



Community + Governance

An Attempt to Define these Terms

SNAPP Governance Working Group
WCS Rights + Communities Program

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What is a Community?

There is no shortage of definitions or conceptions of what a community is.

At its most basic, **a community is a group of people with something in common**. It is the essential concept of commonality that turns a group of people into a community.

According to Black's Law Dictionary, community typically refers to a group of people living together in the same place, under the same laws and regulations, and who have common rights and privileges.

Within the conservation sector communities are often thought about as:

- **Communities of place** (i.e., people living together in the same area, whether that is a village, town, or city)
- **Communities of practice** (i.e., people who share a common way of life or profession, e.g., fishers, farmers, hunters, bushmeat traders, lawyers, teachers, etc)
- **Communities of interest** (i.e., people who share common traditions, perspectives, views or passions, e.g., lovers of Shakespeare or line dancing, members of an ethnic group, religious order or political party, shark fin consumers, fans of a music group or football team, etc.)

Within a community of place there can be several communities of practice and within a community practice there can be several communities of interest.

Communities of practice and communities of interest can be from one or more communities of place.

In the context of governance of natural resources, we think of a community as a group of people who share a common interest in, and have the customary authority to regulate, access and use, natural resources within their territorial boundaries. Such communities would benefit from the formal authority to be able to better regulate their rights and responsibilities towards each other and their lands.



Community plan, Tanzania © Coppollilo/WCS



What is Community Governance?

Governance can be defined as a socio-political system, by which communities (i.e., groups with something in common) define and decide, through a process that equitably represents the interests of community members, what is and what is not acceptable behavior within the community and how the group ensures that community members and others (i.e., non-members) comply with these policies, rules, and regulations for acceptable behavior.

Community-based governance of renewable natural resource is:

A group of people

- Living in a place
- With the authority to regulate natural resource use

That agree to work together

To decide

- the rules that will guide access to an uses of renewable natural resources
- how to enforce these rules, and
- what recognition and/or help they need, if any, from the state and other actors to do so.

Renewable natural resource **governors** are those who 1) decide how natural resources within their jurisdiction can be used by community members and by non-members, and 2) are accountable for the implementation of their natural resource access and use rules and regulations for acceptable behavior. **Managers** are those who are responsible for executing the policies, rules, and regulations (i.e., institutions) established by the governors. Natural resource governors and managers can be the same individuals or groups.

What defines effective and equitable community-level natural resource governance?

When a community is able to make decisions and enforce rules, equitably, that result in the conservation and sustainable use of the renewable natural resources within their territory.

Factors that help or hinder effective and equitable community-level natural resource governance?

What factors determine if a group will be able to effectively govern access to and use of natural resources (i.e., so that resource use is equitable and sustainable), is much debated. Many factors can play a role in whether or not a governance group is able to govern effectively, and a review of the literature and governance guidelines would generate a huge list of attributes believed to be necessary for good governance.

Broadly speaking a governance group has a reasonable probability of being effective if it has the **authority** and **capacity** to govern, and the **power** to exercise its authority.

If a governance group lacks legitimate **authority** to govern (i.e., people do not trust them to represent and protect their interests), it will fail to be effective over the long term. If a governance group has insufficient **capacity** to govern (i.e., decide what to do and implement those decisions), then, even if it is perceived to be legitimate in the eyes of key resource users and rights holders, it is unlikely to be able to govern access to and use of natural resources. Lastly, even when a governance group is perceived as being the legitimate authority, and even when it has the capacity to plan and to act, if it does not have the political, economic, or policing **power** to exert its authority, it will be unable to govern effectively.



A governance group is perceived to have the **authority** to make governance decisions for the community it represents if the people affected by these decisions consider the group to be legitimate, be accountable, make decisions in a participative way, transparently and fairly, and encourage diversity and inclusion. A governance group has the **capacity** to govern if it has the knowledge and skills to decide what to do, the financial and technical resources and the motivation to implement those decisions, and an enabling institutional framework (i.e., government policy, regulations and enforcement) within which to govern. Lastly, a governance group has the **power** to govern if it can exercise its legitimate authority without undue interference from other more powerful economic or political actors.

Some additional terms defined

Accountability: the belief or understanding that a governance group and each individual within the group is a) required to fulfill certain responsibilities and b) is seen to fulfill those responsibilities. Most importantly the governance group must be seen to be downwardly accountable for their actions and responsive to the interests of natural resource users and rights holders.

Authority: the perception of natural resource users and rights holders that a governance group genuinely represents their interests and has legal or customary jurisdiction to govern “their” natural resources.

Capacity: the knowledge and skills to decide what to do, the financial and technical resources and the motivation to implement those decisions, and an enabling institutional framework (i.e., government policy, regulations and enforcement) within which to govern.

