



Coastal Livelihoods and Mangroves

Report On Project Mid-Term Pause & Reflect

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 Landesa

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Introduction

Since 2022 Landesa has been carrying out the 5-year Coastal Livelihoods and Mangroves Project, an ambitious initiative in the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia to lay the foundation to strengthen law and policy over coastal tenure and resource rights of up to 73 million of the most at-risk people living in the region's mangrove forests. The project aims to influence national and subnational policy change that enhances communities' mangrove forest tenure and resource rights and capacitates them to sustainably manage the mangrove forest ecosystem, leading to better conservation and restoration of the 4.6 million hectares of mangrove forests where these communities live and make their livelihoods. The project applies a gender equal and socially inclusive (GESI) approach across all efforts.

If successful, the project expects to provide a significant boost to the global effort to slow climate change through shaping of policies that would help mitigate up to 943 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions. The project's work spans four countries in Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar), and two in South Asia (India and Bangladesh). Efforts to influence policy have targeted Cambodia, Indonesia, India, and Bangladesh in the project's first half.

In 2025, Landesa conducted a mid-term systematic "Pause and Reflect" (P&R) on the project's progress in Cambodia, Indonesia, India, and Bangladesh to help teams understand roadblocks along change pathways and identify elements of success to build upon in the project moving forward. The P&R sought to address the following questions focused on short-term outcomes and processes in the project theory of change.¹:

- How has the project contributed to state and community planners' enhanced understanding of policy and program development needed?
- How has state and community planning changed as a result of project interventions?
- How has the project influenced policy, regulations, and program development?
- To what extent are these changes moving towards increased gender equality and social inclusion?

After a description of the methods used for the P&R, the report presents the P&R's findings on the changes the project has contributed to, including what has enabled the progress. Findings are organized according to the P&R's four target questions with a separate section on project roadblocks. Subsequently, the P&R report discusses main takeaways and lessons learned for the project, followed by a summary of conclusions and recommendations for the project's remaining stages.

¹ The project's short-term outcomes: Local and national policies and programs developed or improved to promote strong mangrove forest tenure and resource rights for women, men and marginalized communities; Local and national policies and programs developed or improved to capacitate communities (including women and youth members) to contribute to and sustainably benefit from mangrove conservation, restoration and afforestation; Communities and state planners value the role of gender equal and socially inclusive tenure and resource rights and community, women, and youth engagement in promoting mangrove conservation, restoration and afforestation.

Methodology

This report draws from two sources:

- Four country mid-term learnings reports (Pause & Reflect reports for Cambodia, India, Indonesia and Most Significant Change report for Bangladesh)
- Mid-term Pause & Reflect Workshop attended by representatives of all four countries

All four countries conducted separate data collection efforts between January-August 2025 to gather reflections, thoughts, and insights from multiple involved actors on the project's progress to date. In Cambodia, India, and Indonesia, these efforts culminated in the form of Mid-term Pause & Reflect (MTPR) reports while in Bangladesh, the efforts were designed as a Most Significant Change Study (MSC) that resulted in a report. We chose the MSC approach in Bangladesh to allow the implementing partner to provide their input on the key domains of change the project has influenced; the partner's perspective may not have been well-integrated through previous project M&E processes. In September 2025, representatives of each country met to workshop together the project's mid-term progress based on insights from the mid-term learnings reports and reflections from each country team.

Across countries, the P&R used qualitative methods to generate detailed information on project processes of government engagement and community capacity-strengthening and document how project efforts have made initial steps towards consequential policy and programmatic change. Although guided by the P&R's main questions, the study design varied per country to address country-specific strategies and foci for policy influence.

Study limitations

We designed the MTPRs in India, Cambodia, and Indonesia to focus on lines of work that the country team had invested substantial time and resources in up until that point in the project; initiatives that were in beginning stages were not included in the study. Additionally, although regional policy advising is a significant component of the project, it was not assessed as part of the MTPR due to limited information on progress from this line of work at the time.

Social norms that effectively limit women from holding leadership positions in several of the country contexts prevented collection of feedback and insights from women authorities or officials, despite the project's commitment to GESI²; however, we sought to address the gap in women's input by conducting focus group discussions with women community members, where feasible.

Country-specific aspects

Bangladesh

Context: The project's first half has focused on pilot interventions to strengthen community capacities and promote behavior change for mangrove conservation and sustainable management

² See findings section 5 "Roadblocks along change pathways" for additional explanation of social norms and barriers to women's participation in key decision-making roles in the project countries.

of the mangrove ecosystem through local government advocacy, gender-inclusive institution building, and behavior change interventions targeting mangrove forest-dependent communities. The project formed smaller, more numerous sub-groups of the Village Conservation Forum (VCF), a local body instated by the Forest Department for community participation in mangroves conservation and protection, to encourage community members' more meaningful engagement in forest governance. It also facilitated discussions on key issues concerning mangrove conservation, made household visits to community members to reinforce the discussions, and facilitated trainings in the communities on women's empowerment and climate change. The pilot took place in four villages in the Sundarbans. A local CSO, Shushilan, is responsible for project implementation.

