Working with Mountain Communities

S. Zia Ahmad Farid, C.N. Anil, Min Bdr. Gurung, Brigitte Leduc

A community is composed of people belonging to different groups in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, economic class, marital status, educational background, religion, and political association. Each group plays specific roles, has different assets, faces particular problems, and promotes diverse interests. The social structure determines relationships, notably power relations among different groups of people, and therefore influences who has access to natural, social, and economic resources as well as who are deprived from accessing those resources. It is particularly important for development practitioners to understand the social structure and to identify the marginalised groups, such as the young, single men, the poor, ethnic minorities, people with little or no formal education, women, orphans, widows, and the disabled. These groups of people are often absent or silent during public gatherings for decision-making and, as a result, development programmes do not properly meet their needs.

Working with communities must be based on the principles of participation, inclusion of all members of the community, the right to development, peace building, and empowerment.

In Afghanistan, mountain communities are organised around strong traditional institutions such as the Shura (a consultative body) and have been able to develop a way of life based on the richness of their knowledge and experiences, utilising and managing natural resources. Even during war time, while government services hardly reached the mountain villages, people have been able to adapt and start over. The communal sense of belonging enhances solidarity within communities, which have developed self-reliance.

However, development practitioners working with communities face some challenges. It is important when working with communities to win their trust and build their confidence. Mountain communities generally lack awareness about development processes and their purposes, especially initiated by 'outsiders'. A low level of formal education amongst most mountain communities can present an obstacle. The difficulty to reach women and other marginalised people and involve them in development initiatives challenges our capacities to address their needs and to solve important development issues.

This chapter introduces different approaches to working with mountain communities that have been found effective in Afghanistan, notably community mobilisation, conflict mitigation, social auditing, the gender and development (GAD) approach, and participatory 3-dimensional modelling.

Leadership training in the Darwaz district, Badakhshan, Afghanistan

Some effective participatory tools

Participatory social mapping
Involving the community in identifying community composition, resources, and activities

Visioning and scenario planning
The community collectively or together analysing opportunities and planning for the future

Well-being ranking
Categorising households according to the criteria of wealth and poverty set by the community

Venn diagramming
Drawing diagrams showing different institutions, their location, responsibilities, the relationships among them, and their importance to the community

Transect walk
Literally a walk across the landscape of the community or study area by a group with community members to identify crop, soil vegetation, and settlement patterns and other natural resources of the community

Preference ranking
The community ranking its needs and projects according to what it considers important

4Rs (Roles, Rights, Revenues, and Relationships analyses)
Analysing the community's organisation and structure based on the four R's

General Principles of Participatory Approaches

What is a participatory approach?

A 'participatory approach' is a process through which the views and interests of all concerned people of the communities are integrated into decision-making and collective action. Members of the community define their problems and drive the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of interventions for their own development.

Many participatory tools, which range from visualisation to interviewing and group work, have been developed to facilitate interactive learning among different stakeholders in the process. The key element to facilitate the learning process is to use participatory tools that enable people to visualise and understand the issues, communicate with each other, analyse options, and take decisions.

What are the benefits?

Participatory tools
- contribute to ensuring genuine community involvement as well as provides a sense of ownership and responsibility towards development and environmental actions.
- add value to local knowledge and experiences, and thus, ensure the adoption of appropriate technologies based on people's capacities; development and environmental interventions are more efficient, effective, and sustainable because these lead to a community's sense of ownership of the outcomes.
- develop people's skills and build local capacities.

- provide people the power to manage resources and to find a balance between their needs and the necessity for conservation.
- raise awareness about the needs, interests and capacities of the poor and the marginalised and contributes to addressing their needs better.
- empower people.
- support the process of gathering the community together to solve their problems.

Some Participatory Methods

Community mobilisation

More and more development and environmental projects are being carried out by involving local communities to ensure the appropriateness of the interventions as well as to enhance the community's sense of ownership of the project or the intervention.

