue initiatives on the different tracks; was it part of “dialogue accumulation”?
3. How was the workshop outcome transferred to the wider political and social context? How was it received in the wider context, by academics, politicians and other actors (e.g., the donor community)?
4. Were any follow-up activities carried out?
5. How far was the process or outcome institutionalized?
6. Did the dialogue lead to jointly agreed activities?
7. Could continuity of initial participants as well as an expanding circle of participants be achieved?

Box 4: Workshop outcome and impact evaluation

7 The Nile Dialogue Workshop Series

The idea of a series of Dialogue Workshops is that one can develop content and relations better than in a single workshop. This development can include: expanding the group of participants, increasing the ownership of the process by the participants, diversifying the approaches taken, aiming at joint action, and ideally also attempting to institutionalize efforts. The three workshops are summarized, as well as one concrete “Nile Forum” project that resulted from them.

The first workshop on “Sustainable Development and International Cooperation in the Eastern Nile Basin”⁷ took place from 27-30 August 2002 in Kastanienbaum, Switzerland. Academics from the three main countries of the Eastern Nile (Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan) were invited to the workshop with the aim of producing a joint academic publication to clarify issues and contribute to ongoing cooperative efforts in the Nile Basin. Contributions and participation at the workshop were based solely on personal capacities and did not represent the views of any government or institution. The country papers presented were revised after the workshop, and a joint text authored by all six workshop participants summarized the key issues and the level of agreement and open questions on various issues. These papers were published in *Aquatic Sciences* 67, 2005, in a special feature on “Riparian Perspectives of international cooperation in the Eastern Nile Basin” (Amer et al. 2005; Hamad, Battahani 2005; Hefny, Amer 2005; Arsano, Tamrat 2005). The workshop process was evaluated in three independent evaluations carried out by an observer, a moderator, and the participants (Appendix 1).

The second workshop on “Instruments and Methods to Support Dialogue in International River Basins”⁸ from 26-30 August 2003 focused on expanding the number of participants and moving from joint analysis to joint learning. The Director of the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine was invited to give a presentation on lessons learnt from the Rhine experience. Based on the wishes of the participants, the workshop also had elements of capacity building, as various interactive tools were used together with the participants.

The third workshop on “Enlarging the Pie: Options for International Cooperation in the Nile Basin”⁹, from 24-28 August 2004, had four participants from each of the countries

⁷ The workshop was organized by Prof. Dr. Alexander J. B. Zehnder, EAWAG (Swiss Federal Institute for Environmental Science and Technology), and Prof. Dr. Kurt R. Spillmann, CIS (Center for International Studies, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology), moderated by Dr. Günther Baechler, SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation), and Dr. Hansueli Müller-Yersin, OECONSULT, with organizational assistance from Simon Mason, EAWAG-CIS, and Marwa Gouda, CIS.

⁸ The workshop was organized by Günther Baechler, SDC, moderated by Hansueli Müller-Yersin, OECONSULT and Ursula König. Samuel Luzi and Simon Mason were involved in the organizational support. Funding came from COPRET, SDC and NCCR North South.

⁹ The workshop was organized by Günther Baechler, SDC, moderated by Hansueli Müller-Yersin (OECONSULT) and Ursula König. Samuel Luzi, Rea Bonzi and Simon Mason were involved in the organizational support. Funding came from COPRET, SDC and NCCR North South.

of Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia. At least one person from each country was involved in the ongoing track 1 process in the Nile Basin Initiative, allowing for interaction between official and non-official views. There was also one woman attending, representing an NGO. Thus there was a cross-track dimension involving all tracks rather than just track 2, as had been the case in the first workshop. The workshop showed that the vertical cross-track dimension is as important and challenging as the horizontal dimensions between the countries. One concrete idea from this workshop was to make a “Nile Forum” – described below.

The “Nile Capacity Building Forum on Water Development and Cooperation”¹⁰ that took place in 2005 in Addis Ababa, brought together 10 participants from each of the Eastern Nile countries: Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia. Participants were Master’s level students at universities, young professionals in Water Ministries or Foreign Ministries, employees of water associations or of water and development NGOs or IGOs (AU) The facilitators at the workshop were part of the “Dialogue Workshops” series. The participants and facilitators also visited the NBI ENTRO office in Addis Ababa – and spoke in depth with Dr. Osman Hamad El Tom (another of the former Nile Dialogue Workshop series participants). The workshop was a unique combination of classical capacity building, interactive learning and a strong focus on exchange of perspectives. Rather than being an export of concepts from the North to the South, the workshop was designed and facilitated by trainers from the Nile countries, for participants from the Eastern Nile Countries. An institutionalized “Training of trainers” by local and regional experts would be an opportunity to further develop this type of capacity building forum.