Methods: A local research organization conducted a Most Significant Change Study that employed a combination of Seasonal Calendar exercises, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and in-depth interviews in the four pilot villages and at the Shushilan office. The research activities engaged village beneficiaries (seeking gender-equal representation), project staff, local government officials, and institutional stakeholders.

India

Context: The project seeks to empower local communities in West Bengal's Sundarbans to protect and conserve the mangroves for mitigation of adverse climate change effects. Policy advocacy in West Bengal has focused on: integration of climate resilience activities in Gram Panchayat (local village) Development Plans; and government programming to support Self-Help Group involvement in climate resilience, alternate livelihood development, and mangrove conservation. In the first two years the project piloted awareness-raising and knowledge development sessions on mangrove conservation and climate action in Self-Help Group (SHG) meetings, skill development sessions for SHG members on climate resilient agriculture and sustainable inland aquaculture, and Gram Panchayat (village council) awareness-raising on integrating mangrove conservation in Gram Panchayat Development Plans in four villages. The project plans to scale pilot-level results through program reform and regulations that would reach all 13 administrative blocks of the Sundarbans region.

Methods: The P&R in India engaged SHG members, Sangha (SHG federation) leaders, government officials and Gram Panchayat representatives associated with the four pilot villages through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews (52 women, 10 men).

Cambodia

Context: In Kampot and Preah Sihanouk Provinces, Landesa, civil society organizations, local government partners, and communities have worked together to institutionalize multi-stakeholder collaboration and strengthen five Community Fisheries' (CFis) capacities to contribute to sustainable mangrove ecosystem management. Landesa and Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT) collaborated with government agencies and local CSOs to reinstate the Technical Working Group for Prek Kampong Smach Marine Fisheries Management Area (PKS-MFMA). A consortium of implementing partner organizations facilitated activities to strengthen CFi skills and capacities,

including community journalism, patrolling using the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) application, participatory community research, local policy development, and mangrove nursery and planting. Learning from the pilots is expected to inform national-level guidelines and tools for strengthening community-inclusive mangrove governance through CFIs.

Methods: The P&R engaged 25 government officials from the respective provinces, districts, and communes where project interventions have taken place, civil society organization staff, and leaders from the five targeted CFIs (3 women, 22 men). Fifty-six community representatives, including 30 women, from the five CFIs were also engaged in focus group discussions. The P&R also included discussions with implementing partners.

Indonesia

Context: The project advocates with national and subnational government agencies for integrating secure coastal community tenure in policies for mangrove ecosystem protection. In doing so, the project has sought to ground-truth these policies to ensure that they are relevant to the realities of communities affected by them. In its first two years the project in Indonesia has contributed to several processes of national and subnational policymaking and reform (draft of Presidential Order, Ministerial Regulation, Development Plans, and a subnational regulation being among them) through language drafts, recommendations, and continuous advocacy. In collaboration with government offices and local communities, the project is also conducting community land registration pilots in 4 sites: Nagekeo regency in East Nusa Tenggara province, Yapen Islands (Yapen) regency in Papua province, Mempawah regency in West Kalimantan, and Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN). The pilots serve to center customary community consensus and decision-making within mechanisms for securing both customary community legal land status and communal coastal land tenure, for strengthened mangrove ecosystem protection.

Methods: The P&R engaged a total of 34 external stakeholders (6 women, 28 men) in in-depth interviews. The stakeholders included 6 national government officials, 12 sub-national government officials, representatives of 3 civil society organizations, 3 academia actors, and 10 community leaders representing Indigenous communities in three regencies. Data collection was conducted through both in-person and remote methods to ensure a diverse and balanced range of perspectives. Fieldwork was carried out in Nagekeo and Ngada regencies, complemented by site visits in Jakarta and online engagements with informants in IKN and Yapen. At the national level, consultations engaged key stakeholders including the Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning (ATR/BPN), the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, and BRIN (Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional--The National Research and Innovation Agency). The P&R process in Indonesia also drew insights from a non-mangroves Landesa pilot site in Ngada regency of East Nusa Tenggara Province where Landesa is applying the same community land registration model and approach.

Findings

1. How has the project contributed to state and community planners' enhanced understanding of policy and program development needed?

Enhanced understanding of national and subnational state planners on tenure's importance to mangrove conservation and sustainable development. In Indonesia the country team has contributed to increased nuance of the Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning (ATR/BPN)'s 3R framework on tenure (Right-Restriction-Responsibility), such that it recognizes the significance of communal tenure. Previously, the framework or paradigm did not surface the viability of communal tenure and focused on application to individual land rights. Through ATR/BPN's collaboration with the team over the course of the project—especially multi-stakeholder convenings facilitated by Landesa that created safe spaces for government actors, adat leaders, and CSOs to reconcile divergent interpretations—the 3R framework is now being applied to understand communal tenure. The enhanced framework allows for greater appreciation of stewardship obligations of local communities and correspondingly, the importance of restrictions designed to safeguard ecological systems.

