

## CONTEXT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FICTIONAL CULTURE

### CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

This scene takes place in a developing country that is governed by a democratically elected administration that came to power recently under allegations of election fraud. They have arrested members of the opposition party previously in power and have driven out a rebel group from areas near the capital city. As a result, the rebel group has reportedly increased their activities in rural areas, recruiting in some areas and elsewhere attacking villages with ties to or support for the current government. As part of a larger U.S. mission, your team is tasked with assessing stability in rural areas and supporting local government development, particularly in areas targeted by the rebel group.

Residents in a rural location within the developing nation have a conflict with a landowner in another hamlet over water use. Drinking water in the area is provided by springs, but there are only a few springs to provide water for all the households in this region shown on the map. One particular spring on the landowner's property within the Upper Hamlet provides water for the landowner and other households within the Upper Hamlet. Households in the Lower Hamlet located lower in the valley suffer frequent shortages from other sources and their nearby spring has been showing signs of drying up. Residents of the Lower Hamlet have periodically attempted to gain access to the Main Spring but all previous attempts have been unsuccessful. Several individuals within this region who are involved in this dispute are having a meeting to discuss the situation.

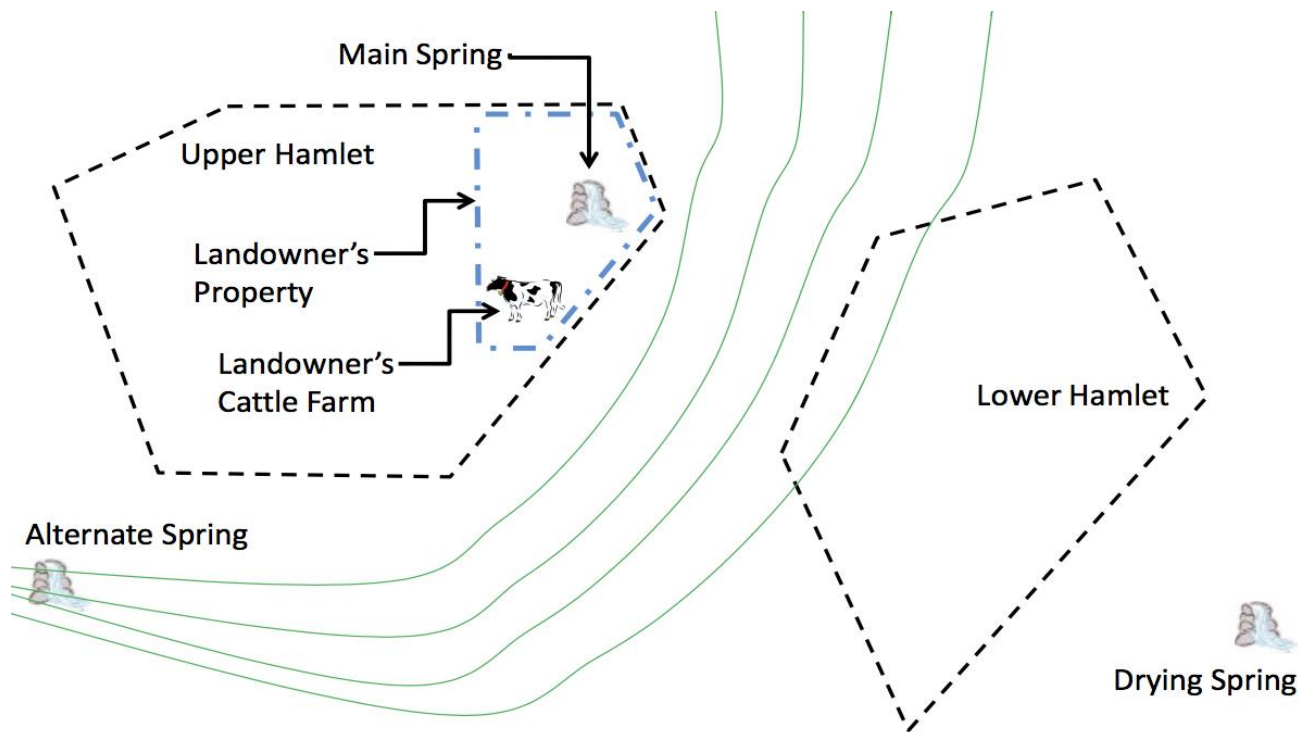


Figure 1. Map showing the relative location the Upper Hamlet, Lower Hamlet, and landowner's property, as well as the three springs in the area.

## **GENERAL GUIDANCE: COMMUNICATION NORMS AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS**

### *Communication Norms*

- Even though discussions are held in English, they have unique verbal and non-verbal greetings:
  - Formal verbal hello = “Hi-toe-cha-nee”
  - Informal verbal hello = “Hi-toe”
  - Informal, non-verbal greeting, with members of own group, family, friends = The two people greeting each other touch palms together.
  - Formal, with members outside their group or superior status = Person greeting places own palms together.
  - Meeting participants greet formally and present gifts to the spiritual leader, who is hosting the meeting, as they arrive.
- Participants will speak more loudly to show agreement. They also raise their hands in the air as a non-verbal expression of agreement with what is being said.
- Disagreement is expressed by limiting eye contact and speaking quietly. Direct eye contact is very limited when discussions are dominated by disagreement.
- Briefly repeat/rephrase what someone has said in an argument as a sign of respect for that person. This stops when anger increases.
- Within groups, members of hamlets typically converse amongst themselves first, even in the presence of others, not concerned that others are listening in, before presenting arguments.