Figure 3: Nile Forum – gender exercise in the exchange between Egyptian, Ethiopian and Sudanese MA students, Addis Ababa, 2006. Photo: Simon Mason

¹⁰ The workshop was one of the NCCR North South PAMS, organized by Berhanu Debele, facilitators were Prof Yacob Arsano (Ethiopia), Ambassador Dr. Magdy Hefny (Egypt), Prof Atta El Batthani (Sudan), Dr. Asha El-Karib (Sudan), and Dr. Simon Mason (Switzerland)

8 Discussion and Conclusion

Dialogue Workshop Series

The benefits of the workshop series were a clarification of Nile water issues and an enhancement of relationships among water experts in the Nile Basin. Somewhat different priorities were given to various factors that influenced the effectiveness of the workshop series, yet the choice of participants, the continuity of the process, professional moderation, and the informal setting were key factors. One sign of the effectiveness of a dialogue workshop series is concrete activities and outputs, e.g. joint publication and the organization of the “Nile Forum”.

The joint publication entailed an ongoing process that linked the participants with each other, also during the time between the workshops. The document serves as a record of where the Nile Basin stands with respect to conflict and cooperation over the Nile at the beginning of the 21st Century, laying a basis for further clarification and analysis. The “Nile Forum” was a concrete activity that arose out of the workshop series, where the participants had now become facilitators, and the interaction could be fostered among a larger group of people as well.

The expanding group from the first to the third series can also be viewed as a sign of the increasing effectiveness of the format. The third workshop showed that the vertical dimension between the government and grassroots level in each country was as important as the horizontal one. An institutionalization of the process could have helped to make it more sustainable, yet the ongoing Nile Basin Initiative is partly filling this gap.

In summary, trilateral projects require a great deal of coordination and time, but they can facilitate understanding of differences and lay the ground for developing management options.

Methodological conclusion

The Dialogue Workshop and Interactive Problem Solving Method can be applied to environment-related conflicts. The challenge is to combine expertise on how to facilitate process and communication (e.g. related to perceptions) on the one hand, with technical expertise and “hard” figures e.g. on water availability on the other hand. The Nile Dialogue Workshop did this bringing together technical and political experts, as well as moderators with a background in environmental sciences. The workshops also combined the clarity of written documents with the fine nuances of oral communication during the workshop. A written publication can enhance factual clarity and transfer of workshop results to the larger academic and political context. Oral exchange has the advantage of greater interaction, exploring new ground, and giving voice to what is otherwise left unsaid. The approach of combining written and oral exchange could be still further developed by using different pooling formats besides academic publications, working on more specific questions, or addressing different target publics.

The Nile workshop evaluation confirms the following lessons learned on workshop effectiveness (Roberts 2000, section 4). Dialogue projects require: 1) a long-term focus; 2) correct choice of participants; 3) long-term organizational input; 4) stable institutional anchorage; 5) an ethically responsible third party; 6) a broad and flexible theoretical and methodological basis; and 7) the transfer of workshop results to the meso-social level.

The depth a workshop can reach is influenced by the level of escalation, the choice of participants, and/or the number of workshops. A shift from positioning to clarification to brainstorming management options to jointly agreed activities can take place with a few workshops in a conflict with a low level of escalation, or with many workshops in a highly escalated conflict. Dialogue Workshops can create a setting for multi-track and cross-track conflict transformation, to support a dialogue dispute culture between, as well as within, parties. Conflicts are not only characterized by differences between conflicting parties or countries, but also between representatives of one country, i.e. between different levels of representation (official, non-official) or disciplines (social sciences, hard sciences). The cross-track aspect of Dialogue Workshops can play an important role here in supporting networking, knowledge diffusion, increasing questions and options raised, and enhancing long-term acceptability of solutions. In future, possible ways of developing the approach would be by aiming at joint activities rather than just dialogue, seeking to develop a more solid institutional anchor in the region, and exploring how participants could take on more ownership for such processes.