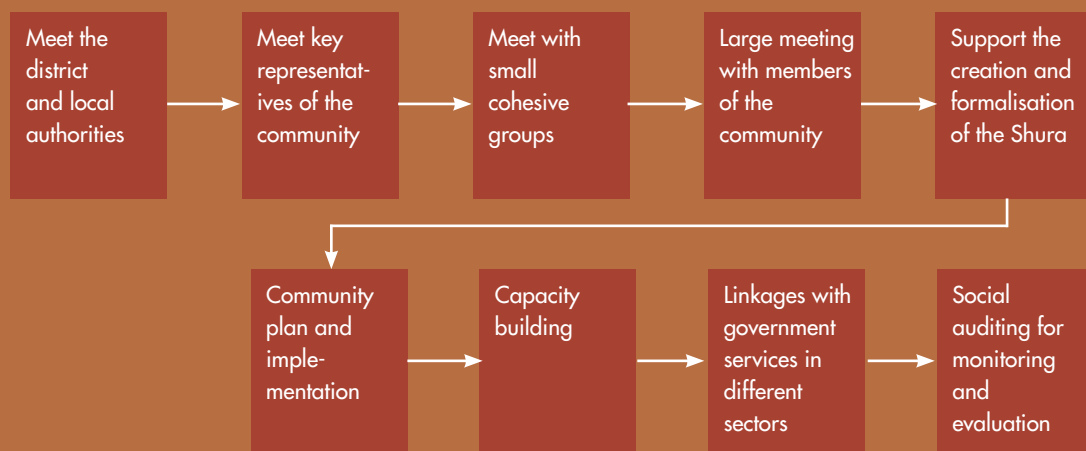### When people work together to illuminate their village

Five Shuras participated in an exposure visit to the village of Nawi-Jurm, Jurum district, where the local Shuras have implemented a micro hydropower project which provides electricity to the entire village. The project was implemented entirely by the Shuras using the community's resources. The Shuras participating in the exposure visit were inspired. The experience made them aware of their own capacities. After returning to their villages, they mobilised their own communities around a similar project for micro-hydropower, using their own resources, successfully implementing another project which now illuminates their villages.

What is community mobilisation?

It is helping organise the community to take charge of its own development by providing information, building community skills, and mobilising community resources (see Figure 1).

How to do it?

- Meet with the district and local authorities. Introduce yourself and the project, and request their approval to work with the selected community or communities.
- Meet the key representatives of the community – the mullahs, teachers, elders, others. Explain the project, its objectives and targets; convince them of the importance and objectives of the project, work to gain their support.
- With help from key community representatives, meet with small cohesive groups within the community to provide information about the project and discuss the community's interests; women community mobilisers may also meet with women and go through the same project briefing process.
- When they feel ready, the leaders should organise a meeting with all the members of the community about the project. In the meeting, people should identify their resources and discuss their potential contribution and interests towards the project.
- Support the creation and formalisation of the Shura in the community, if this is not yet in place.

- With the Shura, facilitate the process of identifying the community's natural, financial, and human resources, and the community needs; and help prioritise the needs of both the community's women and men.
  - Facilitate meetings with institutions providing helpful information for the community to make decisions about their future actions.
  - Support and build capacities to develop a community plan. Write proposals and mobilise resources.
  - Facilitate the submission of proposals.
  - Support the implementation of their projects.
- Strengthen linkages between the communities and government services in different sectors at both district and provincial levels.
- Build the capacities of the Shura and other community members in financial management, administration, conflict mitigation, leadership, teambuilding, and other technical aspects.
  - Contribute to building local capacities in governance and advocacy.
- Support the monitoring and evaluation processes, notably through social auditing.
- Help broaden the role of the Shura in other sectors of social well-being and development such as education.

What resources do you need?