At the sub-national level, the team's engagement with IKN officials has led to their enhanced recognition that, for truly effective mangrove conservation policies, tenure clarity over land with or adjacent to mangroves is important. Advocacy that linked tenure recognition to ecosystem services (mangrove protection, climate resilience) and local development goals proved more persuasive than rights-framing alone, increasing bureaucratic buy-in. Correspondingly, with Landesa's assistance, IKN's policies-in-development seek to position tenure security as foundational to the integrity and legitimacy of IKN's environmental safeguards planning (see findings under question 3, below).

Subnational and local state planners engaged in learning on how programming targeting community agency can support mangrove conservation. Government officials in India have developed an enhanced understanding of the importance of community agency, with a focus on women's contributions, for mangrove conservation through their collaboration with the team over the pilot design, implementation, and documentation of lessons learned. Block-level government functionaries and village-level government representatives (members of the Gram Panchayats, or Village Councils) have committed their support to scaling the project's pilot interventions on SHG awareness-raising on mangrove conservation and climate change to all villages across the twenty-three Gram Panchayats of Kultali and Gosaba blocks. The commitment demonstrates the functionaries' and representatives' understanding of the value of integrating the awareness-raising into the SHGs' functions; it also signifies an interest in pursuing an expanded pilot to identify how government programming can be modified to facilitate the SHGs' integration of livelihoods, conservation, and sustainable resource use. Evidence also shows how the integrated SHG meetings contribute to women's enhanced awareness and information-sharing on mangrove conservation and sustainable livelihood development among their households.

The project has especially contributed to shifts in understanding and actions of Gram Panchayat officials concerning the importance of community awareness-raising on mangrove conservation through its contributions to district-wide Gram Panchayat meeting content and the country team's relationship-building with Gram Panchayats. Although mangroves might have been a concern of the Gram Panchayats in the Sundarbans previously, they might not have considered the potential for Gram Panchayat development planning to address climate change through mangrove conservation. To address this gap, the project team facilitated an orientation on mangrove conservation and climate change at the Gram Panchayat general body meeting held after new representative elections. Besides sharing updates on pilot interventions with Gram Panchayats, Landesa also contributed to discussions on mangrove conservation in village-wide meetings and general meetings of the Gram Panchayats. Correspondingly, members of one of three pilot Gram Panchayats initiated discussions on mangrove conservation in the traditional gathering spaces of the respective village units they represent. Another Gram Panchayat has included awareness campaigns on mangrove conservation (i.e., through wall writing) in the Gram Panchayat development plan, an activity that they might not typically consider for their plan.

Community planners' enhanced understanding of how policy and programming can support their livelihood development. The Bangladesh pilot incorporated discussion-based trainings on community advocacy in meetings of the VCF sub-groups, called sub-VCFs, and promoted that the meeting spaces are accessible to women. Discussions in sub-VCFs on local communities' rights to land and natural resources, their role in forest conservation, and the existing avenues for communities to engage with and advocate to varying government offices have enhanced their awareness of legal and policy issues that affect their livelihoods. Community members who have participated in the sub-VCFs and advocacy-focused meetings facilitated through the project now recognize the need for change in government processes to promote more effective and equitable land allocation, forest benefit-sharing, and support to sustainable livelihoods.

2. How has state and community planning changed as a result of project interventions?

Multi-stakeholder platforms and community organizations for natural resource management have been reactivated, where they had been languishing before. In Cambodia, capacity-strengthening facilitated by the project for Community Fishery (CFi) committee members and chiefs has contributed to more regular CFi patrolling by community members. Committee members' and chiefs' participation in community research activities has promoted their stronger understanding of community needs and priorities. They have also learned to use communication tools important for organizing the community. As a result, CFi leaders have created monthly CFi patrol plans and are facilitating their implementation.

Also in Cambodia, the project has helped reform and reactivate the Technical Working Group (TWG) of the PKS-MFMA to support community-inclusive planning. With its new composition, the PKS-MFMA TWG brings together previously siloed stakeholders, including relevant government departments, CFis, and NGOs, with a mutual interest in promoting the MFMA as a model for community-owned ecotourism and sustainable mariculture. Prior to the project's intervention, the

PKS-MFMA TWG had been largely inactive, due to weak leadership and multi-stakeholder engagement; foundational elements for MFMA governance such as zoning remained incomplete. To promote the re-establishment of the TWG, the project team played a key communication and coordination role among relevant government actors (the Preah Sihanouk Provincial Administration and the Department of Fisheries Conservation) and NGOs active in the MFMA site, culminating in the preparation of a draft decision for the action and its ultimate approval. Consequently, the newly re-established TWG has recently conducted a community-inclusive consultation process for zoning of the PKS-MFMA.

