

The Social Anthropology of Reconstruction

Introduction

Considering and addressing the sociocultural side of construction by using anthropological and participatory approaches is—as the case of PERRP shows—a way to bring about two aims simultaneously: being responsible from a culturally appropriate, social justice-oriented, capacity-building, humanitarian perspective, and doing so while also increasing project efficiency and effectiveness. It is important to note that such approaches may be used by specialists who may or may not be anthropologists. There are many professionals, NGO staff, and staff at other organizations that have these kinds of skills and perspectives as practitioners, even though the work they do may not be labeled “anthropology.” For this reason, I use the expressions “anthropologist,” “sociocultural expert,” and “specialist” interchangeably. At the same time, not all anthropologists would be suited to disaster reconstruction work.

This chapter takes a brief look at the background of anthropology and how it is now being applied far more widely than ever before, especially for its practical uses in addressing social problems. We look again at the disaster reconstruction site and its context, people, and power following a disaster, the impact of experience on perceptions of construction or reconstruction, and the effects that construction and local people can have on each other. This chapter closes with a look at the distinguishing features of social anthropology and how these were applied in PERRP, along with examples of problems this approach solved.

Reconstruction Sites Cannot Be Divorced from Their Surroundings

A reconstruction site cannot be divorced from its social context. In construction and reconstruction projects, managers often focus inward, look-

ing only at the site itself—the contractors, labor, equipment, steel, and concrete. While this focus is necessary to produce high-quality work on schedule, it risks losing sight of other factors that will determine that success. Construction projects often assumed to be—even try to be—separate from the surrounding social environment, but such a disconnect is unlikely or impossible, and it can even be self-defeating. A construction site cannot be divorced from its surroundings. The social context of a construction project will, to varying degrees, have an impact on the construction, just as construction impacts the surrounding social context. And what may manifest as a problem for construction may have underlying sociocultural causes that need specialized attention to prevent or resolve.

In other words, construction is not just about bricks and mortar. As much as architects, engineers, and construction managers need to know in minute detail the composition and characteristics of concrete, steel, soil, and footing—and other factors that determine the new building's structural integrity—so too should the social specialists on a project get to know details of the cultural and social situation. From this knowledge, social specialists can predict local behavior that might affect construction and plan for it, helping to facilitate design and construction and so enable the project to proceed effectively. The activities of social specialists also free the project's technical experts to concentrate on what they need to do to manage construction, to reduce losses for both the project and the people, and to produce more positive long-term benefits for the building, its users, and the community.

People and Change in the Postdisaster Scenario

The challenges that existed before a disaster may be greatly magnified after it. Sometimes, new challenges arise that did not exist before. For reconstruction management efforts, there may be competition for and shortages of essential goods and service providers, including contractors, workers, spaces, equipment, and materials. There may also be changing policies, regulations, and standards that are not always well communicated, and lack of coordination and competition among aid agencies.

At the community level, the sudden arrival of projects and agencies—while necessary to save lives and be a bridge to the recovery process—can create competition or new rivalries. These sudden injections of relief goods, money, jobs, and people of other cultures have the potential to increase disputes and conflicts that already exist. A hand-out style of help can create disincentives: people sometimes begin to rely on the helping agencies to do what they used to do themselves. It is a delicate time, with the losses, trauma, change, movement of people, and fractured social

supports. With such complexities, reconstruction projects benefit from sociocultural experts who know the local culture in its predisaster state, and so are best equipped to assess changes that have occurred and to draw people into the process of problem-solving while also building their capacities.

