

SUGGESTED PRACTICES FOR GOOD PROGRAM MANAGEMENT



Experience has shown that one of the most important factors that determines the success of community land protection efforts is well-organized project management. Managing the many activities necessary to successful community land protection can be challenging. Because the process includes so many different activities and involves so many community meetings, the work is very resource- and time-intensive. Over the years, facilitators have confronted the following logistical and project management challenges:

- **Cost, scheduling and time requirements.** When working in various communities at once, it is difficult to manage the frequency of community visits, especially because of high logistical costs (fuel and transportation) and long distances between facilitators' offices and communities.
- **Workload.** Facilitators are often challenged by the many tasks they must take on, including facilitating community meetings, training community land mobilizers, documenting community progress and evaluating impacts, meeting with local government officials, and resolving land conflicts.
- **Communities' varying paces, needs, and capacity to complete the work.** Facilitators' time and energy must adapt to each community's situation – one community may confront few conflicts and challenges and complete the effort in a few months, while a neighboring community may get bogged down in intra-community conflict and need more than a year of support. The pace that communities move through the process can change, forcing facilitators to modify their work plans on a regular basis.

- **Progress tracking and document management.** Throughout the process, communities and facilitating organizations produce many important documents that are evidence of communities' land rights. When working with a number of communities, it can be challenging to keep each community's documents organized and secure.
- **Staff skills.** It often takes time to understand what kind of skills facilitators must bring to the work. Some organizations actively recruit facilitators that have mapping experience, legal knowledge, conflict resolution expertise, democracy-building experience, and conservation experience, while others work with existing staff that have general fieldwork experience. If a facilitator has no legal, mapping, or conservation expertise, organizations must train them in some of these skills so that they can successfully facilitate more technical community land protection activities.

Each organization must ultimately create systems and procedures that best suit the local legal and political context, community needs, and their own organizational protocols and systems. Overall, however, years of experimentation have shown that certain strategies lead to more effective program management of community land protection initiatives:

1. **Work in a limited number of communities at the same time.** It is best to support community land protection work intensively in a few communities, rather than spreading facilitators' time and energy thinly across too many communities. Facilitators should carefully analyze how many communities they can successfully support to complete community land protection activities at once, and make programming decisions accordingly. It is best to work with

the number of communities that allows facilitators to visit each community at least *twice a month* and stay in *weekly* communication with community leaders and Mobilizers.

2. Work in communities that are geographically close together. Community land protection efforts go most smoothly when facilitators are able to work in clusters of communities that border each other. Working in clusters of communities is helpful for a number of reasons:

- **Cost reductions.** When working with communities that border one another, facilitators may be able to visit more than one community per day (scheduling a morning meeting and an afternoon meeting, or travelling as a group to the area and then splitting up to work with multiple neighboring communities simultaneously), significantly reducing petrol costs and allowing quick “check-ins” and easy drop-off of needed supplies or pick-up of key documents.
- **Fewer boundaries to harmonize.** When working with communities that neighbor one another, there are fewer boundaries to harmonize, and harmonization may go more smoothly because neighboring communities are undertaking the same process and receiving the same conflict resolution support.
- **Shared leadership.** Communities that share borders often share higher-level leaders (clan chiefs, paramount chiefs, district officials, etc.) who can encourage communities to coordinate and collaborate.
- **Multi-Community Meetings and Trainings.** When neighboring communities work toward documenting and protecting their lands, community leaders and Community Land Mobilizers can cooperate and communicate, share successes, and find solutions to challenges. Facilitators can call all the leaders from various communities together for a “leaders’ meeting,” or facilitate a “women’s meeting” that brings together women from a number of neighboring communities to share ideas and empower one another. Working in neighboring communities also makes it easier and more cost-effective to bring together Community Land Mobilizers for periodic trainings and supervision.

3. Visit communities frequently. Community land protection work goes best when facilitators visit each community once a week to keep community energy motivated and focused. At the very least, facilitators should visit communities twice a month. When more than a month goes by without a visit from the field team, community energy and time investment decline. If communities are very far from facilitators’ offices, facilitators may choose to go into the field for a few weeks

at a time, work intensively with communities through an entire “Stage” of the project, then leave the community with “homework” to complete (to prepare them to complete the next series of community land protection activities) before the facilitators return for their next intensive visit.