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Appendix 1: Detailed Evaluation of the Nile Workshop 2002

This appendix describes the detailed evaluation of the workshop of 2002, with the three elements of observer evaluation, moderator evaluation and participant evaluation. This is to serve primarily for any practitioner intending to design, implement or evaluate such a workshop. The 2002 workshop was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in the framework of the NCCR North-South Research Partnerships for Mitigating Syndromes of Global Change, IP7 (Environmental Change and Conflict Management).¹¹

1.1 Observer evaluation (Simon Mason)

Workshop

The first morning program of the workshop was fixed by the moderators; the rest of the program was developed jointly with the participants (Box 5). The aim of the workshop, a publication, was clearly delineated before the workshop began, and guidelines (Box 6) were well observed. Presentations by the participants were longer than originally planned, following the wishes of the participants.

Nile Dialogue Workshop Program			
Arrival	First day <i>Morning:</i> –Introductory speech by Alexander J. B. Zehnder –Discussion of program and workshop guidelines –Presentation of first paper –Discussion <i>Afternoon:</i> –Presentation of second paper –Discussion –Compiling challenges and opportunities	Second Day <i>Morning:</i> –Presentation of third paper –Discussion –Discussion of mind–map based on collected challenges and potentials <i>Afternoon:</i> –Discussion of publication format –Discussion of next steps	Third day <i>Whole day:</i> Excursion to Rigi and Sihlsee Dam <i>Evening:</i> Farewell supper
Evening: Supper, welcome speech by Kurt R. Spillmann			

Box 5: Nile Dialogue Workshop Programme

¹¹ For more information, see www.nccr-norht-south.unibe.ch

Nile Dialogue Workshop Guidelines

The participants agreed to the following guidelines:

1. Focus on the future. Understand the past and present to learn lessons for the future.
2. Chatham house rule ¹²: nothing said during the workshop will be quoted in public.
3. Any paper developed by the participants for the workshop or in the workshop will only be published with the consent of all the participants.
4. Focus on a publication as a joint product of the workshop.
5. The workshop will be evaluated in the framework of a Ph.D dissertation.

Box 6: Nile Dialogue Workshop guidelines

The atmosphere of the workshop was very relaxed and friendly. There was a creative brainstorming atmosphere during the compilation of challenges and opportunities on the afternoon of the first day. This was not the case on the morning of the second day, when more frictional issues were addressed. Following open discussion, the group agreed not to address legal issues, feeling that it was more productive to discuss opportunities and points of consensus. The discussion was lively during the afternoon, and new ideas were developed on how to proceed with the publication. The workshop focused on the future. Past and present issues were addressed during the presentations. Besides the presentations, discussions were very interactive. Most participants had already met each other at previous meetings and conferences; this was an ideal basis for relations during the workshop. Interaction between representatives of individual countries as well as between representatives of different countries was very cordial. Cross-track diffusion of knowledge occurred during discussions when participants who were closer to the official NBI process interacted with those who were less involved and who viewed the process from a different angle.

The environment was specifically considered during a discussion of the environmental implications of water development projects in the wetlands of Sudan and Ethiopia. The systems approach that the group adopted was also well adapted to the environmental nature of the subject. Sticky issues, e.g. legal water agreements, were addressed during the presentations and in the discussions that followed, but not as an independent item in the program. About an hour was spent on discussion of whether these should be part of the agenda or not; the participants agreed not to devote a special session to them. They felt that it would not be productive, and that this issue needed to be dealt with at a higher political level. The entire workshop benefited from a very relaxed atmosphere, mainly because the participants were very cooperative and adhered to the workshop aims. The setting in a research institute near a scenic Swiss lake also helped.

¹² “When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed”. The aim is to encourage openness and the sharing of information.
<http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/about/chathamhouserule/>

Clarification of issues and a focus on good relations were the two main benefits of the workshop. This was possible because the participants were very knowledgeable, flexible, and got on well with each other. A future workshop could perhaps be focus on choosing specific issues and dealing with them in greater depth, possibly also in smaller groups. Alternating between the plenum and working groups of two or three could make exploration of new ground more beneficial. Adaptation of the program according to the wishes of the participants was an important turning point. This left ownership of the process in the hands of the participants. Cultural aspects were taken into consideration as far as possible in organization, e.g. type of food. The workshop as such did not seem to be influenced by cultural differences. All participants spoke excellent English, so language was not a problem.