Improved coordination between government and local communities. The Bangladesh team has helped create venues for local government to interact directly with community members on mangrove forest governance. Spaces for coordination with government officers at multiple levels had not been available to community members before. Due to project advocacy encouraging officials' participation in the newly organized sub-VCFs, community members can now interact directly with key officials from the Forest Department, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Union Councils through the sub-VCF meetings. The project has also facilitated coordination meetings wherein community members can engage directly with higher tiers of forest governance in the Sundarbans, such as the Co-Management Committee (CMC). The opportunities for improved coordination have enabled local government provision of funding and inputs for a communally-managed mangrove plantation. They have also resulted in government trainings (during sub-VCF meetings) and access to government facilities in support of villagers' livelihood diversification and shifts to livelihoods that reduce mangrove degradation risk, such as poultry rearing and vegetable farming.

In Cambodia CFIs have strengthened relationships with local authorities, including commune officials and other CFIs in the area, due to the project's support to CFI members' participation in existing commune and CFI network meetings. As a result, CFI members participate in discussions on Commune Development Plans and coordinate with local authorities over CFI patrolling. The project team has also assisted in funding, organizing, and facilitating meetings for discussion of local ordinance development among CFI members and commune and other relevant government authorities.

In Indonesia the project has helped include stakeholders representing local community interests in coastal land reform processes in Yapen. Community, Customary Council, and civil society actors typically do not have opportunity to participate in land reform discussions in the territory; however, the country team has promoted that a government-run multi-stakeholder task team on Agrarian Reform (*Gugus Tugas Reformasi Agraria*, GTRA) include CSOs and tribal leaders, as part of project advocacy to integrate community mapping into the GTRA agenda in Yapen.

Strengthened capacity of communities to advocate for themselves. Due to the project's support to the formation of sub-VCF groups in Bangladesh, community members have enhanced confidence and organizational capacities to advocate for their needs. Before the project's intervention, community members rarely voiced their concerns or participated meaningfully in local governance. The newly functioning sub-VCF groups provide a space for structured

discussions and decision-making among community members, women especially. Consequently, they identify and voice their needs to government officers, concerning access to inputs, support for alternative livelihoods, and inclusion in local decision-making platforms.

Project efforts in Cambodia have also contributed to CFI members' enhanced capacities to advocate for community needs and concerns. Enhanced understanding of CFI threats and potentially profitable livelihood options and new public speaking skills help them articulate community needs and concerns. The project's targeted capacity-strengthening of CFI members on how to draft and submit a local ordinance also promoted their participation in commune-level meetings on ordinance development. Additionally, learning how to use the SMART app for patrolling mangrove forest areas and fishing sites has helped them generate data to further inform their advocacy. CFI members now voice community concerns on resource protection and management at community meetings, commune council meetings, commune dialogues, and public forums; they also organize community gatherings with stakeholders and local authorities to discuss community natural resource concerns. The issues they raise include mangrove clearance and illegal fishing; and support needed for patrolling, livelihood development, installation of mangrove protection signboards, and fund allocation from the commune investment fund.

Incorporation of community-generated information in bottom-up communal land registration processes. In Indonesia, processes to formally register land (including confirming boundary maps and demarcation) are commonly prompted, overseen, and approved by government actors (top-down). The project helped introduce a process wherein community members, especially underrepresented customary communities, are involved and participated in boundary setting, in generating the mapping information, and in validating tenure and use of land under their territories. The process reduced administrative complexity, provided the community helpful information for their advocacy for customary community recognition, and provided the regency government with credible data. Examples of co-mapping activities held in Ngada and Nagekeo showed that maps and genealogical records co-produced with communities served as both advocacy tools and administrative inputs. Direct, inclusive engagement in these processes proved to be more effective in increasing community awareness and buy-in towards obtaining formal tenure than top-down sensitization, as community members felt respected and heard. Meanwhile in Yapen and Mempawah, community co-mapping processes are being recognized and aligned as legitimate pathways to integrate into formal tenure reform agenda and land-use planning.

3. How has the project influenced policy, regulations, and program development?

National and subnational regulatory text drafted recognizing community consultation, tenure, and stewardship responsibilities. Landesa's close engagement with government institutions in Indonesia indicates advocacy wins in establishing community tenure security and mangroves protection as a foundational connected issue. At the national level, the draft technical guide for ATR/BPN Ministerial Regulation 14/2024 adopts more inclusive language than previous regulatory texts. A product of multi-stakeholder deliberations over community tenure and stewardship, the guide's provisions are designed to avoid over-reliance on elite customary councils by requiring broader community consultations and verification. The guide acknowledges customary lands and

the responsibilities of their stewards, and it signals acceptance of participatory mapping principles. Landesa's growing recognition by ATR/BPN, signaled by discussions of a formal MOU, and its collaboration over the draft guide with academic and civil society organizations with recognized expertise in legal reform and land and natural resource management has bolstered the credibility of Landesa's proposals. Consequently, the guide's provisions reflect an important discursive shift: concepts of co-owned data, customary recognition, and stewardship responsibilities—once considered external to state land administration—are now entering mainstream regulatory language.

