How to do

Strengthen community-based natural resource management organizations

IFAD
Investing in rural people

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List of acronyms

CBNRMO	community-based natural resources management organization
IVPC	inter-village planning committee
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
NRM	natural resource management
SHG	self-help group
VPC	village planning committee
WUA	water user association

Introduction

Natural resources (land, water, forests, fisheries) are fundamental to the survival of rural people. The livelihoods of most poor people depend on agriculture, which in turn hinges on the continued productiveness of the land and availability of water resources. Land and water, in addition to forests, offer the compendium of ecological goods and services that smallholders in developing countries need for their economic development; they can also provide a safety net in times of crisis. These resources are also global public goods. Natural resources need to be managed sustainably not only on smallholder farms and in individual sectors (e.g. selected sources of water or forest reserves) but in the totality of ecosystems that support their existence (Figure 1).

Natural resources management (NRM) should therefore take into account the interests of all those who participate in, or are affected by, the management of a given common resource. Many NRM-related problems (e.g. water use, soil erosion and forest depletion) spread beyond the borders of an individual farm and can be found across several farms, villages or watersheds. This may have impacts at the global level in terms of greenhouse emissions, biodiversity loss and desertification. These shared problems require the collective action of farmers and other users to improve the management of common resources in the ecosystem.

Source: ICRAF

Figure 1. An illustration of a typical ecosystem

Community-based natural resources management organizations (CBNRMOs) provide an entry point to discuss and agree on the best approach to sustainably using a shared resource (Box 1 and Figure 2).

Box 1: What is a community-based natural resources management organization?

A community-based natural resources management organization (CBNRMO) is usually formed around the management of a specific common resource (fisheries, forests, land, rangeland, water body, wildlife). The membership of these organizations elects committees who represent them in the management of the resource according to an agreed set of rules.

Depending on the resource and the national legal framework, CBNRMOs are usually established in line with the legal framework and associated benefits. The structure, financial and human resources, and the rules defined will determine its effectiveness in important ways. The representatives, in consultation with the membership base, make decisions to coordinate the management of the shared resource (IFAD, 2012).

This How To Do Note provides basic principles to consider in providing support to set up or strengthen CBNRMOs. It also illustrates the process of facilitating the aggregation of NRM organizations around managing a common natural resource.

Key issues

Key constraints that need to be addressed during the design and implementation of projects to strengthen CBNRMOs and improve their management of natural resources include: weak governance; lack of financial and management capacity; underdeveloped human capital; and unfavourable policy environments.[1]

The challenge

In most cases, CBNRMOs do exist in IFAD project areas but are often informal. It is important to understand the prevailing local ownership and power structures, the decision-making rights and how existing local decision-making structures will be affected by introducing external support. Certain characteristics of the natural resources also need to be identified: are they public, private, common or open-access? Once a sound analysis has been conducted, its results need to be used effectively to guide the provision of external support in a way that facilitates gradual improvement in the structures and rules of CBNRMOs.

Opportunities

Projects should always take advantage of CBNRMOs already in existence rather than rushing to create new ones. If CBNRMO membership and practices are skewed towards the interests of local élites, strategies can be put in place to gradually address this imbalance. NRM usually takes ecosystem-based approaches, which often include galvanizing support beyond local powers and politics. Indeed, the results of managing ecosystems are often realized in the medium to long term. Because they are a public good, ecosystems may attract public funding and can be a unifying factor around a shared resource. This provides an opportunity for training initiatives to be better targeted to promote organizational change while encouraging local partnerships (Box 2).

Ecosystems level

Associations
- River user associations
- Watershed management associations
- Environmental management associations
- Ecosystem management associations

Farm-village level

Users' groups
- Water user groups (irrigation, etc.)
- Forest user groups
- Rangeland user groups,
  Environmental conservation groups

Figure 2. Types of community-based natural resources management organizations

Box 2: Kenya – Building strong water user associations

Over its seven years of operation, the IFAD-supported Mount Kenya East Pilot Project for Natural Resources Management mobilized and strengthened over 500 informal water user groups, which aggregated into 20 formal water user associations (WUAs). Each association is responsible for a portion of the river basin and consists of representatives from a range of user groups in different areas of the river basin.

WUA management committees facilitate negotiations between different water users, advise on the allocation of water permits in the basin, resolve conflicts and act as contact points for the relevant government ministries, service providers and their members. Members pay a membership fee for operational costs.

IFAD has facilitated the internal bonding process in water user groups, helping them build bridges with other groups and WUAs and promoting their linkages with government agencies and development actors. Some WUAs have started income-generating activities such as fish ponds and tree nurseries. One WUA, the Kiangondu Water User Association, has saved money and built a water bottling plant where water from the spring is bottled to be sold in the local market.

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[1] See Teaser: Strengthening Smallholder Institutions and Organizations.