Participants

The tone of the participants was very friendly, even when points raised in the presentations were questioned. The spoken language appeared better able to express nuances than the written language. Debates were carried out in a friendly, bantering style. The influence of a small informal setting seems to have been helpful. Participants came from different disciplines: law, hydrology, economics, and political science. From each country, one of the participants was closer to Track 1 (e.g. government consultants) and one was closer to Track 2. (academics). There were moments of recognition of different viewpoints, but never moments of changing positions. Thus, the workshop helped to enter the territory of thought of other participants, but did not change participants' thoughts. Differentiations of positions, interests and needs were not always explicit, but they were expressed, both in the draft publication as well as in the oral presentations and discussions. The participants were able to disagree about different issues, but not to make disagreements a point of personal conflict. Thus the dictum: "be hard on the issues and soft on people" was observed. Some stereotypical ways of perceiving other countries were expressed, but again, these were not addressed to the representatives of these countries, and statements to this effect were also answered by other participants.

Moderators

The two moderators took turns moderating different parts of the program. This was helpful, as it clarified who was guiding the process. Moderators initiated certain subjects by posing them to the group in the form of program or content suggestions at the beginning of a session. The moderators did not stick to their suggestions if the group opted for a different approach. The moderators took participants' input into account, both during the session and during the breaks. Moderators supported recognition and empowerment by leaving process ownership in the hands of the participants and by summarizing and visualizing points raised. The session moderator summarized the main points of the previous session at the beginning and end of a session, thus pointing to where the discussion stood and clarifying issues. Flipcharts were used to visualize the process, and they were also used interactively with the group when opportunities and challenges were being compiled. Participants rated the brainstorming points by marking them on the flipchart. During the evening the moderators drafted these points

onto a “mind-map” that was discussed and modified by the group. From the observer’s point of view, the moderators appeared to be all-inclusive and even-handed with all parties.

1.2 Moderator evaluation (Hansueli Müller–Yersin)

Hansueli Müller-Yersin, one of the two workshop moderators, wrote the following evaluation:

Organisation / accommodation / logistics

The workshop was organized by the Center for International Studies, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, together with the Swiss Federal Institute for Environmental Science and Technology (EAWAG). All the participants and the two moderators stayed in a hotel near Lucerne, which offered a secluded but very picturesque and quiet setting for the evenings. The participants met in this hotel on the eve of the workshop. At the initial dinner Kurt Spillmann welcomed the participants warmly to the workshop and introduced all participants. The after-dinner hours were spent making personal contacts and renewing previous acquaintances amongst the participants. Both in the morning and in the evening all workshop participants were transported across the lake by boat to the EAWAG at Kastanienbaum. The workshop was held in a well-equipped seminar room directly at the lakeside. The very good logistical and organizational support offered for the duration of the workshop by the workshop observer, Simon Mason, and the workshop assistant, Marwa Gouda, was greatly appreciated by all participants. It contributed much to the smooth running of the program.

Participants

In preliminary documents, the participants outlined their personal views on the subject of the workshop. These papers indicated that legal and political issues were at the center of the debate between the Egyptian and Ethiopian participants, and that participants from Sudan stressed the need for practical step-by-step cooperative solutions. The mix of participants was well chosen: Six highly competent professionals from a wide range of backgrounds (law, political science, engineering, diplomacy), all with personal experience relating to water-use issues in the Eastern Nile Basin.

Role of moderators

Günther Baechler, SDC, Bern, and co-moderator Hansueli Müller-Yersin, OECONSULT, Amden, agreed to moderate the workshop together, aiming to facilitate exchange of information and strengthen mutual acceptance of personal views and, if possible, facilitate a joint publication containing the participants’ finalized papers. The main activities and interventions of the workshop moderators were:

- Outlining the workshop setting
- Formulating the framework and rules
- Structuring work phases and intermissions / time management
- Enhancing personal contacts and discussions
- Helping to clarify topics by asking questions
- Visualizing the interdependencies of topics
- Summarizing convergent and divergent ideas
- Clarifying the proceedings leading to a joint publication

Main results of the workshop

The workshop helped to establish and refresh personal contacts among the participants. As it proceeded, the participants interacted more freely and were more at ease with each other. This was noticeable in the atmosphere of the working sessions: overall, it was more relaxed on the second day. The mind map of the themes addressed in the workshop visualized the interdependencies of the topics as seen by this group of experts. As a final step, a procedure and timetable for common publication of the participants' finalized papers was established and agreed upon.