In the IKN context, the Draft for Head of IKN Regulation (*Rancangan Peraturan Kepala IKN, Ranperka IKN*) on Coastal and Small Island Management and on Protected Areas include provisions for recognizing traditional management rights, protecting mangrove ecosystems, and linking these rights to mechanisms such as Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES). A Landesa-supported mangroves ecosystem services valuation study informed the draft's provisions by presenting updated information on the amount and condition of mangroves in IKN and defining pathways to incentivize community demand for tenure formalization and governance of mangrove-forested land. The study illustrates how PES, as a viable mechanism, can incentivize community members' stewardship of the ecosystem; community members' formal tenure recognition is an important precondition for community members' benefit from PES. By grounding recommendations for policy change in both social and ecological evidence, Landesa ensured that they connect conservation objectives with community livelihoods and fiscal rationales for protection.

Subnational budgetary allocations and enforcement mechanisms for mangrove protection and customary recognition. At the regency level in Indonesia, Landesa's continued advocacy has contributed to Nagekeo's strengthened commitments to mangrove protection and *ulayat* (customary) recognition. Landesa contributed language specifying the connection between tenure security and mangroves protection to drafts of the Nagekeo regency 2024-2043 land use plan (RTRW 2024–2043) and 2024-2026 budget allocation plan (RPD 2024–2026). Adjacent, a circular in mid-2024 was issued by the regency head signaling another commitment by the regency to strengthen mangroves protection—a cause that underlies Landesa's advocacy and relationship-building with the regency government. The circular prohibits mangrove clearing and mandates silvofishery practices, backed by potential criminal sanctions. Similarly in Ngada, project advocacy and pilot efforts contributed to a regency-wide SOP institutionalizing participatory mapping and which resulted in a MoU and budget allocation of IDR 50 million annually for the regency's Office of Community and Village Empowerment (DPMD) to support recognition processes for communal tenure. While the budget is modest and likely insufficient, these government-led actions signify a formed commitment towards the cause. The country team's leveraging of political timing and alignment helped make the achievements possible: in Nagekeo, the team aligned their advocacy with the Nagekeo district government's timeline for developing the RTRW and RPD; and in Ngada, the team identified the regency head's acceptance and willingness to support ATR/BPN Ministerial Regulation 14/2024 concerning customary recognition as an entry point in forming relationships and advocating for advancing formalized collective tenure efforts..

4. To what extent are these changes moving towards increased gender equality and social inclusion?

Women and youth engaged in management planning more than before, though norms may still limit their participation and influence. Due to project efforts in Cambodia, women participants in the project's capacity strengthening activities now have more information, self-confidence, and opportunities to participate in decision-making on CFI management than before. Landesa and local implementing partners have promoted a gender balance in all CFI capacity strengthening activities, including participatory research, community journalism, and public speaking. Women have benefited meaningfully from capacity-strengthening efforts when partners have facilitated small group formats and women-only training sessions; such practices have helped create safe spaces for learning and confidence building for women. Assigning specific roles to women (i.e. secretary, savings group leader) within CFIs has also helped ensure women's participation in CFI meetings, although their instatement in primary land and fishery management decision-making roles remains limited.

In pilot communities in Indonesia, women's and youth's information and skills gained on participatory mapping has contributed to local leaders' acceptance of their participation in community decision-making. The project has made intentional efforts to include women and youth in mapping activities in Ngada, Nagekeo, and Mompawah. In the process, mapping sessions have become de facto platforms for women and youth to learn, ask questions, and contribute local knowledge, alongside male elders.

Initial positive change in duty-bearers' awareness of GESI's importance. Exposure to inclusive practices is slowly shifting attitudes among some adat and government leaders in Indonesia. Several Ngada officials now see youth involvement as an asset for accelerating mapping, while women's contributions to genealogical data collection are recognized as improving accuracy.

Initiating a process of sustainable livelihood creation for women. In India pilot communities, the project is coordinating skill development sessions for women SHG members in climate-resilient agriculture and sustainable inland aquaculture as alternative livelihoods to unsustainable fishing practices. Through expansion of the pilot interventions to more villages the project, in collaboration with government actors, aims to better understand the results of SHG members' skill development and potential for modified government programming to support them.

Advocating for women's roles in resource governance. The project in Bangladesh has been working to generate evidence in support of a minimum 40% women's participation quota in VCFs and CMCs – building on the 2017 Protected Area Management Rules that mandated 50% women's presence in Peoples Forums (PFs), but remained gender-neutral for other bodies, including VCFs and CMCs. The team in Bangladesh initiated a multi-tiered advocacy campaign engaging actors from the Chief Conservator of Forest to Upazila-level officers that emphasized how the underrepresentation of women in forest governance limited both gender equality and conservation effectiveness. Additionally, sub-VCF group meeting attendance showed that while women's participation in the VCF had been minimal, by the end of the pilot's first year, women constituted

65% of all sub-VCF group participants and as the second year closed, women constituted 72%. The project team shared the evidence on the increase of women's attendance in the newly-initiated sub-VCF groups with government actors as an indication of strong community support for women's voices in conservation and village development. Through additional sharing of outcomes from the sub-VCF group mobilizations and national level strategic dialogues, the project team aims to raise forest authorities' awareness of the added value of women's contributions, leading to increased responsiveness and institutional willingness to revisit policy guidelines.