Perceptions of Construction and Reconstruction

While “construction” literally means the action or process of constructing roads, bridges, dams, shelter, housing, buildings, and other physical infrastructure, it will still have different connotations for different groups of people. To a donor or institution financing disaster reconstruction, their involvement could mean simply carrying out policy, budget, or financing arrangements. To a construction planner or manager, “reconstruction” may mean an exciting challenge to oversee and create a structure that will be of benefit to many for a long period of time. For-profit commercial organizations such as architectural, engineering, and construction firms—those most likely to be involved in infrastructure reconstruction—will see it as a business opportunity. To others, especially those who inhabit nearby areas, their view may be very different and not uniform. People’s opinions will be affected by the reputation of construction before the disaster, by what they observe about other reconstruction sites, and by what they have heard—or have not heard—about the planned construction.

Part of an anthropological approach would be to find out these views from the people and, as needed, plan the preventative measures that the project would need to take. The kinds of questions to be addressed would include: Before and since the disaster, what is the people’s experience with other construction and with construction contractors? Were they treated fairly? Has any harm occurred? Have they experienced or witnessed loss, damage, or destruction of property or other assets by construction contractors? Were they paid compensation if any was due? Do they suspect wrongdoing, cheating, corruption, wastage, or broken promises? Has previous construction caused problems among the local people? Does that experience make them anticipate it will happen again? Have they been consulted on the current reconstruction planned? Will they be involved? The answers to these questions will reveal the local people’s impressions, which in turn will have a strong effect on how they interact with future construction or reconstruction.

Around the world there are countless examples of construction projects that have failed because they ignored the needs and ideas of local people. In chapter 3, in the anecdote about a flood control embankment construction project in Bangladesh, I described how the people violently

opposed a construction project, but by managers and engineers listening to their concerns and finding feasible technical and administrative options, the project went ahead and, in the end, satisfied all stakeholders. As that project was being prepared, not only had the people not been consulted about the alignment of the planned embankment but the alignment chosen would have destroyed precious crop land; from past experience, the people were certain they would be cheated out of compensation and be forced off their land. By hearing their concerns, the project was able to proceed peacefully with the alignment changed; the government paid the compensation owed, and the new ownership documents were completed before construction started, with no resettlement needed. Using anthropological approaches that were culturally appropriate, conflict sensitive, and participatory resulted in another engineering and construction project that was able to get a technically sound embankment.

As table 8.1 shows, construction and local people can have positive or negative impacts on one another; their interactions can affect both the people and the implementing or contracting agencies.

Anthropology and Reconstruction: Foundations of Anthropology

So where does anthropology come into this picture? Cultural anthropology emerged first as a field of academic study in the UK in the late nineteenth century as the British Empire grew. The most prominent figures of this period included Edward B. Tylor and Lewis Henry Morgan. As the field grew in the twentieth century, a long list of other eminent scholars emerged in the US, UK, and Europe, including Bronislaw Malinowski, Radcliffe Brown, Claude Lévi-Strauss, James George Frazer, Raymond Firth, Edward Evans-Pritchard, Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead. Subspecialties also emerged such as archaeology and linguistic, physical, biological (also called forensic), and social or applied anthropology.

While anthropology in its infancy had focused exclusively on culture, social anthropology grew to focus more on social structures and the relationships of groups. The fields of anthropology and sociology now share a fluid boundary. There is no universally agreed definition, but at its most basic, anthropology is the study of humanity, and social anthropology is the study of society, social structures, or groups of any kind. It could also be said that all anthropology can be applied. Anthropological approaches share common research methods—interviews, discussions, and surveys, for instance—but applying these approaches depends on the situation

Table 8.1. Negative or Positive Effects for Construction and the Local People.