The type of analysis described in How to Analyse and Develop the Social Capital of Smallholder Organizations can help understand why these organizations exist, what they are expected to manage (land, forests, water bodies, rangeland, irrigation assets, money, staff, partnerships, etc.) and the road map they have or should put in place to achieve identified objectives. Design teams and practitioners can facilitate CBNRMOs in operating according to the scale, type and nature of the resources being managed and their related income-generating potential, which also has a bearing on the success of these organizations.

Lessons from IFAD experiences

IFAD's experience has been accumulated through its support to NRM projects. A major lesson learned has been that a functionally sound and sustainable CBNRMO requires the participation of all the beneficiaries and support groups in a carefully thought through process that builds on legitimate local elements, is within the country's legal framework and ensures the continued interest of stakeholders (Box 3).

Box 3: Swaziland – Enabling local institutions to resolve land disputes

The IFAD-supported Lower Usuthu Smallholder Irrigation Project (LUSIP) has been working with chiefdom inner councils, which are responsible for dealing with land issues, such as disputes and land-use changes. The councils also help formulate the chiefdom development plans to promote the commercialization and intensification of agriculture. The underlying constraint that most chiefdoms faced was lack of equitable access to irrigable land. The participatory planning process brought this constraint to the fore and created awareness among the traditional leadership.

As a result, action was taken to ensure that all project participants had access to irrigable land. In the few cases where this was not feasible, the coucils developed (and continue to develop) strategies to ensure that participants benefit from the project through other activities. Furthermore, the involvement of the traditional authorities and other local institutions in the planning and implementation processes has ensured that the poor and vulnerable groups in the project area are the lead participants in the development process. The use of chiefdom development plans, which were successfully incorporated into LUSIP, is now being scaled up and integrated into the work of the new Ministry of Tinkhundla Administration and Development.

In most successful cases, key lessons that stand out and must be built into project design are that it is useful to adopt a "bottom-up" approach based on basic principles (Boxes 4 and 5) and to aim for widespread awareness and inclusive representation of all community groups, achieved through a locally accepted and transparent election process. It is also important to build partners' understanding of the underlying causes of vulnerability, including climate risk. As in all community activities, incentives are a natural need but it is up to the facilitators to analyse suggestions and agree on those that are realistic and within the means of the group. Any support offered must benefit the entire target group or a large part of it.

Box 4: The Philippines – Northern Mindanao Community Initiatives and Resource Management Project

This project mobilized the support of informally organized coastal communities to work with the Mabahin Woodcraft Multi-Purpose Cooperative. Linking the communities to the formal cooperative was essential in enabling them to manage a marine protected area effectively and at the same time address coastal degradation.

The project was also successful in strengthening the self-governance capabilities of indigenous groups such as the Higaunon and has facilitated the drafting of guidelines for tribal representation in local legislative councils and in special local bodies. In addition, the project supported self-help groups (SHGs) by setting up a poverty alleviation fund in various municipalities to provide seed money and credit.

Box 5: Morocco – Community-based range management

IFAD pioneered community-based range management through an innovative approach to managing rangeland in which local communities steer the process based on the following:

- Rural communes and tribal affiliation are the basis for the creation of cooperatives.

- Tribal institutions are reorganized into pastoral management cooperatives that are responsible for choosing technology options and managing their resources.

- Tribal members are required to purchase "social shares" in the cooperatives to become members and access cooperative services and improved pastures.

- The project does not settle pastoralists, but rather promotes their mobility according to new and flexible livestock management systems The project promotes consensual decision-making processes with beneficiaries.

Results:

- The project created 44 cooperatives (29 per cent above the target), involving 9,000 households in 15 rural communes.

- The project had a positive impact on: the environment, by increasing dry matter from 150 kg per hectare to 800 kg per hectare; the nomadic pastoral system, by reducing the distances of transhumance; and animal health, by delivering health and veterinary services.

- All new range development efforts in Morocco are now being implemented using the community-based approach, given the good results. The approach is also being adopted by other countries in the region.

Main lessons learned:

- Tribal-based cooperatives have demonstrated that it is possible to build on existing informal, social-institutional systems to foster collective action and sustainable resource management.

- Adopting appropriate technical options and creating the proper legal and institutional framework are critical to the success of innovative approaches.

Key principles for consideration in supporting community-based natural resources management organizations

The structure of the CBNRMO representing users of a common resource should facilitate the making of collective decisions and be such that it has the power to enforce decisions made. However, there must also be incentives for users to adhere to the by-laws they establish in managing the shared resource. The CBNRMO should ensure that its actions lead to benefit streams for resource users. Below are several key principles that should be borne in mind when supporting the establishment of a CBNRMO. Ideally, these principles should be enshrined in the CBNRMO's constitution to ensure that the organization is effective and able to fulfil its obligations, which may vary between programmes and countries.