5. Roadblocks along change pathways

Insufficient government capacity and political will. Limited government capacities can constrain the effectiveness of project efforts to enhance government support to community stewardship and tenure over mangrove forest resources. In some areas of the Indian Sundarbans, local government (the Gram Panchayat) has limited human resources to reach remote villages; consequently, they can only play a weak role in village mobilization and they are challenged to support the project's interventions to raise awareness on mangrove conservation and sustainable livelihood development. In Indonesia, despite unprecedented commitments to customary formalization of land and resource rights in Ngada and Nagekeo regencies, the budget available to support on-the-ground registration efforts to implement them is meager.

Limited political will can also inhibit project progress. In Nagekeo in Indonesia, the topic of customary land and resource rights can be controversial among local leaders; consequently, political resistance to the idea slows down interventions in support of community mapping and rights formalization. In both Indonesia and India, frequent personnel rotations can also make political will insecure and limit government capacity to implement or follow-through on plans and actions proposed.

Community limitations. Despite project efforts to strengthen community capacities to contribute to sustainable mangrove ecosystem management, community members' interest in conservation and stewardship may still be weak in some country contexts. Community members may also lack resources to implement pro-mangrove livelihoods.

- In Cambodia, some CFI members show low commitment or forget their roles, making it difficult to implement joint actions or community-based monitoring, indicating a need for ongoing engagement, awareness-building, and clear communication between CFI committees and the CFI members.
- Lack of access to financial resources and additional training can limit women participants in alternative livelihood skill development sessions in India and sub-VCF members in Bangladesh from making the livelihood alternatives profitable. Similarly, CFI members in Cambodia lack small grants, technical assistance, and marketing skill development to support ecotourism and other sustainable livelihood initiatives recently started.

Social norms and gender-neutral protocols for policy development limit gender equality. Social norms that effectively limit women's role in land and natural resource governance and

decision-making inhibit gender-equality outcomes from the project. These norms pervade and affect institutions, duty-bearers, and community members.

- Customary norms in several of the pilot sites in Indonesia privilege male lineage heads, and women are seldom recognized as formal rights-holders or decision-makers. While women are included in community meetings, decision-making still largely rests with male elders. Correspondingly, although the project has made intentional efforts to include women in participatory mapping activities, mapping in Nagekeo has stalled due to cultural resistance to women's participation.
- Deep seated cultural norms and a lack of gender-responsive protocol restrict women's engagement in governance bodies and advocacy fora in Indonesia and Bangladesh. Limited measures to promote women's representation in district and provincial policy forums results in policy drafts or MOUs lacking women's perspectives. Although women's participation in local governance has increased in Bangladesh, women's achievement of true leadership roles remains rare; those women who do were enabled by spousal and familial encouragement. Additionally, even when women are included in VCFs or CMCs, their participation is often symbolic.

Livelihood trends and community practices that limit youth inclusion. Educational commitments, labor migration (seeking jobs in factories or casinos), and a lack of interest or perceived value in CFI work can hinder consistent youth engagement in the CFIs in Cambodia. CFIs also lack formal mechanisms or incentives to promote youth mentorship or leadership, despite community interest in youth involvement and cultivation of new generations of leaders.

Discussion and lessons learned

Lessons learned draw from the previously presented findings and also from Mid-term Pause & Reflect Workshop sessions wherein country teams reflected on learnings from key project successes and challenges.

1. Success in enhancing planners' understanding, reforming planning processes, influencing policy reform, and promoting GESI depends foundationally on identifying entry points for project efforts based on a fine-tuned understanding of government needs and key stakeholders to engage with. Correspondingly, in India the project aligned efforts to promote women's role in mangrove conservation with a higher-level government instruction to promote "women-friendly" Gram Panchayats. In Indonesia, understanding how the national ATR/BPN regulation 14/2024 influences subnational priorities in Ngada has proven key for identifying opportunities to contribute to regency standard operating procedures for registration and for budgetary allocation in support of customary tenure and resource rights. Appreciation of the IKN government authorities' development goals also helped identify the entry point for discussion of PES potential. In Cambodia, the project identified government interest in reactivating the PKS-MFMA TWG and fulfilled a coordination and communication role that was lacking for the TWG's reinvigoration.