Effectiveness of natural resource governance: when decisions made and rules enforced by a governance group actually result in better natural resources governance (i.e., long-term ecologically, socially and economically sustainable outcomes). Effective long-term sustainable management of natural resources is predicated on governance that is representative and democratic.

Diversity: the explicit inclusion of women and minorities in the decision-making process and in governor and manager roles.

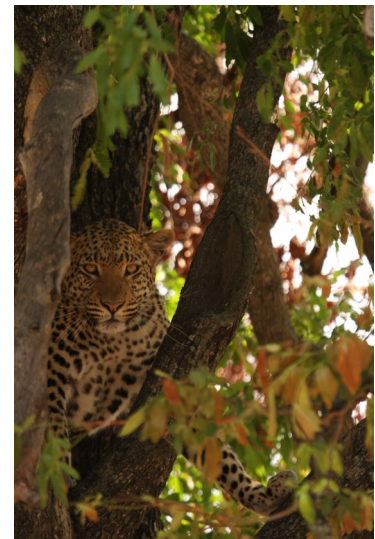
Duty Bearers: are those actors who have a particular obligation or responsibility to respect, promote and realise human rights and to abstain from human rights violations. The term is most commonly used to refer to State actors, but non-State actors can also be considered duty-bearers.

Fairness: the perception by natural resource users and rights holders about the degree to which they feel that rules regulating access to and use of natural resources are equitable in terms of who benefits and who incurs the costs, and that the enforcement of these rules is applied to all individuals and groups.

Institutional framework: the set of formal government rules, regulations, and policies that enable a governance group’s ability to sustainably manage natural resources. Absent this national enabling legislation the governance group lacks formal authority to govern.

Institutions: the formal or customary norms, policies, rules, and regulations, all of which are tools that are available to a governance group to define access to and regulate the use of natural resources within their jurisdiction.

Knowledge and skills: sufficient understanding of a) the biological, economic, historical, socio-political, and managerial factors that put in jeopardy the long-term sustainability of natural resource use; b) the policies and practices needed to remedy the situation so that valued resources are conserved and used sustainably; and c) the ways to monitor the effectiveness of conservation actions



Leopard, Botswana © Wilkie/WCS



Legitimacy: the governance group is recognized formally (i.e., legal - de jure) or informally (i.e., traditional - de facto) as having jurisdiction over determining what resource or practices are permissible, defining who can access certain resources or implement certain land use practices, and establishing what sanctions can and will be imposed for infractions of these rules. Legitimacy is both a formal perception: people recognize that under law the governance group has the right to make and enforce decisions; and a social perception: people recognize that the governance group understands and is acting in their interests.

Motivation: the level of willingness of individuals within a group to do their assigned jobs, commit time, struggle with adversity, and advocate for their group's interests in an effort to implement their group's plans and achieve their group's objectives and goals.

Natural resource governance: the concept of who makes decisions (the governance group) about regulating access to, and use of, natural resources; and the process by which a governance group decides and defines what is, and what is not, acceptable behavior in terms of natural resource use in a given area; and how the group ensures that community members and other relevant actors comply with the policies, rules, and regulations for acceptable behavior.

Natural resource management: the implementation of rules and regulations defined by a governance body or group. Natural resource "governors" are those individuals or groups that establish, and are accountable for, the implementation of natural resource access and use policies and norms (institutions). "Managers" are those individuals or groups that are responsible for executing the policies, rules, and regulations (institutions) established by the "governors.", including oversight where specified management activities are carried out by a "contracted" third party.

Organizational process: The operational system that a governance group agrees to put in place and adapt over time to make and implement decisions in pursuit of its objectives (i.e., defines why the group exists, who the group represents, how the group engages its internal membership, and how the group communicates its decisions).

Participation: the processes by which and the extent to which natural resource users and rights holders are able to take part and have their voices heard in establishing policies that restrict access to and use of resources, and in adjudicating sanctions against those that fail to comply with accepted norms.

Power: the ability of a governance group to exert its authority and to do so without being regularly or repeatedly undermined by other more powerful groups.

Resources: the physical (office space, cars, boats, camera traps, GPS, computers, phones, tents, fuel, etc.), financial, and staffing assets needed for a governance group to be able to put its plans into action within their jurisdiction and monitor and report the outcomes and impacts of their efforts.

Rights Holders: unlike many other stakeholders, these people deserve specific attention as they have specific rights related to the ownership and use of resources that other stakeholders do not. Rights holders are often customary landowners or government assigned landholders, but can also include hunters, gatherers, herders, or fishers who have rights to access particular resources.

Transparency: the openness (agreed record-keeping and legitimate access to records) with which a governance group carries out its work.

Wildlife Conservation Society
Global Conservation Program
2300 Southern Boulevard
Bronx, NY 10460
Tel: 718-220-5100
www.wcs.org

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