- Committed, skilled, and informed men and women community mobilisers
- Support from government services of different sectors and local governments
- The community's trust
- Time
- Security/safety of the development workers

Figure 1: **Important steps to effective community mobilisation**

Conflict mitigation

Very often, a social mobiliser may find him/ herself working in a community where there are conflicts. When working in such contexts, avoid interventions that could contribute to further fuelling the conflict. As a social mobiliser, you do not have the mandate to solve the conflict by yourself. Instead, your role is to facilitate the process of peace building and conflict resolution by building the capacity of community members to understand the causes of the conflict in order to be able to manage it and link the community with helpful external resources to aid in peace building.

What is conflict mitigation?

It is a process that aims to solve problems in the community in a peaceful manner.

How to do it?

- Build your capacity to analyse and mediate conflict.
- Meet both parties and try to find the roots of the conflict, who are involved, and the reasons behind.
- Do not take sides; use diplomatic approaches to save people's pride.
- Propose 'win-win' solutions – solutions that will benefit both sides.
- Work with the troublemakers to make them change their position.
- Collaborate with the elders or other leaders, or with people who could influence the troublemakers in a positive way.
- Facilitate meetings between the conflicting parties.
- Inform people about their rights and possibilities.
- Empower peaceful people – acknowledge their capacities to contribute to resolving the conflict.

Some tools for conflict mitigation

Root causes analysis, to identify the sources of the conflict

Analysis group discussion, to build the capacities of community members to analyse the situation

Consensus building, to agree on a common ground about causes of the conflict and find solutions

Brainstorming and cluster technique quickly lists the issues and topics of the components of the conflict

Convergence matrix, to identify key actors who are part of the conflict issues and who, in turn, could be involved in peace building

Decision making matrix to agree on actions to be carried out and by whom

A long time conflict solved with the help of the Shura

In a village in the district of Yumgan, there was a long-standing conflict amongst brothers over land issues and the conflict went on for more than 10 years. In vain, the brothers had tried to have their problem solved mediated by official authorities. Still the conflict persisted and became more and more violent. Finally, aware that it could affect the village's peace and stability, the Shura invited the brothers to talk things out about the issue. After much discussion, a solution convenient for all the brothers was found, agreed upon, and since then the conflict has been resolved.

What resources and enabling conditions do you need?

- Technical knowledge on conflict management
- A conducive environment to conflict mitigation and security
- Willingness of the community to solve the problem

Where to find more information

If you want more information about how to mitigate or resolve conflict, you may contact the following organisation:
- Aga Khan Foundation

Social auditing

Social auditing is an interesting tool for monitoring and evaluating the work of local organisations such as the Shura. It has many advantages:
- increases community participation in the governance process by incorporating the principles of transparency and accountability in project operations;
- increases people's confidence in the development process as well as in one another.

In Afghanistan, it is particularly important to conduct social auditing in a peaceful manner with consent from the Shura. The social mobiliser's role is to facilitate the social auditing process by providing information, and building the capacities of both the Shura and community members to conduct a social audit on their own.

A misunderstanding over the Shura's expenses

Sometimes, suspicion about how community resources are being used can lead to mistrust and create conflict within a community. During a social audit in one village, the presenting treasurer mentioned that 250 afghanis (AFA) were paid to five members for labour. This was objected to by some community members who mentioned that they had only received 175 AFA! Then the treasurer explained this was true, but since the budget was only for five labours and they had engaged seven, the total amount available was divided into seven. He also explained that the Shura had to prepare the report according to the agreement with the guidelines. The members were appeased with the explanation and thanked the treasurer for clarifying the matter to them.

What is social auditing?

It is a participatory process where community members come together on a common platform to evaluate how the Shura or other implementing organisations are utilising project resources. It is carried out through active participation from community members, project beneficiaries, and Shura members. During the audit, the social audit committee asks questions regarding how the resources were used, for which purposes, how much the project or activity cost, and who benefited. The process is conducted in a peaceful way.

How to do it?