2. Especially in contexts where state planners are far removed from community experiences, efforts to incorporate community-inclusive multi-stakeholder deliberation over policy and program development help enhance stakeholders' understanding of what the policy or programming innovation or change should look like. Multi-stakeholder meetings and events including adat leaders and CSOs, carefully facilitated by the project in Indonesia, helped contribute to ATR/BPN's enhanced understanding of the connections between communal tenure and stewardship responsibilities. The expanded conceptualization of tenure also helped shape provisions in the draft technical guide for ATR/BPN Ministerial Regulation 14/2024.
 3. Providing targeted orientation on key issues to primary stakeholders has made initial contributions to government agenda shaping. Project-facilitated orientations for Gram Panchayats and community advocacy training for sub-VCFs have contributed to consideration of how GPDPs can incorporate mangrove conservation and sub-VCF articulation of advocacy messages.
 4. Forming coalitions to design and deliver policy proposals and basing them in evidence has helped build credibility of policy advice. Collaborating with academic and civil society organizations with recognized thematic and legal expertise has enhanced the strength of the draft technical guide for ATR/BPN Ministerial Regulation 14/2024. Findings from the mangrove ecosystem services valuation corroborated provisions for linking management rights with PES in the Ranperka IKN, and evidence of women's increased sub-VCF group attendance has helped achieve traction in advocacy to forest authorities for a minimum 40% women's participation quota in VCFs and CMCs.
 5. Equipping community organizations with enhanced legal literacy, cultivating their local leadership, and strengthening their capacities to function independently and mobilize the community GESI-responsively is elemental to enhancing their role in sustainable resource co-management. Sub-VCF trainings on land and resource rights and pathways for government engagement have helped community members identify and voice their needs to government officers, concerning support for alternative livelihoods and inclusion in local decision-making platforms. CFi capacity-strengthening activities, particularly those that targeted community leaders, equipped leadership with information and tools to better assess community needs and organize the community to conduct regular patrolling. Breaking the VCF into smaller groups promoted community members' more active participation in community organizing and advocacy. Encouraging sub-VCF meetings to be women-friendly spaces contributed to women's meaningful inclusion in the sub-VCFs.
- Although the project has made initial steps to promote women's participation in community organizations, large-scale socio-economic trends can inhibit youth's meaningful engagement (such as economic out-migration in the case of CFis). Without intentional changes to project design, limited youth participation can continue to deter community institution strengthening.

6. Although the project has facilitated technical knowledge development, access to inputs, and community organizing to support alternative and sustainable livelihoods, effectively addressing the enabling environment for livelihood productivity is challenging; this can limit project progress towards sustainable ecosystem management and mangrove ecosystem health. Income needs can drive Sundarbans community members back to livelihood practices that degrade the mangroves. Similarly, there is a need for recently started CFI livelihood initiatives to achieve productivity for greater community, youth especially, valorization of CFI-based livelihoods and motivation to steward the CFI.
7. Gender-sensitive intervention design and close collaboration with government actors help advance gender equality at the levels of people and duty-bearers. Good practices for promoting women's meaningful benefit from community capacity-strengthening include gender-equitable quotas for trainings and meetings, small group formats, and women-only spaces. Exposure to learning from gender-sensitive pilots helps enhance government officials' awareness of the importance of gender equality to improved government processes, including customary rights recognition in Indonesia and community- inclusive mangrove conservation and protection in Bangladesh.
8. Although women's capacity-strengthening has enhanced their self-confidence and access to decision-making spaces, more intentional awareness-raising with male community members and local duty-bearers on gender equality and women's empowerment is necessary to address limiting gender norms. Supportive husbands and families have enabled the few cases of women taking on leadership roles in pilot communities in Bangladesh. Even when there exist law and policy mandates on gender-equitable participation in natural resource governance, limited awareness of the mandates' significance inhibits local government officials from implementing them (across country contexts, but particularly in the case of Joint Forest Management Committees in West Bengal, India).

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

Findings from the P&R show that, concerning state and community planners' understanding of policy and program development needed, the project has helped shift paradigms of national and subnational state planners towards inclusion of community tenure in policy development. At lower levels of government, the project has also promoted officials' learning about how modified programming can better support mangrove conservation. Additionally, it has contributed to community institutions' enhanced understanding of opportunities to influence laws and programs relevant to community members' livelihoods.

Planning and management of mangrove ecosystem resources are more community-inclusive as a result of project interventions. Platforms for natural resource management have been reactivated and made more accessible to communities. Improved land registration processes and capacity-

strengthening interventions have also enhanced communities' capacities to contribute to planning through stronger relationships with local government actors and enhanced information and skills to advocate for their sustainable livelihood development and customary rights recognition.

Concerning influence on policy, regulations, and program development, the project has influenced government agendas and commitments to prioritize customary and communal rights recognition, stewardship responsibilities, and livelihoods. National and subnational regulatory text has been drafted to this effect in Indonesia. At subnational levels, enforcement mechanisms have been put in place as well as budgetary allocations for mangrove protection and customary recognition.

The project has helped lay the foundation for GESI in policy and program development and planning, for example, helping raise duty-bearers' awareness of GESI's importance to community land administration and rights formalization. Women and youth are included in spaces for decision-making on community land and resources where they had not been previously. The project has also facilitated collaborative learning and evidence generation with and for government stakeholders for the development of programming and more robust regulations on women's sustainable livelihood development and gender-equitable natural resource governance.