Excursion

The last day was used for an excursion to the Rigi Mountain and a visit to the Sihlsee (artificial lake reservoir; hydroelectric power production for the Federal Swiss Railway system). At the Sihlsee, sedimentation aspects were discussed with a power plant operator, who afterwards guided the group through the control alleys in the 60-year-old dam, explaining its stability and security measures. At the farewell dinner at Feusisberg, Kurt Spillmann thanked all the participants for the time they had taken to prepare the initial documents, and for their valuable input and contributions to the discussions at the workshop. The mutual thanks and heartfelt reactions of the participants reflected the personal esteem which had developed during this workshop.

Personal appraisal and critical evaluation by co-moderator (H.U.Müller)

The workshop aims in terms of enhancing personal contacts and relationships were realised to a great extent. This workshop established a good interpersonal basis for further cooperation in terms of sustainable water use in the Eastern Nile Basin. Exchanges of views and information, as well as mutual growth in understanding among participants, made it possible to develop a common picture of systemic interdependencies towards the end of the working sessions. This jointly established analysis also facilitated the development of a common publication. The following factors were helpful in this respect:

- Highly motivated and competent participants
- Good, secluded accommodations (informal personal contacts)
- Pleasant surroundings (mountains, lake, boat ride, etc.)
- Sound preparation, organization and logistics

The progressive ease in personal contacts among the participants was also noticeable in the atmosphere of the working sessions. As they became more relaxed, critical stages in the discussions were easier to detect; these were marked by more formal interaction.

Such resurgent incidents of “temporary regression” in the discussion atmosphere indicated that despite improving personal contacts, there was no marked détente on the legal / political opposition of upstream / downstream views in the course of the workshop. Whenever the contested legal issues came up, a tendency towards more rigid “either / or” logic and conditional argumentation prevailed.

Nevertheless, the workshop helped to clarify and detail the positions and views of this group of experts from Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt. It indicated points and aspects that could help to ease tensions. Further activities will be required to start developing concrete options and generate evaluation criteria to help resolve conflicts in the area over the use of water from the Nile.

Outlook, follow-up and Future Activities

Joint publication of the papers from the Kastanienbaum meeting will round out this workshop. It will be important to disseminate this publication to officials and groups of stakeholders in the Eastern Nile Basin as well as to actors in other “tracks” of watershed conflict resolution in the Nile Basin. The promising overall outcome of the Kastanienbaum workshop could lead to further activities. These should be carefully coordinated and tuned to other tracks in the conflict resolution process. Personally, I believe it might be worthwhile if such activities could lead to regular and possibly more formal exchanges of relevant detailed information within the Nile Basin. An evaluation of whether this should be done, primarily on a local / pragmatic scale or in a larger, more political context, will have to be carried out.

To further enhance the conflict resolution process and facilitate options and evaluation, it might be helpful to compile and visualize relevant data (e.g. hydrographic, technical, environmental, ethnographic, economic, etc.) and make the resulting data base accessible to future stakeholders, especially to actors taking part in future conflict resolution activities.

Hansueli Müller-Yersin, Amden, 12.01.2003

1.3 Participant evaluation (workshop participants)

The following workshop evaluation is based on responses from the workshop participants, who were asked about the workshop benefits and what could be improved. This is followed by specific answers to the questions in Box 3.

Benefits

Participant A: “Participants had the chance to provide independent reflections on issues concerning Nile Water. They had an opportunity to talk informally with researchers from other Nile countries, and did not have to represent or advocate the views of their own government. They had an opportunity become familiar with the views of other researchers on the issues. This was very useful feedback for future research. The organizers and moderators were able to determine which issues were sticky and which were not. Participants got to know each other better. The research output will be a useful contribution to the research literature on the subject.”

Participant B: “The benefit of the workshop was in bringing together people with long experience and different perceptions, who already knew each other from their writings or from conferences. The main benefit was to enable the exchange of tacit knowledge based on experience that cannot be gained from books. The systems approach and mind map could be a form of leverage for the next steps to be taken together. The mind map we developed created an image we could take home. Respect, the art of listening, and learning are important.”

Room for improvement

Participant A: “The participants were too careful about touching on sensitive issues, to the extent that the whole exercise sometimes made it appear that there were no problematic issues. It would have been good if some of the problems and positions identified had been revisited with the help of the moderators. Participants seemed to exercise caution regarding their home governments. Moderators were too cautious in not going beyond what the participants had to say or what they had written. More issues and independent analysis of the issues could have been useful to determine whether the participants could deliver views different from those of their governments. In the deliberations, more comparative analysis of similar situations (e.g. water issues in the Rhine Basin) would have been helpful.”