- Meet the Shura and explain the social auditing process and its benefits. IMPORTANT: Shura members must give their consent to the conduct of a social audit.
- Meet with community members and support the creation of the social audit committee.
- Support the committee in the analysis of administrative and financial documents and the preparation of charts of the findings.
- Facilitate organising a meeting with community members (at least 75% of the households should be present), where project charts are displayed and a forum is opened for discussion.
- In some cases, a separate meeting or discussion may be organised with the women to provide them an opportunity to give their feedback. In other cases, women may directly participate in the main meeting.
- With the agreement of the Shura and the community members, draft key resolutions to institute improvements.

What is needed?

- The consent of the Shura
- Willingness of the community to take part in the social audit
- A good facilitator and mediator
- A peaceful environment and harmonious relationships
- Openness of the Shura members to answer questions and to be questioned

Gender and development approach

In Afghanistan, gender relations could differ greatly from one ethnic group to another. In some, it is very difficult to involve women in development interventions, public gatherings, or to even meet with them. In others, it is acceptable for the community members to work in mixed groups. Therefore, it is important not to generalise about what could be possible to do, and it is essential to acknowledge that men and women have diverse roles and responsibilities, both in the household and in the community, and thus their needs could be as different. These differences could also affect their capacity to be involved in development programmes.

What is the gender and development approach?

It is a collection of methods and tools to understand the roles of men and women in the household and in the community in order to address both their needs and ensure sustainable development.

How to do it?

- Recruit women and men social mobilisers from the community and build their capacity to use and promote the gender approach in development.
- Conduct a gender analysis that identifies the roles and needs of both men and women at the household and community levels.
- Facilitate women's participation in all development programmes; this does not mean that men and women have to work together in the same space.
- Support the creation of women's committees and build their capacities to participate in development by organising training sessions on management, leadership, conflict mitigation, communication, literacy courses, and other activities for skills development according to their interests. These committees should increase their capacity to manage some resources.
- Plan activities in the project to address women's needs. Find entry points to work with women.
- Acknowledge and value women's knowledge, skills, and experience.

When women participate in community life

In an Ouzbeck village in the Jurm district, women did not usually participate in development projects and public gatherings. But a women's committee existed in the village and, in turn, women received training on leadership and conflict mitigation. When the NGO supporting the Shura helped organise a social audit, they insisted on the involvement of women in the process. It was not easy at first to convince the Shura members because of village traditions. After some discussion

Women's participation in social auditing in Gurm district, Badakshshan

and arrangements, however, women were finally and actively involved in the social audit.

- Where possible, sensitise men on gender issues and women's needs.
- Do not oblige community members to work in mixed groups.

What resources and conditions do you need?

- Women social mobilisers
- Gender-sensitive men social mobilisers
- Openness from community members to involve women in development activities

Participatory 3-dimensional modelling

A Participatory 3D-Model (P3DM) is a visual mapping tool made by community members. It serves as a platform for sharing information and helps in decision making and in managing natural resources, even by people with little or no formal education. The P3DM is useful in land use planning, forestry and watershed management, risk assessment, disaster mitigation, conflict mitigation, national parks management, community resource planning, and impact assessments. However, it requires intensive planning and investment in time by community members and requires technical support. In conflict areas, the tool may surface sensitive information and worsen the situation. The role of social mobilisers is to facilitate linkages among technical resources and the community and accompany and guide the community members in the use of the model.

What is participatory 3-dimensional modelling?

It is a process whereby community members produce a three-dimensional (3D) scale relief model of the community environment based on spatial information from topographic maps (see Figure 2). The model is made from locally available materials or rubber sheets.

How to do it?

- Collect the base maps and materials of the community, prepare the base map and orient the community about the map.
- Construct the module with local materials.

Some gender analysis tools

Division of labour between men and women helps to identify and understand the roles and responsibilities of men and women in the household and within the community.