- **Mandate**. Whether formal or informal, the organization should have a mandate setting out why it exists and what it manages (land, forests, water bodies, rangeland, irrigation assets, including money, staff, partnerships, etc.). It should also have a clearly stated goal and objectives and an operational plan to achieve them.

- **Representation**. Membership eligibility and size should be decided by the community. It is essential to have a system of representation that sanctions all users to consult the organization and present their interests. Users need to be represented by someone they trust and respect, who is also sensitive to gender balance.

- **Operational procedures**. There must be an operational set of policies and procedures to mediate processes such as decision-making, planning, electing representatives, feedback mechanisms, finance planning and management, reporting and sustainability (recurrent costs for services the organization provides to its members). The elected representatives should be accountable to the membership and the procedures must ensure that the membership can enforce this accountability. There should also be clarity on how the procedures can be modified if necessary.
The actions of a CBNRMO's elected officers should always be open and visible to its members. While a CBNRMO may regularly report to its members, openness and clarity about its operations and any decisions taken allow all members to have trust and confidence in the organization at all times. Remember that "transparency" can be locality-specific.

- **Partnerships**. Operational procedures should allow for the effective promotion of partnerships. Because natural resources are a public good, partnerships between CBNRMOs and local/regional government departments, NGOs and private-sector operators are important to enhance performance and the likelihood of success.

- **Value added.** Effective CBNRMOs should ensure that they illustrate a clear connection between management of the resource and the benefits generated by the management activities. In other words, gains derived from the use of the resource must be shown to directly benefit the organization and its members.

- **Clear roles and responsibilities**. It is important to have all roles and responsibilities within the organization clearly established and accepted. This includes the participation of all members and other stakeholders, such as traditional authorities, land boards or regional councils. This is instrumental in gaining and maintaining support to ensure that the organization has its due authority, credibility and legitimacy. Regular communication between stakeholders, especially the poorer and more marginalized individuals and households, is important.

Guidance for design/implementation

While the nature of a CBNRMO will vary depending on the resource in question (land, rangeland, forests, water, environment), the step-wise process presented in Figure 3 leads to the establishment and operationalization of a new CBNRMO.

Project design teams and project implementers will have to decide which specific steps/principles can be applied to existing CBNRMOs based on the type of resource and their strengths and weaknesses identified through a sound analysis (e.g. irrigation WUAs grouped around irrigation assets).

Step 1: Mobilizing grass-roots resource user groups at the village level

Mobilization of communities, which is the initial stage, contributes to making sure that there is no (or minimal) elite capture of the resources in question or the benefits that accrue to the organization. It enables members and other stakeholders to openly discuss and understand the potential benefits of managing the resources and to ensure their sustainable use. Unless the organization is being set up from scratch, each CBNRMO will have site-specific needs at this stage. For existing organizations, we need to determine which steps are applicable, based on a careful analysis. The following activities can be selectively carried out, according to need.
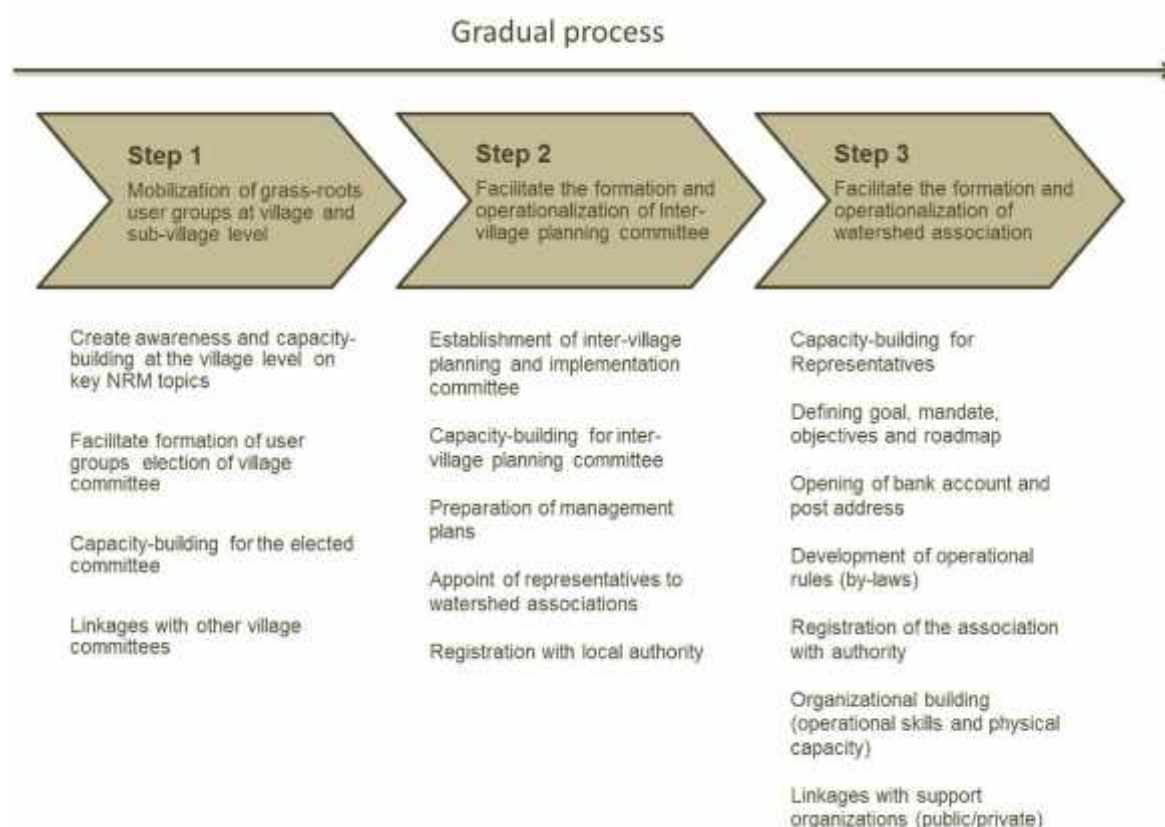
Gradual process

