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“Management of land use systems for enhanced food security:
conflicts, controversies and resolutions”

Conflict Management Programs in Transdisciplinary and International Research Projects

KATHARINA LÖHR¹, STEFAN SIEBER¹, CHRISTIAN HOCHMUTH², DIRK SPRENGER³, JANE
WAMBURA¹, FELIX WENDENBURG², LARS KIRCHHOFF²

¹*Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), Inst. of Socio-Economics, Germany*

²*Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt, Germany*

³*kontrair, Germany*

Abstract

With the shift to transdisciplinarity in sustainability research, the complexity of the project design has increased. In order to minimise conflict or even a project failure, it has been acknowledged that communication among project members is key and should be facilitated by meta-communication. Integrated conflict management programs, as prominent in the business world, can help transdisciplinary research projects to work more effectively. We present the development of a conflict management programme fit to the needs of a transdisciplinary work environment. For this purpose, framework characteristics are established and existing models for conflict management are tested for their transferability to projects in sustainability research. As case study serves the food security project Trans-SEC, which is a pilot project that uses an integrated conflict management program. The project consortium consists of more than 100 researchers of 15 world-wide institutes and aims at stabilising in a value-chain approach the situation of 4000 households in Tanzania.

Such projects can be described as complex work settings which show the following characteristics: (1) transdisciplinary (2) donor-funded (3) temporary (4) intercultural (5) inter-organisational and mostly (6) virtual. The sum of the established characteristics coming together simultaneously within a single project make the work environment particular. Each characteristic in turn needs to be considered when setting up a conflict management program. A blue-print model for the research context is established based on the Viadrina Component Model which gained prominence in Germany's corporate sector. Although key components of the model remain, a component of conflict prevention is added and elements are adjusted to the research environment.

Keywords: Conflict management, conflict prevention, food security, project management, transdisciplinary research