

INTEGRATING LIVELIHOOD SUPPORTS



Community members repeatedly voice concerns about livelihoods and local economic development throughout the community land protection process. These concerns tend to follow three main trends:

1. Community members who practice certain specific livelihoods related to natural resources extraction (alluvial mining, charcoal making, logging, etc.) become concerned that the community's new rules will significantly obstruct their ability to continue their livelihoods, and argue against by-laws meant to ensure sustainable natural resources use.
2. Community members who doubt the degree to which they will be able to leverage resources, capital, and opportunities to join local economies, build small businesses, and create their own local jobs and enterprises remain focused on attracting an investor who will bring jobs and opportunities into the community from outside.
3. Community members keen to start their own business enterprises, grow their businesses, or increase their access to capital, transport systems, and distribution networks may pressure facilitators to help them to realize these goals, asking "So now our lands are protected – so what? We are still poor."

These concerns and questions deserve thoughtful, careful answers. One option is for facilitating organizations to incorporate trainings and other supports designed to strengthen livelihoods and local economies into the community land protection process.

WHY ARE LIVELIHOOD SUPPORTS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF COMMUNITY LAND PROTECTION EFFORTS?

Sustainable, thriving livelihoods are central to the long-term protection of community lands. When community members are able to create prosperous local livelihoods, they may:

- **Build local businesses, rather than seek to attract outside investors:** Livelihood supports and access to credit provide alternatives to external investments, giving communities the freedom to reject potential investments on the grounds that "we can profit more from using this land productively ourselves than leasing it to an investor." In contrast, if there are few local prospects for prosperous livelihoods, communities may welcome an investment that provides jobs but ultimately reduces community prosperity and wellness over time. A sense of desperation or lack of employment options can reduce communities' bargaining power with potential investors and fracture communities, pitting community members concerned about the proposed investment's negative environmental impacts against others who believe that the external investment will bring much-needed jobs. Unscrupulous investors are aware of such tensions within communities and may make empty promises to widen divisions within communities, such as: promising far more jobs than they can realistically provide, promising to hire community members when they actually plan to hire outsiders, or describing jobs as having wages that are much higher than what they actually intend to provide.

- **(Re)Invest in their community:** When communities rely on external businesses to provide goods, services, income, or jobs, they allow wealth to drain away from their community in the form of the resources extracted or profits made. In contrast, local enterprises have the potential to generate much more community prosperity, as the profits earned from local businesses stay in the community and can be reinvested.
- **Retain local youth:** When there are few local jobs or opportunities for enterprise, a community may lose its youth, who move to urban centers in search of jobs. This can become a self-fulfilling cycle – as youth leave, there is less youthful energy to build community prosperity, so more youth leave. Eventually a community may be primarily composed of people who cannot leave – the elderly, the disabled, etc. Thriving local livelihoods are key to a community’s sustainability, as well as the maintenance of its language, culture, art, and traditions. The creation of livelihood opportunities and connections to credit, skill-building trainings, and markets can help to keep bright, energetic youth and adults in their community, building small businesses and contributing to community-driven development.

HOW TO INTEGRATE LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT INTO COMMUNITY LAND PROTECTION EFFORTS?

Supporting community livelihood development can be challenging for facilitating organizations that have limited resources or lack expertise in livelihood-based skill building, micro-credit lending, or market access. As it is, the community land protection process is long, intensive, and demanding – adding livelihood support components may be too big a stretch for facilitating organizations. As such, Namati and its partners have developed the following “low-burden” strategies to address these topics:

1. Develop alliances with local organizations and agencies whose mandate is to provide livelihood support, technical skills training, micro-credit lending, and market access:

Facilitators should ask communities to brainstorm what kinds of livelihood supports they need most, then seek out organizations that can provide for communities’ needs. It is best if communities substantially complete the community land protection process before the livelihood training, micro-credit lending, or market access-focused organizations enter the community to begin their work. Yet because these organizations will likely have their own priority areas and schedules, it is necessary to start these discussions very early on, so that there can be time to align annual work plans. It may be necessary for the organizations’ executive directors to make such plans together and sign Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) formalizing the relationships and setting out clear expectations for how the organizations will work together in the same communities.



2. Support communities to discuss and plan for their future prosperity during community visioning and/or community development planning meetings:

During the visioning process, encourage discussion of future livelihoods or new projects that can generate community revenue. Facilitators might support communities to include plans for a community-driven investment project in their future vision (rather than waiting for an outside investor to arrive). Then, during the community development planning meeting, facilitators can encourage goals and action plans that support local livelihood options. (See the chapters on *Community Visioning* and *Returning to the Vision with Community Action Plans*.)

3. Support communities to create by-laws that encourage local livelihoods:

During the by-laws drafting process, facilitators might encourage communities to consider rules that:

- Promote local business development by community members;
- Allow practitioners of extractive livelihoods like alluvial mining and small-scale logging to continue their businesses, but in a manner that promotes their sustainable continuation – for example, loggers may be required to pay fees that fund afforestation efforts, or to cut only a certain number of trees each year, etc.; and
- Require that funds collected from the community’s common lands and resources (such as fines or fees) be invested into community projects that, among other priorities, support livelihood diversification and local business development. (See the chapter on *Drafting By-laws for Good Governance of Community Lands and Natural Resources*.)

4. Support communities to create zones for local business development:

When making their zoning plans, communities can support livelihoods and local businesses by zoning areas specifically for local business incubation. This may inspire enterprising youth to apply to use such land to start new companies. Communities might create an application process for interested members, with preferences for new local businesses that commit to hiring a certain number of community members as employees. Precautions must be taken to ensure that these lands are not captured by elites and that the promised jobs are provided. (See the chapter on *Making a Zoning Plan*.)

5. Prepare communities to negotiate for lasting livelihood benefits in any deals with investors:

When training communities for negotiations with potential investors, facilitators should prepare communities to ask critical questions about promised jobs and ensure that any resulting contracts include clear, binding agreements on how many jobs will be created for community members. Facilitators might also encourage communities to require investors to support the community’s local economy, for example by creating a fund to support small local businesses or providing high-quality training and skills-development for community members. (See the chapter on *Negotiating with Investors*.)

Such supports can help motivate and encourage communities to make concrete future plans for livelihood development. When communities internalize the belief that they themselves can determine and drive the course of their growth using their own resources, skills, and expertise, they are well-positioned to protect their rights, steward their community lands and resources sustainably, and ensure their community’s thriving, prosperous future.

NOTES