Step 1
Mobilization of grass-roots user groups at village and sub-village level

Create awareness and capacity-building at the village level on key NRM topics

Facilitate formation of user groups election of village committee

Capacity-building for the elected committee

Linkages with other village committees

Step 2
Facilitate the formation and operationalization of Inter-village planning committee

Establishment of inter-village planning and implementation committee

Capacity-building for inter-village planning committee

Preparation of management plans

Appoint of representatives to watershed associations

Registration with local authority

Step 3
Facilitate the formation and operationalization of watershed association

Capacity-building for Representatives

Defining goal, mandate, objectives and roadmap

Opening of bank account and post address

Development of operational rules (by-laws)

Registration of the association with authority

Organizational building (operational skills and physical capacity)

Linkages with support organizations (public/private)

Figure 3. Process of strengthening community-based natural resources management organizations

Create awareness

Awareness needs to be created at the village level on topics such as the following:

- the contribution of natural resources (land, forests, water body, wildlife, river basin, etc.) to villagers' livelihoods

- changing trends in the availability of natural resources, conflicts[2] and the likely situation in the future

- opportunities for improving the current situation (such as group/organization formation and development, improved management of the soil, water, vegetation, agroforestry and other natural resources)

- the best options under local conditions, such as joint management with access rights to land, forests, rangeland and water resources

- the need for an NRM plan[3]

- who is best placed to guide the implementation of the options identified

- the way forward based on what is agreed upon.

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[2] Conflicts can be a sensitive topic and may require separate discussion.
[3] See Annex 1 for the key elements of an NRM plan.

Find out from local (e.g. school teacher) or non-local (e.g. NGO staff) resource persons where best to organize awareness-creation sessions (e.g. during a village assembly, market day).

The outputs of awareness creation

- A common understanding of how actively participating in a CBNRMO can unlock the income-generating potential of natural resources and how both individual households and the local environment can benefit from this.

- An awareness of the challenges, the solutions and the tasks that need to be performed to sustainably manage the shared resources, together with an ability to identify potential candidates to perform the tasks identified and establish linkages with other villages.

Facilitate training of resource user organizations

It is essential to create a suitable body or organization that will be able to exercise formal and/or customary rights over the natural resources. The organization must be empowered to take, and enforce, all key decisions required for its running. Members of the organization using the resources must elect representatives to carry out certain functions on their behalf. Representatives must be accountable to the membership.

The membership must be involved in key decisions to do with the running of the organization. The roles and responsibilities that members, elected representatives and other stakeholders have in decision-making must be clearly spelled out. This should ensure that the organization's operations reflect good governance and are transparent, and that communication is effective. Other key training activities include:

- team building within the user organization on the need for each member to play their assigned role in management that is based on the understanding that an improved natural resource base is the foundation for improved economic and social conditions over the long term

- basic training in natural resource/watershed development planning

- formulating criteria/procedures for sharing benefits among members of the user organization

- developing rules/criteria for accessing, managing and governing any financial resources mobilized by the user organization

- preparing an NRM plan at the user organization level.[4]

The output of formation and training

User organizations understand the importance of common resources and their rights to the resources, and are ready to participate in the design and implementation of NRM plans.

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[4] See Annex 1 for a framework for preparing an NRM plan.

Facilitate the election of village committees (elected by user organizations)

When all village user groups have agreed that a small number of representatives should be responsible for the planning and implementation of potential NRM activities, it is essential to agree on a management and communication structure and on the best way of electing/selecting representatives (Box 6).

A participatory approach should be used to identify criteria for the election of village committee officers. For example, selection criteria may include the following:

- respectability within the village

- charisma and family consideration

- availability and accessibility

- honesty and level-headedness

- knowledge of management and use of natural resources

- full-time resident of the village community.