	Negatively	Positively
How local people can affect construction:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New differences among people may be created or existing differences exacerbated. • If not suitably treated or not participating in any way, the local people may be indifferent or even in opposition to the project. • They may file court stay orders or undertake other actions to stop construction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If effectively engaged to participate, local people can help to make things happen, donating their time, experience, resources, and influence. • They can prevent problems and serve as the main problem solvers of community concerns related to construction.
How construction can affect local people:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction can damage property or other assets, and can overuse local resources. • Project leaders can overpromise and underdeliver, misleading people, creating mistrust or conflict. • The work may exemplify bad management, lacking transparency or accountability. • The local community may perceive the construction as a loss or something to resist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The construction can provide a new facility that will bring new benefits. • If the people participate effectively, they will increase skills and build their own institutions. • The work can exemplify promises kept, trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability. • The local community may perceive the construction as a gain and something to support. But for this to be the case, the local people must be treated fairly.
How results can affect the contracting or implementing agency and others:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a project fails, has long costly delays, or is abandoned for any reason—including opposition of the people—the reputation of the contractor or implementing agency may be damaged, affecting future contracts and their bottom line. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a favorable, respectful, and cooperative atmosphere is created, not only does it get better results for all on the ground, but it also adds to the positive reputation of the company involved and, possibly, to their future work.

and involves a range of other possible skills including action research, advocacy, and community mobilization and participation.

There are two main distinguishing features of anthropology: it is holistic and it involves extensive fieldwork as a participant observer, living and working among the people. Through this close contact, anthropologists may develop deep knowledge of situations, especially from the perspectives of the people being studied and/or assisted. In projects such as disaster reconstruction, social anthropology involves not just conducting research but also simultaneously putting that knowledge into practice and doing so in a scheduled amount of time.

Anthropology as Problem-Solving

To some, anthropology has an antiquated, esoteric ring to it. Anthropology has the reputation of being limited to academia, yet change has been occurring in recent decades, and anthropology is now being applied in practical ways across a vast array of subjects in dynamic, diverse situations around the world. Now it can be said that, wherever there are people, there is a case for anthropology, and whatever people do, there could be an anthropology of it.

Anthropology may be best described in the websites of universities promoting such studies, as well as in publications and by professional associations. The University of Manchester Department of Anthropology explains that social anthropologists “are concerned with such questions as: how societies are organized; the relationship between values and behavior; [and] why people do what they do” (“What is Social Anthropology,” n.d.). The American Anthropological Association, the world’s largest association of professional anthropologists, describes anthropology as working “to solve real world problems using anthropological methods and ideas” (“What is Anthropology,” n.d.). In its website heading, the American Anthropological Association uses the slogan, “Advancing Knowledge, Solving Human Problems.” The National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA), a US professional association, explains that anthropologists have three skills that make them “great cross-functional team players”: the ability to “engage the underrepresented,” to “observe and listen,” and to “facilitate and translate” (NAPA, n.d.).

NAPA also lists a range of specializations among members, indicating the types of subjects and problems they tackle: business anthropology, medical anthropology, the anthropology of the workplace, public health, marketing, the arts, information technology systems, housing, social justice, mass media and communications, agriculture, computer science, military, artificial intelligence, international development, the design of facilities for e-sports, and so on. A glance through professional journals, conference topics, and new books adds to the range of subjects in which anthropology is being applied: disasters, aid, law, precious minerals, human rights, peace and conflict, the environment and climate change, gender and reproduction, health disparities in jails, and patient experience in the design of new hospitals. Additionally, the subjects are often location specific, such as refugee resettlement in Italy, artificial intelligence and virtual reality in China, the spread of malaria in central Africa, transboundary water issues in the Himalayas, microcredit in Bolivia, and Wall Street behavior. Also emerging is activist or advocacy anthropology “in the service of marginalized groups” (Schuller et al 2020: 6).

Because social anthropology helps identify, analyze, prevent, and solve real-world problems involving people, it can be applied to any subject—including construction and disaster reconstruction, as shown in this book.

Realities for the Sociocultural Expert in Reconstruction

With anthropology being applied to so many different subjects, it seems important to delineate the particular set of skills, attributes, or knowledge needed to do specific kinds of sociocultural work effectively—for example, to be a medical anthropologist in North America or to work on transboundary water issues in high mountains or in refugee resettlement in Europe. Certainly, not all sociocultural experts would be interested in or suited to all these roles. The same is true of the anthropology of disaster reconstruction.