### *Natural Resources*

- Water and other natural resources are generally considered from God, so no one individual should be allowed to own them.
- A fuzzy exception/conflict to this is when longstanding family ownerships are involved. This underlies some of the Landowner versus Hamlet conflict.

### *Past Orientation and Concrete Thinking*

- Members of this culture have a past orientation. For example, they refer to how things have been done in the past to justify some arguments.
- Arguments about “it has worked this way in the past, so it will work this way again” are common (e.g., “This spring has served the Upper Hamlet only for many years. It should not change.”)

- The past, even remote past, has a strong influence on decisions made in the present. They refer to things that happened long ago in same regard with things that happened recently.

### *Family Orientation*

- Historical slights to family members in the past drive many decisions in the present.
- Family and hamlet relationships are stronger than relationships in the larger community, so more respect and deference is shown by hamlet members to leaders of hamlets than to community or even spiritual leaders.
- Community leader is more of a facilitator and has limited power within this meeting.

### Uncertainty Tolerance

- This culture has very low tolerance for uncertainty. Inconclusive outcomes that leave things hanging or open to future changes are very uncomfortable and likely to result in resistance from some of the parties involved. For example, proposals like “let’s try this for a few months and see how it works” is too unsettling for all involved.
- This is especially true for the party left to deal with the uncertainty. For example, if somebody proposes that the Lower Hamlet residents use the alternate spring, Lower Hamlet residents show resistance due to unfamiliarity/uncertainty (e.g., “We are not familiar with this spring. We don’t know how much water it will provide or if there are good paths to the water”).

### Power Distance and Status

- Local leaders and informal ties are respected more than the regional or national government, which are perceived as lacking relevance within the hamlets.
- Power distance is moderate. Distinct roles and status exist within Hamlets and across the region. For example, age does impact status and the respect that is shown, but individuals with lower status are able to speak their voice in the presence of higher status individuals. Younger members might occasionally defer to older people in room or hamlet, but also speak up to make their own points at times.

### Relationship vs. Achievement Orientation

- This culture is much more oriented toward maintaining good relationships than toward achievement.

## ***ROLES AND BACKSTORIES OF MEETING ATTENDEES***



*Figure 2.* From left to right, meeting attendees were: Community political leader, Upper Hamlet resident, Upper Hamlet leader, Landowner, Spiritual leader, Lower Hamlet leader, and Lower Hamlet resident.

### *Landowner*

- The landowner feels that the Lower Hamlet residents had mistreated his family in the past, but doesn't bring up until later in the conflict. He believes that his grandfather, now long-deceased, had several head of cattle stolen from him by the former leader of the lower hamlet, also long-deceased. As a result, he is withholding permission to retain his family's honor.
- In the past, the landowner has proposed that the Lower Hamlet residents pay a fee for using the spring. However, the residents were offended by the notion of paying for use of the spring, and negotiations failed to proceed as a result.
- The landowner does feel some internal conflict: He wishes to have harmony throughout the community and realizes that some resources should be shared, but this concern seems to be outweighed in his mind by the perceived past slight to his grandfather and the need to retain family honor.
- The landowner did not want to meet with the lower-hamlet residents again, but his wife talked him into it, having had many informal discussions with other women of both the upper and lower hamlets. This comes out at some point.

### *Upper Hamlet Leader and Resident*

- The Upper Hamlet residents are currently using the main spring and are concerned that there is insufficient water to allow use by the Lower Hamlet. Further, with the past orientation, they do not like changing how things have always been.
- Additional use of the spring for drinking and cooking could result in less water available for irrigation purposes.
- These villagers feel conflicted between treating water as a gift from God, for all, versus maintaining family usage of the spring.
- Maintaining a good relationship with Lower Hamlet is important as well.

#### *Lower Hamlet Leader and Resident*

- The Lower Hamlet residents are very concerned that they do not have enough water resources to maintain their way of life. They are not looking to develop further, but rather just want things to remain as they have in the past.
- There is a growing rumor in the Lower Hamlet that the springs are connected and that the landowner's growing cattle herd is using up too much water at the upper spring, thus decimating the lower spring.
- They are also concerned about the practicalities of using alternate springs that would require them to transport water long distances.
- All meeting attendees are of similar age and status and all speak out relatively equally after having internal discussions to come to consensus. It is difficult in this group to spot the leader.
- Regarding the ancestral conflict with the landowner, these residents genuinely believe that the cattle were provided by the grandfather as a payment for labor. Lower Hamlet ancestors supposedly helped to build the fencing that holds the cattle, and the landowner's grandfather provided 20 head of cattle as payment. At this point, there is no way to prove with certainty who is right.
- Maintaining a good relationship with the Upper Hamlet is important as well.

#### *Community Political Leader*

- The community political leader primarily wants to restore harmony within the community. He is concerned that unhappy citizens may begin to side with the scattered rebel forces.
- He is acknowledged but is more of a facilitator than leader as the hamlets and families are stronger than broader community ties.
- He frequently seems to change his position, siding with the lower hamlet residents at some times, but with the landowner at other times.

- At one point, he will argue that the lower hamlet residents should pursue another solution (e.g., use a spring farther away, which would increase the burden of transporting the water).
- At another point, he will argue that all should have equal access and that resources should be shared.

### *Spiritual Leader*

- The spiritual leader believes that water and all other resources come from God. She will frequently remind all parties of “the right ways” to behave and act.
- She tells stories/parables to make her points indirectly.
- She thinks land and water ownership are artificial.
- Her blessing basically thanks God for providing the shelter for the meeting and the sustenance that has allowed everyone at the meeting to be present.