4. Assign communities homework. Community land protection efforts are most successful when facilitators hold a community meeting to introduce an activity, lead the community to begin the activity, and then assign the community specific “homework” to complete before their return. For example, facilitators might begin the process of brainstorming the 1st draft of community by-laws in a long community meeting, and then assign the community the homework of finishing the 1st draft on their own before the facilitators’ next visit.

5. Provide comprehensive training and support to Community Land Mobilizers. To ensure that Community Land Mobilizers can provide the necessary support, facilitators should train them rigorously, supervise them well, and make sure that Mobilizers have copies of all relevant national laws, guides and pamphlets, and enough pens, markers and papers to carry out their duties. (See the chapter on *Selection and Training of Community Land Mobilizers and Interim Coordinating Committees.*)

6. Have realistic expectations for Community Land Mobilizers. Community land protection efforts should be led by facilitators, not by Community Land Mobilizers. Facilitating community land protection efforts is a full time job and takes significant work. When Community Land Mobilizers are unpaid or receive only a small stipend, it is unreasonable to ask them to devote more than a few hours per week to the effort because they need time to pursue their livelihoods and support their families.

7. Ensure clear lines of communication. It is best to create a formal Community Land Protection phone line (ideally separate from facilitators’ personal phone numbers) and share this number with all community members to ensure that community members can call facilitators when they need to discuss their community land protection efforts. This is especially important when leaders are corrupt, or elites are challenging the community land protection process. Facilitators should make sure that this number is widely known throughout the community – youth, women and other community members who may not have a voice in the community may have key information to share with facilitators, and be willing to share it if they can speak with facilitators directly.

- 8. Manage community documents carefully.** The community land protection process produces many documents, including hand-drawn maps of the community, satellite/technical maps, various drafts of the by-laws, boundary documentation MOUs between neighboring communities, and, not least of all, formal registration certificates for community lands. Facilitators should help communities to keep all of these documents in one, contained binder or folder that will ensure that the documents are safe, secure, dry, and clean. Facilitators should make digital copies of all paperwork and store the files in a safe, secure computer or in an internet-based file management system that cannot be easily broken into by outsiders. With community permission, facilitators should also keep copies of all paperwork in their offices in a secure location. Communities may also want to explore keeping their documents in a bank's safe deposit box, or in a trusted government office.
- 9. Hold regular meetings with local government.** Community land protection efforts tend to be most successful when facilitators schedule a regular monthly meeting with relevant local government officials. At this meeting it is good to have a prepared, one- or two-page summary of the past month's activities, highlighting specific achievements and challenges. Regular meetings can help build strong relationships with local government officials, who may then be called upon to: help resolve land conflicts; reign in corrupt community elites; support the drafting, adoption and enforcement of community by-laws; and ensure that communities' documents are processed quickly, among other supports.

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Facilitating organizations have devised a number of ways to make their community land protection efforts more manageable and to work with many communities at once. Some notable examples include:

- 1. Ten communities, two facilitators and a motorcycle.** One cost-effective project management strategy is to work in ten communities at once, with communities grouped in five sets of two neighboring communities. All communities are located within an hour's ride from the facilitating organization's office. The team of facilitators divide the communities between themselves and visit each community once a week. The facilitators motorbike or drive to the field together. The facilitator working in the farther community drops off and picks up the facilitator working in the nearer community. Each facilitator visits one community per day, Monday through Friday. Each community has a fixed day of the week and time that their community land protection meetings are held, so community members know, for example, that every Monday from 1 pm until 4 pm, they have a community land protection meeting.

Note: Some organizations have found that it is necessary to have two facilitators at every community meeting –one to facilitate discussion and one to take notes or support the meeting in other ways. If the Community Land Mobilizers are high-literacy enough, then one facilitator may be sufficient. If the organization has a car, then students, interns and volunteers may accompany facilitators to play supporting roles.

- 2. Leveraging Facilitators' Specific Expertise.** Another strategy is to create teams of facilitators that include individuals with expertise and experience in different aspects of the community land protection process. For example, a community land protection team might include a facilitator who has special expertise in mapping and conflict resolution, and another facilitator who has a background in legal education and local governance.

In this model, all staff are responsible for all communities, but the community land protection process unfolds in different sequences: facilitators enter a community together and collaborate throughout the "Laying the Groundwork" phase. The facilitators then divide communities between themselves, with one facilitator leading half the communities through the "Boundary Harmonization" phase, while the other facilitator leads the community through the "Promoting Good Governance" phase. Then they switch communities. Finally, they co-lead the "Preparing Communities to Prosper" phase. This model allows communities to have a specially trained expert supporting each phase of the process, as appropriate.

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