While being well versed in the methods of anthropology discussed above, a sociocultural expert in a reconstruction project also needs to work within these realities:

- If it is a well-managed project, all design and construction work will be on a tight timeframe, around which the social program will need to be designed and carried out to help synchronize the technical and social steps.
- As infrastructure reconstruction is normally carried out by for-profit firms, this context will have considerations new to some anthropologists and other social experts.
- As construction can take years, projects need to include plans for how the sociocultural expertise can be kept in the field at or near the sites for the duration of the project.
- Construction engineers, planners, and managers can be thought of as from one culture, and sociocultural experts as from another. Besides bridging project understanding with the communities, it may be up to the sociocultural expert to initiate bridging the cross-cultural gaps between disciplines.
- While the sociocultural expert undertakes the work with communities and the technical expert launches all actions for design and construction, the two need to set up strong communications with one another to meet both the technical and sociocultural needs and goals.

Other essential skills include community analysis, participation, conflict prevention and resolution, and team leadership and management skills.

Social Anthropological Approaches as Applied in PERRP

In PERRP, our holistic approach involved first taking the widest possible view of the project's contexts, as described in chapter 2. At the construction site, this meant keeping the most immediate stakeholders in view: the design and construction teams. We strove to determine what they needed that the social team could provide from the community. This also required figuring out the community social structure, its blocs of power, and the steps required to have power shifted and shared so that the local people could work effectively with construction.

The fieldwork or participant observer component was built into the project. In academic terms, being a participant observer means living and working in a society, organization, institution, group, or community for extended periods of time, frequently counted in months. In PERRP's case, we worked six years full-time as participant observers.

Social anthropology now tends to be more participatory. In the past, it was typical for an outsider to go and study a group in top-down, extractive ways—collecting data, taking it away to be analyzed for assessment studies or academic papers, and never returning. While that approach unfortunately still happens, many contemporary anthropological approaches are collaborative, working with the people using participatory methods to jointly analyze data, identify needs, develop strategies, and monitor work—a kind of participatory anthropology. In disaster situations, in which speedy action is required, research methods such as rapid assessments and action research can be used, with the participant observation occurring simultaneously during these processes.

Advocacy is another important role for social expertise. While encouraging the community people themselves to speak up, using their own voices to get what they want, PERRP's social team members often played people's advocate with officials, architects, and construction managers, urging them to listen to the people.

Examples of Real-World Problems Solved

Almost all of the seventy-seven construction sites in this project had several problems involving local people. Some of the problems were caused by the construction teams, and some by a few local people. However, even the most complex situations were handled using culturally sensitive anthropological approaches with additional skills such as community mobilization, mediation, and conflict resolution. Being able to handle such challenges

was—along with strong construction management—one of the reasons almost all of PERRP’s construction was completed on or ahead of schedule. Examples of incidents and problems are given throughout this book, and below. In each case, the problem was solved by the social team, which had first concentrated its efforts in each community, working to understand the culture, the power arrangements, and the approaches necessary to facilitate formal agreements, allowing construction to proceed.

- In one remote conservative community, a serious cultural breach occurred involving one of the construction contractor’s laborers. He was caught and severely beaten by villagers, but the incident so offended members of the local community—and generated so much fear about repetition of this behavior by the other laborers—that they demanded that the contractor be fired. They would have preferred to have no school built rather than suffer such humiliation again. A solution was agreed to when the contractor offered to replace all the laborers on the site, exchanging them with workers from another construction job, who would have their training in the code of conduct repeated.
- One girls’ high school had already been deemed infeasible for this project to build, as engineers doing the assessment observed that the site for the school was not accessible from the road, being located in a precarious position on a terrace below the mountain road. Additionally, the surrounding six small plots of land had a total of about eighteen co-owners, all from the same extended family, who had a long history of conflict. Constructing the school depended on getting the access needed, and getting that access depended on people with serious differences coming to an agreement. While at first these landowners refused to cooperate with one another, peacemakers within the community, with the social team facilitating, convinced the landowners to resolve the matter. Had the agreement not been reached, the school could not have been built; with the land issues solved, work began immediately.
- At the critical time when volumes of concrete were about to start being mixed and poured, the water supply suddenly stopped. As the construction engineers urgently traced the cause, they found that someone had deliberately cut the water pipe bringing the water from the supply source. It was an act of revenge over an unrelated matter against the man who owned the land with the water pipe. The project’s social process quickly and amicably solved the problem, allowing the concrete pouring to continue without hindrance.