Participant B: “The knowledge café method could improve interaction and focus. Small groups of two to three people of mixed nationalities visit the different knowledge “cafés”. Different tables are set up, with different questions at each table, e.g. “What do you mean by a vision?” The small group discusses the questions and seeks a response. Then the groups rotate and deal with the other questions. At each table there is a moderator who makes connections to what has been discussed before. The results are then presented in the plenum. One could ask what the challenges and the visions are, and how to get from the challenges to the visions. We could reflect on stumbling blocks –

for example, how to operationalise the principles of “cause no significant harm” and “equitable use”. Maybe an input from other basins, such as the Danube, could help. How did they put these principles into practice?”

Answers to specific questions (Box 3) (Participant A)

Workshop in general

1. Were the aims of the workshop clearly established and attained?
“Yes, participants were to state the interests of the three countries on the issues of water rights and use. That was clearly accomplished.”
2. Were the ground rules set and adhered to?
“Yes, they were very clear and they were adhered to.”
3. Was there ever a creative “brainstorming” atmosphere?
“I would say not clearly and specifically.”
4. What was the balance between focus on the past vs. focus on the future?
“Focus was more on the future. But the past was often referred to, as the issues concerned changing the as yet static past.”
5. What was the balance between one-way presentation and interaction?
“There was very good interaction, via questions, clarifications and dialogue over certain issues in the presentations.”
6. What was the balance between communication among the representatives of different countries and communication between the representatives of one country? Could any instances of “cross-track” communication be observed, i.e. diffusion of knowledge between the tracks?
“There was no conspicuous cleavage or visible frequent consultations between country delegations. Rather, there was a lot of mixing and informal interaction across delegations from different countries. There was a lot of interaction at interpersonal levels.”
7. How were specific environmental issues taken into consideration (sustainability, natural systems boundaries)?
“The question about Baro-Akobo was raised. That triggered reflection on Jonglei between the Sudanese and Ethiopian delegations.”
8. How were sticky issues dealt with? What helped to create a relaxed atmosphere?
“They were not raised much. Mention was often made that sticky issues are handled at governmental levels. Interpersonal acquaintance at various levels helped very much to keep things easy-going and to promote knowledge and friendship. Also, the responsibility to represent views was less strong. The venue, moderation and organisational tone were helpful.”

9. What went well, what went badly, what were decisive turning points, and why?
“On balance, all went well. Nothing in particular went wrong. There was no need for such a thing as “decisive change”.”
10. How were cultural aspects taken into consideration during the workshop?
“Everyone was polite, respectful to one another. That cultural element was well maintained, even after the workshop.”

Participants

11. What was the tone of the participants during the workshop in comparison to their written work and/or their style during public conferences (impact of informality)?
“They did not move too much away from the substantive content of their papers. The papers had an academic orientation. They were not position-oriented, but reflective and evaluative.”
12. Did all participants participate actively during the workshop?
“Yes, but some, of course, were more active in contributing to the discussions.”
13. What was the disciplinary (social, natural and engineering science) and Track (1 and 2) mix of the participants?
“Except for one, all the participants were from the social sciences (law, economics, political science, engineering). That did not create any misunderstandings. The subject was jointly analysed.”
14. Were there moments when recognition of other perceptions and interests was expressed by the participants?
“Yes, for instance the Baro, Jonglei cases.”
15. To what extent did the participants differentiate between positions, interests and needs, as well as between different issues?
“This was in their respective papers. The papers provided the framework, which was well delivered by every group. At no time did the participants themselves engage in positioning. However, they reported as researchers and authors on the positions of one or another country.”
16. How well were participants from the other countries perceived in a differentiated or stereotypical way?
“There were some stereotypical statements on the questions governments disagree on.”
17. Were the participants satisfied with the organization and venue?
18. What was the participants’ overall satisfaction with the workshop?
“All the participants were satisfied with the organization, venue, selection of participants, and knowledgeable moderators at the workshop.”

Moderators

19. What did the moderators do to initiate certain subjects?
“The greatest contribution by the moderators was to engage participants in drawing a common road map of Nile Basin Cooperation.”
20. How did the moderators deal with unforeseen occurrences?
“There were no unforeseen occurrences.”
21. How did the moderators support recognition and empowerment?
22. What did the moderators do to structure and visualize the process?
“Conduct of the session was very smooth. Presentations, discussion, and debate occurred without additional commitment to resolution.”
23. Were the moderators all-inclusive and even-handed with the different parties?
“Yes, very much so.”
24. How did the participants rate the moderators?
“Moderators knew the level and tone of the workshop. They went as far as the participants on the issues. They were unassuming. They were attentive and watchful of matters raised.”