To ensure that representation is inclusive, the following aspects should also be considered:

- gender balance, in view of the use made of the natural resources

- youth representation, for the same reason as above

- representation by population group or village hamlet (e.g. ethnic groups, tribe, clan, caste)

- literacy level of representatives, who need to be able to communicate well and draw support from outside the village, etc.

Box 6. Peru – Empowering rural peoples' organizations to manage local resources

The IFAD-supported project in Puno-Cusco Corredor in Peru has shown that transferring decision-making power and control over project resources to rural communities leads to multiple benefits such as increased incomes, assets and confidence, and trained local service providers who are better able to respond to rural communities' needs. The project's innovative technology competitions between communities are an effective way to encourage better resource management and sharing of ideas. And involving rural poor people in all stages of project planning and implementation legitimizes their perceptions and needs, creates realistic expectations and reduces controversy.

The technical assistance market in the region was strengthened in response to demand (greater capacity and willingness to pay, new capacities for selecting, hiring and evaluating) and supply (increased technical capacity, new service providers). The competition system (*concursos*) proved a highly efficient means of channelling locally available resources to motivated and organized stakeholders and of drawing rural communities into participating in policymaking processes

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The output of elections

A resource management structure is set up and a representative village natural resources management committee is elected with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Support capacity-building for the elected committee

- Train the committee in basic practical NRM skills and best practices, for example:

    - how to manage the process of developing a consolidated village NRM plan

    - how to prioritize key elements of a consolidated village-level NRM plan as opposed to an organization or farm-level plan (for thematic plans – soil and water conservation, tree planting, etc. – check whether national-level guidance exists; also check against other plans that may exist at the municipal level or above, such as land-use plans)

    - natural resource tenure arrangements and alternative conflict resolution techniques.

- Train committee members to undertake their roles and responsibilities, which include:

    - leadership training for the elected board

    - harmonizing all user organization plans into a consolidated village NRM plan

    - supervising implementation of planned activities as per the village NRM plan

    - bringing together all community members for full participation

    - mobilizing community participation in decision-making and labour provision

    - mobilizing and recording resources contributed by the community

    - ensuring that interventions are relevant in terms of the community's NRM needs

    - managing records, reports, minutes and contributions from the community

    - identifying, addressing and/or seeking advice on emerging implementation challenges

    - convening community review meetings, as required

    - ensuring that issues concerning gender, poverty and vulnerable people are mainstreamed into activities

    - providing good leadership to the community on NRM issues

    - mobilizing funds from within and outside the community, e.g. through proposal writing

    - developing rules/criteria for benefit-sharing between groups in the village

    - developing rules/criteria for access, managing and governing any financial resources mobilized by the committee

    - networking and collaborating with other stakeholders

    - providing oversight of user organizations' performance and ensuring that they meet regularly

    - applying basic principles of monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

    - establishing an oversight subcommittee

    - setting up community-based procurement, service delivery and contract monitoring

    - holding service providers accountable.

- Facilitate exchange visits between neighbouring village committees to build bridges that will facilitate organization at the higher watershed/landscape (municipal/district) level.

- Create linkages with support agencies such as government agencies, other CBNRMOs, NGOs and private-sector actors.

- Facilitate regular meetings to discuss new issues and review progress, and provide feedback in the implementation of village NRM plans.

- Facilitate the election of a representative to the inter-village planning committee (IVPC).

The output of capacity-building

Competent committee members, a village-level NRM plan owned by all user organizations and stakeholders concerned, and good working relationships between user organizations and elected representatives.

Box 7. Local land management institutions for flood recession agriculture in Maghama, Mauritania

When IFAD sought to support the Government of Mauritania in improving irrigation in the *walo* (the flood recession farming area), a major risk identified was that IFAD's main target groups would end up not benefiting from the newly built infrastructure. The loan agreement for the Maghama Improved Flood Recession Farming Project (PACDM), therefore, included a covenant aimed at resolving the "skewed" nature of existing land tenure arrangements through an institutional innovation. The innovation is called the "land tenure agreement" (*entente foncière*) and provides for a revised agreement between families with strong land rights (*dieye* and *diengué*) and families with only weak entitlements (*loubal, rempetienne* and *ndiouldy*), often migrants who have arrived in the area relatively more recently.

PACDM initiated a process of setting up village planning committees (VPCs) entrusted with signing new land tenure agreements on behalf of their respective communities. Committees of notables were then included to mediate in any conflicts that may arise, facilitate the implementation of the land tenure agreements and of project activities, and supervise the VPCs.

Although the traditional élite continues to enjoy priority rights of access to land, water and other natural resources, underprivileged segments of rural society are increasingly able to voice their concerns and ensure that action is taken to accommodate them. Since the VPCs include elected representatives (chosen by consensus at village assemblies) and transparent "rules of the game", their operations have increasingly become influenced by new categories of stakeholders, including women, young people and other groups with a much weaker social status. Many more formerly landless and vulnerable individuals and families than had been the case without the *entente foncière* have thus been able to gain access to valuable irrigated land in Maghama.