- Located below is an ethnography that indicates how highly complex social problems can become manifest at a construction site. In this situation, there was a seven-way dispute involving two families, a renegade member of one of the families, a low-caste group, two government departments opposing each other's decisions, and an unscrupulous contractor who was attempting to have his own work stopped by court order. The final dispute was over the placement of a gate and walking path, a situation that again threatened to stop the nearly completed construction.



Ethnography—Government Boys' High School in Flat Land*

**“Flat Land” is a pseudonym. To maintain confidentiality, the name of the school, village, and castes are changed.*

This example illustrates how the problems that arise in construction or reconstruction can have underlying social causes that need to be sensitively addressed. The disputes in this location were power struggles between castes, classes, vested interests, and political connections, in the midst of rapid cultural change. This example shows the complexity of social structures in communities and how complicated it can be to prevent or solve community-related problems that could affect construction.

At one large school being constructed in PERRP, there were three particular incidents, each one threatening to interfere with construction and to cause strife in the community. At one point the struggle was a seven-way dispute involving the following participants:

- two landowning families in a long-term conflict (family # 1 and family #2)
- a lower-caste group (the Blue caste or Blues), who had been the tenant farmers of family #2, but who over the past twenty years had been working their way out of servitude, which was resisted by family #2
- a renegade member of family #1—a son who had a reputation for being temperamental, litigious, prone to violence, and radically individualist, often rejecting the normal local behavior of respecting the decisions of elders
- two government departments opposing each other's decisions
- an unscrupulous contractor attempting to have his own work stopped.

The families and the Blues owned the property touching on the school's east and north sides.

Soccer Field Incident

One son in family #1 had been part of most of the community participation process to prepare for construction. He had been present in meetings to learn the construction plan and give design input, and he knew all about the project's conflict resolution agreement procedures and the significance of the Committee-Contractor Agreement. Soon after construction of the school started, however, he suddenly decided to ignore these agreements and raised a subject unheard of up to that point.

This school had an unusually large plot of land that included a soccer field. The son did not believe that the soccer field's size would be maintained after reconstruction, despite reassurances from the PERRP construction managers, who showed him detailed site plans. All the region's soccer teams depended on this playing field. It was the only regulation-size soccer field in the district, and he was certain that the new school was so large it would take up some of the field, making it no longer suitable for the regular tournaments that had been held here for years.

The school committee held meetings with family #1 and this son to try to convince him to believe the construction managers. Still, he became increasingly agitated and started making threats against the project and construction. Despite attempts by the committee and his own elders to get him to stop protesting, he ignored them and applied to the court to stop construction. If a court stay order were issued, it would stop construction and lead to many other problems in the community, including conflict over the stoppage. In the meantime, the threat of violence persisted.

As elders, construction managers, committee members, social mobilizers, and this man met on the school ground to try to discuss the matter, the man's equally agitated brother showed up and began swinging an axe at the people. Fortunately, a local policeman who happened to be nearby and in uniform diverted the brother with the axe, allowing discussion to continue on the site.