During oral feedback by the participants at the workshop wrap-up phase, the following points were raised:

- The venue was agreeable and the organization was good and swift. For some of the participants too many emails were sent out.
- The flexibility, program and spirit of the workshop were felt to be valuable, as one part of the puzzle in the larger picture. The desire for a follow-up workshop was expressed.
- The moderators’ facilitating role and input in the form of structuring and visualization was greatly appreciated.
- The group selection was seen as vital; a different choice of participants could have blocked the process.
- The sincerity and appreciative listening spirit of all the participants and organizers was seen as a decisive reason for the workshop’s success.
- The workshop was not isolated from other dialogue efforts. As part of all the communication forums in the Nile Basin, it was seen as helping “dialogue accumulation” and international cooperation.

In summary, the success of the workshop was seen by the participants in terms of: 1) The small number of participants; 2) The choice of participants and the fact that many of them had already met each other beforehand; 3) The informal atmosphere; there was a focus on personal perspectives rather than articulating national positions. There was no pressure to agree; 4) Progress and a good atmosphere in the workshop reflected achievements on the ground.

Ideas for future workshops and follow-up activities raised by the participants were:

- Meet experts from another river basin, e.g. the Rhine River Commission.
- Include further participants in such a workshop, depending on specific issues to be addressed.
- Use methods that enable in-depth work on specific questions.
- Develop an exchange of academics and students among the Nile Basin countries, where a group of students and academics visit another country and are then visited in turn in their own country.

Appendix 2: Nile Forum, Facilitators' Evaluation

Facilitators' / Trainers' Evaluation of Nile Capacity Building Forum, Addis Ababa, 30 Jan-2 Feb 2006.

Yacob Arsano

Content: Preparation was very good, all presentations were well prepared and delivered.

Venue: The Choice of the venue was excellent (hotel Ghion). It was conducive for the training workshop

Turn Out: All expected participants were from the three countries

Participation and interaction: Participants and trainees were very interactive, receptive and communicative

Site-seeing: This was a missing event. The trainees would have liked to travel to one or the other sites related to water development within Ethiopia. It was very good that AU and ENTRO kindly availed their time for the group.

Asha El Karib

The idea of bringing the 3 country groups together was excellent and so was the selection of participants (age, gender, professions). The Inter/Intra-disciplinary facilitators provided room for more learning and reflection and definitely future improvement at the personal level. I would have liked to work towards a sort of "shared vision" from the beginning. I hope for similar workshops for the same group on related issues.

Magdy Hefny

The workshop represents a vehicle for learning from each other in the region. It was unique to see a representative number of Egyptians, Ethiopians and Sudanese, young professionals, researchers, meeting together and thinking together in a friendly way. This has the value as such of breaking the taboo of not knowing each other in the region. The workshop provided an opportunity to meet and discuss positively ideas for improving regional cooperation. Interactive learning and role play and simulation exercises helped to internalize new concepts and ethical values that originated in the region. This was a unique situation in which young professional came together on grounds of mutual understanding. There is now a possibility for networking involving this group.

Atta El Battahani

It was an important exercise for young researchers and civil society and NGO actors to be informed about and debate official government discourse on the Nile. More of this needs to be done in the future. The reading material – particularly that used in the discussion of the working groups (Yacob's, Magdy's, Ahsa's and Atta's) – should have been distributed at least a day or two before the workshop to give the participants the chance to have a look at it. It is important to find a way to build on / maintain the positive outcome of the workshop. How? I don't know. The overall coordination was excellent.

Simon Mason

The strong gender aspect (in balanced participation as well as in one morning contribution and exercise on the subject by Asha) was very enriching. Besides that, the example of powerful personalities, such as Asha, sends a strong signal. Rolling planning is the only way to do such a workshop, to be able to coordinate between the facilitators (that do not live in the same place, and have to prepare by email) as well as to take the energies and wishes of the group into consideration. Interactive learning is by far superior to lecture-type learning. The working groups went very well. Ideas for the future: bring Southern Facilitators to train people in Switzerland. How to proceed? A workshop in Khartoum and Cairo would be great. What about financing, both from the region and outside?

Appendix 3: Glossary

Action Research: Action research is a three-step spiral process of planning that involves reconnaissance, taking action, and fact-finding about the results of the action (Lewin 1948).