Support the formation of linkages between village planning committees

Linkages between village planning committees (VPCs) are important in enabling a decision-making mechanism to be set up to deal with issues that cut across the entire watershed or affect all villages. This type of coordination mechanism helps make choices that are socially, environmentally and economically sound (Box 7). It also allows for possible conflict resolution and takes into account the fact that across a watershed the level of empowerment of communities may be uneven (e.g. downstream users may be more economically powerful than upstream users, mining companies may be more powerful than the village as a whole). Support in setting up this mechanism is critical for the following reasons:

- It facilitates support and collaboration among the VPCs in a watershed or ecosystem and encourages them to provide input and to commit to sharing resources and knowledge in the implementation of NRM plans.

- It liaises with local and traditional authorities to mobilize their support in implementing NRM plans and keeps them posted on any organized events and scheduled meetings.

- It encourages VPCs to give feedback to the authorities and keep the subregional and regional governments informed of the process.

- It also establishes an agreed method of sharing information and networking between the VPCs.

The output of support in establishing inter-village linkages

A coordination mechanism that ensures harmonization/consolidation of a watershed NRM action plan, with input from all VPCs and key stakeholders.

Step 2: Establishing the Inter-Village Planning Committee

Facilitate the establishment of an inter-village planning committee

Once linkages have been formed/strengthened between the VPCs, they can be institutionalized through the establishment of an inter-village planning committee (IVPC). The membership of the IVPC is drawn from representatives of the VPCs and other key stakeholders in the resource area. A transparent process needs to be put in place for electing the committee and included in its by-laws (using the same criteria as VPC elections). The IPVC should be answerable to the village-level committees and key stakeholders in the area where the resource is located. It is a crucial entity that helps:

- set priorities for inter-village NRM plans

- pursue linkages with local government and other players at the provincial/district/municipality level

- convene annual meetings of the village-level committees and key stakeholders to review progress in the implementation of village NRM plans.

The output of facilitating the establishment of an inter-village planning committee

- A competent inter-village planning committee (IPVC)

- Natural resources management (NRM) plans

- Activity plans

- Elected representatives on the watershed/ecosystem/environment committees

- A registration certificate for the IPVC

Strengthen the skills and increase the understanding of the role of inter-village planning committees

The committee members need to be trained in:

- validating and harmonizing priorities of the NRM plans of all villages

- how to develop and update inter-village action plans

- how to supervise implementation of watershed-level action plans

- how to link the IPVC to the activities of local authorities

- how to register the IVPC with the local authorities

- leadership and teamwork skills

- understanding their roles and responsibilities

- understanding the basics of existing NRM and environmental laws (e.g. water, land, forestry and rangeland acts) and developing new ones

- electing representatives to the watershed association committee.

Step 3: Forming and operationalizing the natural resource management apex organization

Form a watershed/ecosystem committee

The apex organization – the watershed/ecosystem committee – will represent all direct users of the resources to be managed (through village organizations and other stakeholders). This committee is elected according to the same criteria as the inter-village planning committee. It is responsible for dealing with problems at the watershed/ecosystem level and for finding local solutions for local problems, which can include the following:

- indiscriminate deforestation to create farm and settlement land, fuelwood and construction materials
- declining crop productivity due to poor soil fertility
- conflicts between and within communities
- gender inequality
- poor governance and policy processes harmful to the environment
- low investments in and/or budgetary allocations for NRM and poor accountability
- poor social infrastructure, inadequate extension services and poor access to NRM information.

Strengthen the skills and increase the understanding of the role of the watershed/ecosystem committee

To perform these tasks, members of the apex organization – the watershed/ecosystem committee – will need enhanced knowledge and skills in several areas, including:

- environmental law (e.g. forestry, land tenure, water, wildlife acts)
- knowledge sharing/brokerage platforms for several apex entities (e.g. environmental conservation associations, forest associations, irrigation WUAs, nature associations, rangeland associations, regional land coalitions)
- developing a constitution for the apex organization
- opening a bank account
- developing operational rules (e.g. by-laws)
- registering the association with local authorities
- creating and strengthening linkages with support organizations
- identifying sources of funding for the association, such as donor funding, and linkages with local government, NGOs and the private sector, local contributions and levies, and rental of assets owned
- facilitating regular meetings.

The output of facilitating the formation and operationalization of NRM apex organizations

A registered apex committee with a constitution and operational plans; resource users deriving benefit streams from resources that are sustainably managed.

Monitoring

The project management unit staff and appropriate staff of implementation partners and committees at each CBNRMO level should be responsible for monitoring capacity strengthening using defined indicators to track their own progress towards reaching the desired goals. Monitoring can be carried out at two levels (project and organization) using indicators that measure achievements and change at three levels: output, outcome and impact.

