

Module 3: How Can We Build Successful Livelihood Initiatives?

Introduction:

In this module, we'll explore various self-determined governance structures, analyze the benefits of collectively organizing, and delve into mapping out "social capital" to identify potential collaborators both within and outside the community.

Community Governance And Livelihoods

Governance is a crucial consideration for developing community-based livelihoods. It can be thought of as the way people and communities agree to organize, live and operate together. Each community and territory's unique history, culture, context, wisdom, struggles, and ways of life influence their structures and power dynamics (ways power is organized or shared, both openly/overtly or informally/covertly). Local governance dynamics determine how and what can emerge and be sustained within a territory/community. Community governance structures can also be greatly affected by external legal and political factors.

The governance structure (and the way it is created) influences what livelihoods can emerge and develop. The how is extremely important, for example: who is involved, who makes decisions, what alliances can be made, how the money or income distributed, etc.

There is no universal "right way" to set up governance, as it must be created from the norms and existing practices in a specific community. This module will not share a definitive list of governance models. Instead, here are various case studies and voices to reflect on governance and power structures, and we will discuss more about your contexts in our live sessions.

What Is "Social Capital"?

When referring specifically to “social capital” within the framework of Livelihoods, **Norman Rodea** invites us to respond to some of the following questions:

- Do organized social groups exist within the community? What are the existing groups?
- What are the power dynamics and the relationship within the existing groups?
- How are conflicts addressed?
- What is the community decision-making structure like, does it work or not work?
- What are the external pressures that generate tension in the community?
- Who are resourceful people and institutions outside of the community that can benefit livelihood initiatives? For example: government officials, businesses, civil society organizations, public services
- What kind of economic markets are available?
- What powerful actors (within and outside) of the community align with the community values and goals?

Power Dynamics And Polarities: How To Navigate Tensions?

Many of the power dynamics that surface when we discuss organizing and governance structures reflect both internal and external tensions or opposing forces at play within communities. Below, we present an initial list of these tensions and invite you to reflect on how they take shape in your community in relation to livelihood ideas or initiatives you’ve been considering.

The **polarities framework** invites you to hold these tensions, seeking ways to leverage them and include the wisdom of both sides, countering the danger of getting carried away with imposing one extreme over the other. The invitation is not “one thing

versus the other”, but “one thing and also the other”, and to ask oneself: “How can these polarities be leveraged? What needs to be incorporated from each polarity?”

Tensions related to Power Dynamics		
Honoring traditional authorities	and	Supporting emerging and young leaders
Following men in leadership	and	Trust and empower women in leadership
Investing in the organization of a collective initiative	and	Maintain individual autonomy to manage my own projects
Strengthening the local economy through local businesses	and	Strengthening the local economy through external market alliances
Maintain local autonomy	and	Open up to the national or international market
Develop a mass-market product	and	Develop diverse products
Create a community business	and	Create your own individual business
Value and maintain the traditional way of doing things	and	Incorporate new ways and ideas of how to do things

Exploring Principles Of An Indigenous Economy In The Amazon

The following video is an example of how some of these tensions are navigated by some indigenous groups in the Amazon. “Indigenous peoples and local communities of the Latin American Amazon are increasingly approaching the market seeking the value of forest socio-biodiversity chains, and in this relationship with the market, several challenges are faced”.

This video responds to the question, “What is an indigenous economy?” based on the perspective of the Buen Vivir (“Good Living”), which integrates a vision of territory, ancestral knowledge, and social harmony and governance.

Video: [Economía Indígena/Indigenous Economy](#)(min 0:40 to 3:21)

The following video describes what it took to start The Capulli Women's Cooperative in Capulalpam, that promotes traditional medicine and passes it on to new generations.


Video (3:09): [Cooperativa de mujeres Capulli promueven sanación en Capulalpam](#)

Navigating Power Outside Of Your Territory/Community

There are also external power holders that may help or hinder our ideas for livelihood initiatives in our territories or communities, like: neighbors, partnerships with individuals or other communities/businesses, associations, non-profit organizations, small businesses, large corporations, governments, etc. These potential relationships or alliances also come with power dynamics.

To consider opportunities and power dynamics at play for potential external alliances, partnerships and collaborations. Consider the following:

1. Identify potential allies and collaborators members of the community have access to (for example: business people, government officials, academics, social mobilizers, people with access to other networks)
2. Define the kind of power they hold
3. Analyze whether these potential collaborators align with community goals and values
4. Decide whether you would want to pursue alliances based on the information

 Read more about tools for doing a power analysis: [A Guide to Power Analysis in Community Organising – The Commons](#).

Homework

Activities to complete after the third live session.

Group Homework (90 to 120 minutes)

A mapping exercise to identify social and physical assets in your territory, and

identifying livelihood initiative ideas.