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Community Protocols - What are they and how could they be integrated into the NRGF?

By Holly Shrumm & Harry Jonas
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Community Protocols

Community protocols are one form of community-based and participatory empowerment methodology. Indigenous peoples and local communities are increasingly articulating their protocols in forms that can be understood by others. Doing so can help put external actors on notice about the community's identity and ways of life, values and laws, and procedures for engagement. It can catalyze constructive dialogue and collaboration to support the community's plans and priorities in locally appropriate ways.

The process of developing, and using a community protocol involves collective reflection and deliberation, participatory documentation and communication, legal empowerment, and social mobilization. It can be a powerful way for communities to determine and communicate their own plans and priorities and advocate for respect and appropriate support for their ways of life. A community protocol can serve as a platform for asserting rights and affirming responsibilities under customary, national, and international law, particularly in response to opportunities and challenges posed by external actors. It can also contribute to the revitalization of certain cultural practices or norms that affect their interactions with the environment.

Although each is adapted to its local context, a biocultural community protocol is generally:

- Determined by a self-defined community with a close connection to a specific territory or area that is the foundation of their identity, culture, language, and ways of life
- Documented, developed, and used in a participatory manner by that community and, where appropriate, with the support of trusted and long-standing organizations
- Intended to promote appropriate recognition of and support for community-specific customary ways of life and stewardship of their territory or area
- Based upon values, standards, procedures, rights, and responsibilities set out in customary, national, and international laws and policies

A community protocol should not be:

- Determined or defined by an external actor such as a government official, researcher, businessperson, or consultant;
- Documented, developed, or used in a top-down or prescriptive manner or in a way that undermines the community's decision-making processes and right to self-determination;
- A guarantee that the community will provide free, prior and informed consent to an external invention or project;
- An agreement to enter into any negotiations or contractual arrangements; or
- A tool that can be used to undermine or hinder values, standards, procedures, rights, and responsibilities set out in customary, national, and international laws and policies.

We suggest that the NRGF should incorporate similar kinds of methodologies that allow for Indigenous peoples and local communities to self-assess their current situation, integrate active forms of learning about institutional and legal frameworks (among other things) and support the development of means to institute local changes. Importantly, these kinds of approaches promote thinking beyond the singular issue at hand (NR/REDD/ABS) to take a more holistic view of the community's situation and to make plans accordingly.

For more information, please see www.community-protocols.org