

## COMMUNITY VISIONING



**Community land protection efforts did not originally include a community visioning process; this important step was added in order to:**

- Support communities to recognize and reflect on how their community's relationship to its lands and natural resources has changed over time;
- Raise awareness of increasing natural resource scarcity and the long-term consequences of unsustainable natural resource use;
- Motivate communities to undertake and complete the community land protection process;
- Empower communities to strengthen their land governance as well as manage and use their lands and natural resources equitably and sustainably; and
- Create a united sense of purpose and mission to work collaboratively toward shared goals.

Beginning community land protection work with a visioning process significantly increases community motivation. It also helps to place community goals and plans at the center of the community land protection process, and supports communities to ask: once our lands are secure, how do we want to shape the course of our own development and future prosperity?

### HOW TO FACILITATE A COMMUNITY VISIONING EXERCISE?

It is best to undertake this activity during facilitators' first or second community land protection meeting. The process generally takes 2-3 hours.

Do not facilitate a vision exercise with only a few leaders: the exercise is most effective when at least 100-200 community members – or a very high percentage of the community's households – actively take part. It is important that the community visioning meeting is well attended because it helps to set the tone for the rest of the work. Ensure that leaders, elders, women, youth, minority groups and all other community stakeholders are present and participate actively in the discussion.

While it is better to undertake this activity in one large group, in some contexts women will not speak freely in front of men. In such situations it may be more effective to divide the community into two groups of men and women (keeping youth with elders). If so, schedule time to reconvene, report back and combine the men's and women's visions into one community-wide vision.

### ORIGIN STORIES

Many communities have complex and ancient stories about how the community was created. Discussing a community's history helps people to understand the importance of protecting lands and natural resources. If time allows, invite the community to tell the story of how it came to be – elders frequently have the most knowledge on this subject. This exercise roots the community in its history and its unity, and serves as a good starting point for the visioning process.

**Step 1: Remembering the past.** Ask community members to describe what their lands, natural resources and community relations were like in the past, 50 years ago, when today's elders were children. Ask community members to share their memories with the group. Write down what people say. Make sure to give everyone a turn to speak – elders tend to become very animated during these discussions, while young people may be prompted to share what their grandparents have told them about the past. Some questions to motivate discussion might include:

- How were community lands used and managed 50 years ago?
- What resources and materials did women, men, girls, and boys gather from the common land?
- How abundant were these natural resources?
- How did people live and work together within the community?
- Were there any cultural activities or festivals that took place on your common areas?
- How long did it take to gather resources like firewood and water?
- How did the community make decisions? How were they enforced?
- How did youth come to learn about customary ways?
- What did community members care about most? What were their priorities?

**Step 2: Reflecting on the present.** Ask community members to consider what their lands, natural resources and community relations are like today. Some questions to motivate discussion might include:

- How are your community's lands being used now?
- Has there been a change in the availability or abundance of resources that men, women, boys, and girls gather from the common lands?
- How do people live and work together within the community? How do men and women treat each other? How do neighbors treat one another?
- How does your community make decisions about lands and natural resources today? How are decisions and rules enforced? Are leaders managing the communal land well? Does this management have good results?
- How do youth learn about your culture and customary ways?

- What do community members care about most? What are their priorities?
- Are you happy with the current situation? What is working well? What is not working well?

### DEALING WITH ACCUSATIONS

Reflections on the present or likely future may prompt people to blame specific community members for problems. People may stand and point fingers or make accusations. Facilitators should intervene and explain that it is not a specific individual or family that has caused the problems, but a lack of good governance and well-known rules. Facilitators can remind community members that in a few weeks they will begin to work on rules for land and natural resources management, which will help to address current challenges.

**Step 3: Envisioning the likely future.** Next, ask community members what their lands and natural resources/community relations will be like 50 years from now, for their grandchildren, if things continue as they are today. Invite the participants to close their eyes to really “see” the vision in their minds. Give people some time to think about this – do not rush this step.

Ask people to share what they saw as the likely future. Write down what people say. Some questions to motivate discussion might include:

- What will be the availability of your lands and natural resources?
- Where will people get their food, building materials, water, and fuel?
- How will people interact and live together?
- How will people be making their livelihood?
- Who will be practicing customary cultures and traditions?
- How do you feel about your grandchildren living in this kind of situation?

When participants transition from remembering the past to envisioning the likely future, the general mood may shift from happy nostalgia to sorrow and fear. If people become upset, emphasize that while the current situation may seem bad, there is still a way to change things to ensure a prosperous, thriving future for their children and grandchildren. Facilitators should aim to transform the gravity of the current situation into determination to protect community lands, resources, traditions and culture.

**Allow moments of silence to be turning points.** Sometimes, a community will fall into a serious silence in this moment. Let them sit in silence with this feeling for a few moments to let it sink in. This is a powerful moment in some communities and should be handled carefully and with compassion.

**Step 4: Envisioning the desired future.** Ask community members to close their eyes a second time, and to dream about the world they would wish for their grandchildren to have in 20 or 50 years from now. Again, allow a few minutes to think about this silence, then ask people to share their visions. Write down everything people say on large pieces of paper. Some questions to motivate discussion might include:

- What does the community look like? What does the landscape look like? What is the quality of the water, soil and air? What resources are available?
- Who manages and uses the community's natural resources?
- What kinds of infrastructure or public services exist in the community?
- How do neighbors treat one another?
- How do schools look? How do children learn about your culture and customs?
- What kinds of markets, cultural festivals, and events take place in your community?
- How are sick people cared for?
- What kinds of livelihoods will people have? How will the community prosper?

**Step 5. Link the visioning exercise with the community land protection work.** End the exercise with clear next steps, beginning with protecting community lands. Remind everyone of the steps in the community land protection process and describe how each step will strengthen the community's ability to achieve its vision. For example, creating clear rules for the use and management of natural resources like thatch, wood, and water will help to make sure that they are available for future generations. Support community members to brainstorm other actions that they could begin — alongside community land protection efforts — to start moving toward their vision, such as revitalizing community dance performances or planting trees. Some questions to motivate discussion might include:

- What needs to happen in order to reach your community's future vision?
- What kinds of local projects can community members take to start achieving your goals? What projects must be part of a longer-term plan?
- How will you involve everyone in making the community a better place?

When the meeting is over, take photographs of all of the notes for record keeping and leave the original notes with the community for its records. Suggest that the community post the description of the final vision somewhere that all community members can view it, so that the vision can serve as an ongoing reminder of the goals of protecting their community lands.

#### **“VISION BEARERS”**

Sometimes leaders begin to feel a natural ownership of the community land protection process when they realize its potential to offer lasting solutions to community challenges. To encourage their leadership during the community land protection process, facilitators might suggest that as leaders, they are the “vision-bearers” of their communities, responsible for helping the community to move toward their shared vision.

## NOTES