The social mobilizers realized that the problem was that the man had not understood the technical drawing of the school and site plans. They got the project engineers and surveyors to lay out on the ground the actual location, size, and orientation of the planned soccer field. When they installed pegs joined by rope all around the perimeters of the field and the planned school, at last the man and his friends were convinced. The court application was withdrawn, with no negative effect on construction.

Block the Windows

A couple of months later the same man raised another issue, making it into a crisis and again—without the committee or his elders knowing about it—he applied to court to stop construction. The matter he was concerned about

was that the upstairs windows of this boys' school would look directly into the neighboring compound where he lived. He said this was an interference in his privacy and he would not tolerate it.

His repeated aggressive behavior was an embarrassment to his elders and the surrounding community, as they by then were familiar with the project's process and dialogue-based conflict resolution procedures. They knew that PERRP took measures at other schools to install glass block visual barriers in upstairs windows so that there was no view into private property. Yet even after being taken to a nearby PERRP school so he could see the visual barrier for himself, the man would not relent. The case made it to the first court hearing, but the judge dismissed his request for a stay order as unfounded when committee members attended the hearing, showing photos and evidence of the visual barriers, which were already planned for their school, at the other PERRP-built school.

Access Path Dispute and Rapid Cultural Change

The most complicated issue to solve was over a walking path that neighbors would use to go around or through the school ground. On the surface, this dispute was about the path, but underlying that was the long historical struggle between family #2 and the Blues, neither of which was willing to yield to the other. The situation was further complicated by an unscrupulous contractor. Once again, this dispute could have grown and resulted in stopping the by then almost completed construction, but it was resolved by the social team working in partnership with the engineers, committee members, elders, the Department of Education, and the district coordination officer.

As stated elsewhere, in construction and any development work where there is community participation, it is necessary to understand the community. This is challenging enough where the community is static, but even more difficult and crucial when change is occurring, as was the case in this location.

Rapid cultural change was occurring in this rural conservative community. The formerly highly oppressed people of the Blue caste were working their way out of subjugation to the current generation of wealthy landowning families, including family #2. The Blues now openly and defiantly opposed family #2. While the rise of the Blues began roughly two decades earlier, it was rapidly accelerated by the earthquake: locals said that the status quo changed in only three seconds. See two anecdotes "Low Caste . . .," page 71.

This change began with a few Blues breaking free of their bonds, becoming entrepreneurs and helping other Blues do the same. They were increasing their level of education and moving away from traditional ways of life. Due to their own initiatives, in many but not all locations in the region, the Blues

were out from under the thumb of their former landlords. A few had even become well-off. Not surprisingly, this in itself created mutual hostility.

Such cultural change, where a low caste moves up relatively quickly to rival the higher caste, is rare. The Blues were said to have recently and rapidly escalated their own status by pooling the relief money they had received from the government to rebuild earthquake-destroyed homes, using their collective resources to buy property and start businesses. Their ability to turn relief money into development money deserves more in-depth study. The earthquake only lasted three seconds, but for this one oppressed group, it might have brought their freedom. A sure sign of moving up in status is that people in the region had elected a Blue person in the last five elections.

If the argument over the access path had happened a few decades ago, the story would be very different. Now, however, the Blues would boldly stand up for what they wanted.

In the 1980s, the school ground had been enlarged to include the regulation-size soccer pitch, as discussed above. Until that time, the Blues had walked through the unfenced school ground to get to the main road. But when the sports field was put in, a solid boundary wall was added, blocking their route to the road. At that time, there was a dispute over the wall, because over half a century earlier, when the school was first built by the British, there had been a formal agreement with the government allowing free passage across school land. As the Blues had no power when the new field and wall were built, they gave in. Their access route was moved to a rough track on the outside of the wall, between it and a nearby stream.

In the intervening years, when a member of family #2 found that the school wall deflected some of the stream water onto his property, he belligerently installed a stone masonry wall on his side to deflect the water back toward the school wall. Then, in heavy flooding the year before school construction started, his deflection wall resulted in the foot track being washed away and the boundary wall being damaged. Now there was no path at all, and the only road access required walking through the water—a dangerous and inconvenient route.