Compromise: A situation in which everyone's minimal requirements satisfied at the least (Robert Weibel)

Conflict: "... a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals." Lewis Coser (1956: 8). Conflict can be understood as incompatible behaviour between two or more conflicting parties, where one of the parties' experiences damage, and the other intends or ignores the negative impacts (Mason 2004).

Conflict Management: A generic term that refers to all interventions in a conflict that aims to solve problems, transform relations, and change structures (adapted from Glasl 1990).

Conflict Transformation: Conflict transformation acknowledges that conflicts are a part of life, and that the aim is to transform destructive forms of dealing with conflict into constructive forms. It focuses on understanding perceptions and improving relationships, by empowering actors and supporting mutual recognition (Bush, Folger 1994, Lederach 1995).

Dialogue Accumulation: the result of numerous meetings between representatives from different conflicting parties over the years in various formal and informal settings. While one meeting may have little impact, together they have a measurable impact.

Dialogue Workshop: In Dialogue Workshops, non-official representatives of the conflicting parties meet in an informal setting facilitated by a third party with the aim of non-polemical conflict analysis, transformation of antagonistic relationships, joint action, or problem-solving (Ropers 2000, Kelman 1999).

Environment-related Conflicts: Conflicts over the use of the environment and natural resources, or related to degradation of the environment. At least one of the conflicting parties is harmed, and the other intends or ignores the damage. .

Environmental Conflict Management: Interventions in an environmental conflict aim to solve the problems perceived by actors, transform their relationships, and enhance ecological sustainability.

Global Syndrome Approach: Integrated approach to the study of clusters of core problems of global change, indicating specific patterns of non-sustainable development (NCCR North-South 2002).

Interest: “Interests are the underlying desires and concerns that motivate people to take a position. While their position is what they say they want, such as ‘I want to build my house here!’ their interests are the reasons why they take a position (because I want a quiet lot with a good view of the city). Often parties’ interests are compatible, and hence negotiable, even when their positions seem to be in complete opposition.” (CRC 1998, Fischer, Ury 1983).

Need: A condition or situation in which something is required. In this context, ‘needs’ refer to basic needs such as security, food, shelter and employment. According to the human needs theory, conflicts can only be resolved in the long term if basic needs are satisfied (Burton 1990).

Parties: People or groups of people involved in a conflict.

Perception: Insight, intuition, or knowledge gained by perceiving (taking in, seizing). Here perceptions refer to the different views and interpretations people have of an issue.

Position: A position is a fixed solution to a conflict suggested by one party that is often incompatible with the position of the other party. Positions are what people have decided upon; interests are what cause them to decide. (Fisher, Ury 1983)

System: A system is a set of elements interrelating in a structured way. The elements are perceived as a whole with a purpose. A system’s behaviour cannot be predicted by analysis of its individual elements. The properties of a system emerge from the interaction of its elements and are distinct from properties as separate pieces. The behaviour of the system results from the interaction of the elements, and the interaction between the system and its environment (System + Environment = A Larger System). Definitions of the elements and the setting of system boundaries are subjective actions (RPR 2002).

Third Party: “A ‘third party’ is someone who is not involved in a conflict who gets involved to try to help disputants work out a solution (or at least improve the situation by communicating better or increasing mutual understanding). Examples of third parties are mediators, arbitrators, conciliators, and facilitators.” (CRC 1998).

About the Author

Simon J. A. Mason, holds a Ph.D. in Environmental Science, specialising in environmental conflict transformation. His dissertation was entitled “From Conflict to Cooperation in the Nile Basin, Conflict Sensitive Interviewing and Dialogue Workshop Methodology”. He has received further training in mediation and negotiation. Presently he is a senior researcher at the Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) in the “Mediation Support Project” funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. His main research areas include mediation methodology and the overlap of mediation with other topics relevant to peace processes and sustainable development. From 2002 to 2006 he was coordinator of the sub-project ‘Water and Conflict’ in the NCCR North-South programme. He co-organised, supported and evaluated a series of dialogue workshops between Egyptian, Sudanese and Ethiopian experts on the Nile conflict.

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Participatory resource and conflict management is one of the greatest challenges of our time. If stakeholders are not involved in this process, solutions will not be locally legitimised, or sustainable. “Dialogue Workshops” are one form of participatory resource and conflict management. The present paper summarises the theory behind this method, and describes its application in the Eastern Nile Basin with participants from Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia. This provides the basis for a provisional assessment of the methods, limitations and potentials. Concrete questions are listed that may also be useful for designing or evaluating Dialogue Workshops used in other settings.

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