At the CBNRMO level:

- Outputs such as "the number of CBNRMO members trained" can be applied to capacity-strengthening activities. The data collected during the programme inception analyses should feed into the baseline. At the organization level, outputs can easily be measured by simple counts, such as the number of members/committees completing training, the number of meetings being held and the number of times minutes of meetings are produced.

- Outcomes – and impacts – can be difficult to demonstrate in terms of proving that they derive directly from institutional or organizational strengthening. It is, therefore, wiser to aim at showing (through plausible association rather than full attribution) how capacity strengthening contributes to certain effects. At the outcome level, it is possible to show how members' attitudes towards each other change and management practices improve in the short or medium term. To track these elements, you would need to ask questions such as:

    - Do the trained members of the organization demonstrate the necessary skills to achieve the desired objectives as defined in the NRM plan?

    - Do members say that they have improved their understanding of NRM issues and that the procedures/by-laws they have put in place to implement the NRM plan are being followed by all members and association committees in their assigned roles?

    - Are members satisfied with the new/modified way of working together within their organization and with other organizations in their village and other villages? Is increased collaboration leading to increased coordination and, therefore, more effective NRM? Is there an increase in cohesion and trust and a decrease in conflicts?

At the impact level:

The outcomes should, in turn, be shown to be contributing to impacts, which can include enhanced livelihoods, decreased poverty and vulnerability, decreased rate of deforestation, better nutrition and improved individual and family well-being, including biophysical impacts at the ecosystem level.

At the programme/project level:

- Specific quantitative indicators are expected to be used at the output level, while at the outcome level it is useful to include comprehensive qualitative and maturity indicators in the areas of governance, management, leadership, capacity-building mechanisms and resilience that can be tracked every two or three years.[5]

Relevant indicators should be listed in the logframe. The design baseline is a useful indication of the extent to which the outputs are *really* contributing to changes in individual attitudes/mindsets in the organizational structure and how all of this contributes to the improved functioning of systems (decision-making, procurement, financial management, communication and service delivery).

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[5] See (i) How to Analyse and Develop the Social Capital of Smallholder Organizations and (ii) A Field Practitioners Toolkit: Institutional and Organizational Analysis and Capacity Strengthening (2014), for a sample of maturity indicators.

Examples of indicators that have been used successfully

Governance

- There is a constitution and by-laws, and collectively-owned assets are managed according to the provisions contained in them.
- There are provisions for the participation of all members in decision-making and managing jointly-owned assets.
- Clear (written) provisions on decision-making authority..

Management

- Rules and procedures are enforced through regular meetings and the constitution/by-laws.
- Financial, physical and human resources are available.
- If conflicts arise, they are resolved through meetings and the application of the constitution/by-laws, regardless of who is involved.
- There are partnerships with other organizations and they include exchanges relating to coordination, training, financial support and capacity-building.
- Lessons are shared within the organization through farmer-to-farmer exchange/contact, workshops, seminars and exchange visits, and methodologies take into account requirements of women, youth and indigenous and tribal peoples and other traditionally excluded groups.

Leadership

- Leaders are elected democratically and there is an acceptable turnover.
- Leaders participate in meetings and activities and mobilize members to participate in meetings, training and activities.
- The participation of members is sanctioned by the constitution/by-laws and promoted through transparency and by attributing of benefits according to the contributions of members.
- Members respect regulations and sanctions.
- There is no evidence that some members would be entirely excluded from consideration or otherwise discriminated against (with respect to regulations/leadership positions).

Capacity-building mechanisms

- Lessons are shared with other smallholders through exchange visits, field days and public meetings.
- Members' skills are identified and used in the organizations.
- The organization establishes partnerships with local government, NGOs and research institutions.
- Members and the wider community view the SIOs as positively contributing to their empowerment and life improvement.

Resilience

- Institutional knowledge is accumulated through record keeping, group visits, group activities and training.
- A constitution, the organization's registered status and an updated workplan and budget enhance capacity to uptake opportunities.
- The organization actively tries to add value to its products and activities through training, technologies and resource mobilization.

There will also be technical areas of interest for M&E, depending on the nature and level of the organization (village, inter-village or apex) or focus of the committees, such as proper functioning of the water rationing/abstraction system put in place by a WUA. Ultimately, it is useful to show how improving the efficiency of CBNRMOs contributes to outcomes and impact: increased benefit streams (e.g. improved incomes and gender equality) for association membership; more participation in policy-shaping; and increased crop/livestock assets, including biophysical impacts at the ecosystem level.

Conclusions and strategic recommendations

- The publication How to Analyse and Develop the Social Capital of Smallholder Organizations can be used to carry out an inventory of existing organizations in the project area, including an assessment of their maturity status.

- These assessments can provide the basis for determining the scope of support required for existing CBNRMOs and for creating new organizations from scratch.