Despite significant positive results achieved thus far, challenges to progress remain. Lack of human and financial resources and limited political will can constrain government capacities to implement or follow-through on plans and actions developed together with the project to support community stewardship and tenure over mangrove forest resources. Local community members' limited interest in conservation and stewardship and their lack of resources to implement sustainable or alternative livelihoods restrict their capacities to contribute to sustainable mangrove ecosystem management. Social norms limiting women's role in land and natural resource governance and decision-making inhibit pilot efforts to enhance women's meaningful participation in governance and promote gender equality in community development and planning. Youth's limited valorization of mangrove ecosystem-dependent livelihoods and weak community organizational support to youth engagement inhibits youth-inclusive capacity-strengthening.

Key lessons learned from the project's successes and challenges thus far highlight several good practices and approaches for effective policy advocacy, including developing a nuanced understanding of government needs and priorities, providing targeted orientation to duty-bearers on key policy issues, forming coalitions to collaborate over policy proposals, and substantiating policy advice with evidence. Incorporating community-inclusive multi-stakeholder deliberation into the policy development process helps promote that the policy change or innovation responds to communities' experiences. Capacity-strengthening targeting legal literacy, local leadership development, and GESI-responsive community-organizing helps enhance opportunities for communities to contribute to sustainable resource management; however, more intentional engagement of male community members and local duty-bearers is needed to more robustly advance gender equality. Failure to address the limited enabling environment for livelihood productivity can also deter project progress towards sustainable mangrove ecosystem management.

Recommendations

Project recommendations concern the areas of policy influence, community organization strengthening, GESI, and research.

Policy influence

- Continue to invest time and resources in developing a nuanced understanding of government needs and priorities, at multiple jurisdictional levels. This has been key to successful policy influence in terms of commitments made and agendas defined.
- More consistently consider opportunities for research and evidence generation to strengthen policy advocacy. Evidence-informed policy advising is already part of project strategy; however, the level of time and thought put into the research dissemination strategy and delivery of the evidence can make a difference in how clearly findings are communicated and how effectively state planners engage with the messaging.
- Consider opportunities for forming influential coalitions to strengthen policy proposals in other country contexts besides Indonesia. Coalition forming may be particularly effective for national policy influence; its feasibility as a strategy may also depend on whether there are existing contacts or networks to build off of.
- Continue to support efforts to incorporate community-inclusive multi-stakeholder deliberation in policy and program development processes and conduct targeted MEL to better understand how the efforts can lead to policy influence. Intentional facilitation of meetings and discussion spaces over key policy issues can ignite the policy change pathways needed. While the project has documented initial results from efforts in Indonesia concerning regulations in development from ATR/BPN, there is opportunity to learn from similar related efforts in other project countries (i.e., Bangladesh, Cambodia).
- Explore more how providing targeted orientation to state and community planners can lead to shaping agendas and commitments on issues of interest to the project, beyond local scales. There is evidence of initial progress in India and Bangladesh from targeted orientation and awareness-raising activities for local government officials and community organizations. Additional thorough MEL can help determine potential for rolling out orientation programs across jurisdictions with opportunities for mangrove forest co-management and applicability of the approach to other country contexts.
- To address challenges of limited political will, follow good practices and approaches for effective policy advocacy identified, including, in addition to nuanced identification of government needs and priorities, basing policy advice in evidence, forming coalitions to deliver policy proposals, and facilitating community-inclusive multi-stakeholder deliberation.
- Explore ways to leverage the project's regional policy advising to address national and subnational government financial constraints to implement policy recommendations.

Strengthening community organizations, GESI, and Research

- Focus on legal literacy and local leadership development as part of scaled interventions to enhance communities' role in sustainable resource management. Interventions targeting these capacities have had substantial results thus far.
- Look for opportunities to institutionalize practices that promote gender equality across efforts to strengthen community organizations. Implementing gender-equitable quotas and facilitating women-only (or women-friendly) spaces have proven helpful first steps to advancing gender equal opportunities to benefit from community initiatives.
- Consider what additional resources and strategy modifications will be needed to promote enhanced youth inclusion as part of community organization strengthening. The enabling environment for youth inclusion is lacking in Cambodia but likely also in several country contexts. Reflection on what aspects of that environment the project can feasibly address can help develop a more fine-tuned youth inclusion approach.
- Incorporate intentional awareness-raising with male community members and local state planners on gender equality and women's empowerment across project efforts to reach more robust gender equality results. Ensuring that women are present at discussion fora and events on mangrove forest and coastal management – when they had not been before—is commendable; however, making sure that their participation is meaningful and sustained requires strategies that engage local men and policy implementers.
- Pursue more research and learning on the tenure-related policy, programming, and institutional change needed to promote communities' sustainable livelihood productivity. Articulating these pathways will help ensure that the project can enhance communities' incentives to steward the mangrove ecosystem. The project theory of change assumes we will help facilitate the enabling environment for productive, sustainable livelihoods; however, achieving it is challenging and requires a long time-frame.