Access and control over resources and benefits define which resources men and women use and how they decide on their access and use.
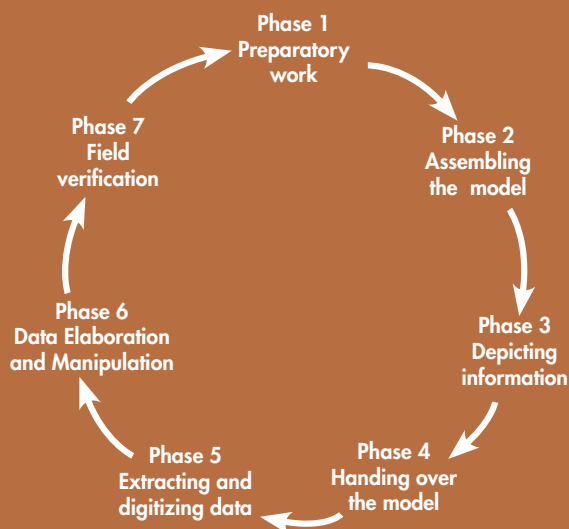
Levels of participation of women and men in a sector or in an institution is useful to understand the roles both play and the degree of control they exercise over resources, on their work, and the extent to which they participate in decision making processes within the household and in the community.

- Collect community information (lakes and bodies of water, settlements, forests, others) and incorporate these features of the community into the model.
- Hand over the model to the community.
- Extract and analyse information and produce resources maps.
- Analyse the dynamics of natural resources to visualise different options about their use and take decisions.
- Verify the information in the field.

What resources do you need?

- Open access to topographic data
- Motivation to involve local communities and grassroots in collaborative natural resources management and planning
- Existence of an enabling and positive policy framework
- Skills and dedication to shift from common sketch mapping to more demanding scale mapping
- Clear plan for future integration of community mapping with geographic information system (GIS) technologies

Figure 2: **Steps involved in building a P3DM**

Phase 1
Preparatory
work

Phase 2
Assembling
the model

Phase 3
Depicting
information

Phase 4
Handing over
the model

Phase 5
Extracting and
digitizing data

Phase 6
Data Elaboration
and Manipulation

Phase 7
Field
verification

Using a P3DM for community natural resource management planning in Sagarmatha National Park, Nepal

Practical tips for working with communities

For participatory processes to be effective, it is crucial that social mobilisers have the appropriate attitude and behaviour. Be respectful of community members and have a genuine interest in the community. Avoid showing off superiority and your education. Listen to and acknowledge people's knowledge and perspectives. This will make a difference in the kind of relationship or rapport you establish with the community. The social mobiliser's role is to enhance the community's capacities to improve their living conditions by providing useful information and technologies and strengthening their skills. To impart those skills and technologies requires an attitude different from that of teaching, directing, and ordering.

Here are some useful tips for working with communities:

- **Be open, honest, and transparent** about your objectives with all groups in the community.
- **Listen carefully** and try to understand the different voices and standpoints in the community.
- **Provide useful information and instructions in simple formats** – prefer visual (illustrated) to written materials. Use a vocabulary and language that can be understood by all – leave your scientific jargon behind.
- **Use practical and visual tools** – Visual techniques are good for involving the poor and the marginalised. Community people relate more easily to physical observations, photographs, maps, and drawings; they motivate community participation.
- **Work with small groups sharing common interests** – It is better to work in small groups in the beginning; people are often inhibited to talk in front of large groups.
- **Value people's knowledge and skills** – people's knowledge and skills are valuable resources often overlooked and untapped by outsiders during the participatory development process.
- **Be creative. Encourage the community to try something new or different** – It is important to share different experiences and encourage people to try something new. This is where exposure visits could be extremely helpful.

Further Reading

Integrated Approaches to Participatory Development (IAPAD)
www.iapad.org/
www.iapad.org/participatory_p3dm.htm
www.iapad.org/pafid/

Beekeeping and agricultural products are steady sources of livelihood in mountain areas