- There should be a demand-driven focus, with self-selection of organization members being encouraged rather than members and sites being selected by the project.

- Cohesiveness and trust are prerequisites to facilitating the creation or strengthening of a CBNRMO.

- It is critical to ensure participation that really counts: focus on the quality of individual members' participation in group activities and of group participation in ecosystem and resource management activities rather than on the number of groups.

- Always be mindful of the process of training and spend more time developing a collective culture.

Frequently asked questions

1. What is a CBNRMO? (Box 1)

2. How do I prepare a NRM plan? (Annex 1)

3. What makes a good facilitator of grass-roots institutional and organizational analysis and strengthening?

    "A good grass-roots organizational facilitator assists as a "catalyst" in organizational strengthening processes. He/she is an organizational promoter who coordinates the capacity-building processes through which groups receive both soft skills and technical skills. He/she facilitates the needs analysis and coordinates delivery of capacity strengthening skills in: leadership, good governance, planning for sustainability, communication, management, basic problem solving, resource mobilization and partnership building skills He/she brokers links between organizations and other development/service provision actors (private sector, government/NGO development services). He/she should understand the use of a mix of capacity-building methods including: coaching, mentoring, on-the-job training and process advisory."

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Annex 1: A framework for preparing an NRM plan

An NRM plan should specify the interventions to be carried out by the CBNRMO to fulfil its mandate in managing the common natural resource. The plan should also link to other important activities undertaken by the CBNRMO. Participatory methods[6] are extremely useful in that they enable community representatives and other stakeholders to contribute to the management planning process and provide accessible information and ideas for use at the grass-roots level. Ensure that the plan uses visual tools and simple illustration; use maps, posters and charts, where necessary. These tools may then prove to be useful for monitoring progress.

Make sure the framework is accessible to all committee and organization members. For operational purposes, this plan should inform the action plans of organizations and the project's annual workplans/budgets, in addition to the monitoring process. The plan should be clear on what should be done at the different levels (farm, landscape, ecosystem) and how it should be done. The key elements of the NRM plan include:

- **A goal**. Establish a common understanding of the value of the common resource within and among organizations in the villages concerned. This will form the basis of proposed management actions.

- **Objectives**. All stakeholders and committees at the village and higher levels must agree on concrete management objectives and desired outcomes.

  The land-use option plan. This is a mechanism for zoning locations based on criteria that allow for different user types in different parts of the watershed ecosystem. Its advantages include the following:

    - It helps to reconcile competing conservation and development objectives (especially when dealing with cross-border issues), while maximizing benefits that can be derived from using the resource.

    - It facilitates comparison among alternative scenarios, which is instrumental in selecting realistic proposals.

    - It allows specific risks associated with land, resettlement or environmental damage to be integrated into the main plan and supports measures designed and managed in consultation with communities affected.

- **Activity plans and road map**. Precise action plans and road maps should be prepared and a realistic time frame should be agreed on:

    - Activities should be specific for each zoned location, setting out the desired outcomes and targets to be achieved over defined time periods. The level of detail of the plan and its complexity should be commensurate with the risks, impacts and opportunities specific to the project area.

    - Considering that some community members are disadvantaged and more vulnerable than others, the plan can clarify the need for differentiated measures so that groups are not disproportionately affected in the sharing of benefits and opportunities.

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[6] Participatory mapping methodology developed by IFAD (www.ifad.org/pub/map/pm_ii.pdf) and others such as participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques.

- The dynamic nature of projects and the implementation process needs to be taken into account. The plan should be flexible and responsive to changes in project circumstances, unforeseen events, regulatory changes, climate change impacts, environmental and climate shocks, etc.

- **Define an implementation approach.** Ensure that activities are sequenced to show which ones should be implemented in the short, medium and long term, hence providing the necessary interface between long-term priorities and the routine annual workplan and budgeting exercise.

    - Establish a clear understanding on the part of all stakeholders of who plays what role within the established CBNRMO structure.

    - Incorporate the necessary organizational capacity (including further training requirements) to address and manage the environmental and social risks that may occur during the implementation period.

    - Provide clarity on lines of communication and authority in implementation of action plans. Key performance indicators should be set and the milestones agreed on, as well as supervision routines and measures to be employed in case of non-compliance with agreed actions.

- **Procedures.** Agree on procedures and by-laws to establish what can and cannot be done in different parts of the watershed (e.g. stakeholder participation in plan development, screening for environmental and social impacts, including for subprojects, timely information disclosure, "chance-find" procedures, dam safety) The procedures and by-laws should be strictly enforced by the CBNRMO in collaboration with local authorities. The procedures should also comply with IFAD requirements for assessing and managing environmental risk. Chance-find procedures should be included in the plan, particularly in an area where tangible cultural heritage is likely to be found.

- **Subprojects.** These lay out proposals to be undertaken privately or through public funding.