

Community protocols

Tools for awareness raising and conservation



OVER HUNDREDS OF YEARS, farmers and herders have grown crops, raised livestock and used land, forests and water. In doing so, they have created crop varieties, livestock breeds and ways of managing the environment that are of immense value both for the communities themselves and the rest of the world. But these varieties, breeds, the environment they are part of, and the knowledge needed to maintain them, are in danger: they are threatened by the spread of industrial agriculture, environmental degradation and a lack of recognition and political support. How can these vital “biocultural” community assets and their guardians be protected?

One answer is for a community to develop a **community protocol** – a record of how it has created and managed its natural and cultural resources.

What is a community protocol?

A community protocol consists of two aspects:

- A **written document** (or a video or other type of evidence) that highlights the community’s knowledge, traditions and the resources that it stewards. It states the reasons for conserving the resource and the community’s rights to do so.
- A **process** by which members of the community reflect on their way of life, their values, customs, resources and priorities. This process brings them together to create and agree on the common document.

The document

There is no set format for a community protocol: it depends on what each community thinks is important. In general, the document describes:

- The community that compiles the document
- The compilation process
- The resources that the community stewards
- The community’s contribution to the management and conservation of these resources
- Its rights and responsibilities in relation to the resource
- The support it needs to be able to continue maintaining the resource
- The customary rights and national and international laws and regulations that support the community’s demands.



Evelyn Mathias

Samburu herders developing a community protocol in Kenya

Defining the “community” behind the protocol can be a challenge. It may be a village, an ethnic group, a group of animal breeders, or a professional association. What matters is that the group has a common resource or set of knowledge. For example, a group of shepherds may keep a particular breed, or manage their animals in a way that maintains a certain type of landscape.

The process

How the document is **compiled** is crucial. The members of the community must feel they own the document and the information it contains. As many members of the community as possible must be involved in writing it. That builds on the diversity of knowledge and skills in the community, and strengthens the community’s own resources and resilience.

Outsiders can facilitate the process by stimulating dialogue within and between communities. They can help draft the text and advise on laws that support the community’s claims.

The document must reflect the values and ideas of the community, and not just a few dominant members (or the facilitators!). So the facilitators must be skilled, trustworthy and open; they must respect the community and be sensitive to how it functions.



Ilse Köhler-Rollefson

Listening to what women Raika pastoralists in Rajasthan, India, have to say



Biocultural community protocol documents from Kenya and India

Why community protocols?

A community protocol is a **powerful tool**:

- It can show to the outside world how the community has created its resources, and how it manages and maintains them.
- It provides evidence to support the community's claims to a particular resource.
- It raises the community members' awareness of their contributions to society and the environment, and stimulates them to work together for the common good.
- It can help create awareness and support from the public.
- It can be used to push for policy changes.

Community protocols are recognized under **international law**: Article 12 of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing, adopted in 2010 under the auspices of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, calls on its parties to support the development of community protocols.

Since 2008, a growing number of communities in Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Pacific have developed their own protocols. Several groups of herders – the Samburu in Kenya, the Raika and Lingayat in India and the Pash-ton in Pakistan – have used their protocols to highlight the value of their animal breeds and to claim their rights. They have fought to reopen traditional grazing lands and lobbied for the conservation of their breeds.

One risk: community protocols can trigger the abuse community's resources and knowledge by outsiders (and by community members themselves). Communities should be aware of this, monitor the use of the protocols and their resources, and be ready to defend their rights if necessary.

More information

LPP, LIFE Network and LPPS. 2010. Biocultural protocols for livestock keepers. Lokhit Pashu-Palak Sansthan, Sadri, India. <http://tinyurl.com/pj4snwu>

Natural Justice. 2009. Biocultural community protocols: A community approach to ensuring the integrity of environmental law and policy. UN Environment Programme and Natural Justice. <http://tinyurl.com/ocfcs5y>

Swiderska Krystyna et al. 2012. Biodiversity and culture: exploring community protocols, rights and consent. Participatory learning and action 65. IIED, London. <http://pubs.iied.org/14618IIED.html?s=PLA>

www.community-protocols.org. This site also contains examples of community protocols.

This brief

Authors: Evelyn Mathias and Ilse Köhler-Rollefson, evelyn@mamud.com, ilse.koehlerroll@googlemail.com,

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