



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coastal Livelihoods and Mangroves Project: Mid-Term Pause and Reflect

In 2022 Landesa began the ambitious 5-year Coastal Livelihoods and Mangroves Project 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. In 2025 Landesa conducted a mid-term systematic "Pause and Reflect" (P&R) assessment across Cambodia, Indonesia, India, and Bangladesh to understand roadblocks along change pathways and identify elements of success to build upon moving forward. The P&R explored the following questions focused on short-term outcomes and processes in the project theory of change:

- 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?

Progress

The project has shifted national and subnational state planners' thinking and actions towards recognition of community and customary rights to and stewardship of mangrove forests. These shifts include deliberate involving of communities in planning and management for mangrove ecosystems. Among the highlights are: a community-inclusive consultation process for zoning of the Prek Kampong Smach Marine Fisheries Management Area in Cambodia, conducted through a Technical Working Group newly reactivated through project efforts; regulation drafts on Coastal and Small Island Management and on Protected Areas for Indonesia's new intended capital city include provisions for recognizing traditional management rights, protecting mangrove ecosystems, and linking these rights to mechanisms such as Payment for Ecosystem Services.

The project has increased duty-bearers' awareness of GESI's importance to community land administration and to formalization processes. It has also facilitated collaborative learning and evidence generation with and for government stakeholders to develop programming and more robust regulations on women's sustainable livelihoods and gender-equitable natural resource governance. Highlights include: local leaders' acceptance of women's and youth's participation in community decision-making in pilot communities in Indonesia, due to the latter's information and skills gained on participatory mapping through the project; in Bangladesh evidence of women's increased attendance in sub-groups of the Village Conservation Forum (VCF) formed through the project has helped achieve traction in advocacy to forest authorities for a minimum 40% women's participation quota in VCFs and Co-Management Committees.

Challenges

Despite positive results, challenges remain. Lack of human and financial resources and limited political will can constrain government capacities to implement or follow-through on plans to support community stewardship and tenure over mangrove forest resources. Local community members' limited interest in stewardship and their lack of resources to implement sustainable or alternative livelihoods restrict their capacities to contribute to sustainable mangrove ecosystem management. Youth engagement in community natural resource management can be limited due to the lack of value they give to mangrove-resource dependent livelihoods. Social norms limiting women's role in land and natural resource governance and decision-making inhibit efforts to enhance women's meaningful participation and promote gender equality in community governance and planning.

Key lessons

- Good practices and approaches for effective policy advocacy include 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.
- Deliberately including communities in multi-stakeholder deliberations during policy development helps promote that the policy change responds to communities' experiences.
- Capacity-strengthening targeting legal literacy, local leadership development, and GESI-responsive community-organizing helps enhance communities' opportunities to contribute to sustainable resource management; however, more intentional engagement of male community members and local duty-bearers is needed to robustly advance gender equality.
- Failure to address the limited enabling environment for livelihood productivity can deter project progress towards sustainable mangrove ecosystem management.

Project recommendations

In addition to carrying forward the key lessons, recommendations include:

Policy influence

- Consider opportunities for forming influential coalitions for drafting of regulatory text to help build credibility of policy proposals, building on Indonesia's experience.
- Explore more how providing targeted orientation to state and community planners can have scaled results, influencing multiple agendas and commitments.
- Explore ways to leverage the project's regional policy advising to address national and subnational government financial constraints to implement policy recommendations.
- Consistently identify opportunities for research to strengthen policy advocacy and conduct MEL to better understand how project efforts influence policy processes and outcomes.

Strengthening community organizations, GESI, and Research

- As project interventions scale, focus on legal literacy and local leadership development to enhance communities' role in sustainable resource management.

- Look for opportunities to institutionalize practices that promote gender equality in community organizations.
- Consider what additional resources and adjustments will be needed to promote enhanced youth inclusion as part of strengthening community organizations.
- Incorporate intentional awareness-raising with male community members and with local state planners on gender equality and women's empowerment across project efforts.
- Pursue more research and learning on the tenure-related policy, programming, and institutional changes needed to promote sustainable and productive livelihoods to help ensure that the project can enhance communities' incentives to steward the mangrove ecosystem.