The dispute arose again when the construction contractor was about to start installing a chain-link fence on the perimeter of the school ground, on the side of the field facing land owned by the Blues and by family #2. The Blues appealed to the construction contractor to not install the fence and instead leave the ground open so that they could have a safe walking route again.

Here, the unscrupulous contractor saw the chance to buy time. He had work elsewhere and wanted an excuse to slow down or stop work here, so he suggested to the Blues that they get a court stay order about the fence.

That way, he could get out of this construction for a while and they maybe could get the fence stopped. With his encouragement, the Blues proceeded through official channels to build their case, going to the Revenue Department to get the historical records and, through their political connections, they sought to influence the district coordination officer to stop the plan to put in a chain-link fence.

Once these old legal documents were found, the district coordination officer ordered his Revenue Department to demarcate the path that had, and still would, pass through the middle of the school's sports ground. To reinforce this idea, the Blues went ahead and also filed an application with the court for a stay order to stop construction and give them back an access route. They named as defendants the Department of Education, the head master, and the secretly colluding contractor.

The social mobilizers had already held several urgent meetings to resolve this issue. Construction of the school building was almost finished and a stay order would stop it from being completed. On getting news of the court application, the mobilizers immediately asked for a meeting that would include the contractor, PERRP engineers, and representatives from the Department of Education, the Blues, and both landholding families.

In this meeting, the Department of Education representatives rejected the district coordination officer's order. They argued that, since another flood might further damage the boundary wall, the boundary line and damaged section should be moved inward twenty feet in one corner, again allowing a path to go around the outside of the wall. They suggested that a retaining wall should be put between the path and stream. Into the fray again stepped the same adult son of family #1, so protective of the soccer field, who hotly contested both ideas: he refused to allow anyone to use "his" field as a pathway, and he opposed moving the wall inward.

After much discussion it was a relief that agreement was finally reached. All parties agreed that, along one end of the school ground, facing land owned by both the Blues and family #2, the chain-link fence would be installed with a small gap so people could walk through across the field. The parties involved wrote a resolution, and everyone signing it, attesting that they had reached agreement. Family #1 assured all stakeholders that their son would not continue his legal actions. The signed agreement was to be taken to the court to withdraw the case—or at least that was the idea.

Outside the courtroom the day the case was to be heard, social mobilizers watched as the calculating contractor still urged the Blues to persist in the case. If the Blues persisted and won, it could have bought the contractor a great deal of time. At first the Blues' representative resisted the contractor's pressure, but then he saw the opportunity and made a counterdemand: he would go into the courtroom and continue to press for a stay order—

despite the signed agreement—if the contractor agreed to build the Blues a new road, one that was unrelated to the school construction. When the contractor balked at committing to this new construction, the representative stalled. The social mobilizers wondered: Would he proceed into court to withdraw the case? Was the case to stop construction going to be dropped or not?

In the last few moments before being called to appear before the judge, another influential community member stepped in and informed the Blues' representative that, if he did not drop the case as had been agreed, then he would seek punishment from the Blues' own politician, who was the man's personal friend. Finally, the representative had the case withdrawn.

With all this facilitation, in the end everybody—except the contractor—got what they wanted: construction continued and was completed without a single day lost; the soccer playing field was still regulation size; the Blues got free access across the field; and family #2 was happy to have the wall moved away from their land.

Each of the construction sites in PERRP had difficulties to overcome and achievements to celebrate. If I had written up all seventy-seven sites in this much detail, they would not be dissimilar—they would simply involve different blocs of power and different issues. While reconstruction projects by other implementing agencies were halted over issues as complex as the one described above—being dragged through the courts and sometimes never resolved—with the anthropological approaches and community participation in PERRP, each incident was solved peacefully with no loss to local people or to construction time.

