

WHAT WORKS IN CAPACITY STRENGTHENING INITIATIVES WITH INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES, GROUPS, AND ORGANIZATIONS?

Lessons to inspire dialogue and action on Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship in the land now known as Canada | 2024



Photo credit: Overlooking Maasai grasslands by M. Nthiga, provided courtesy of Maliasili

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LESSONS TO INSPIRE DIALOGUE ON INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP IN THE LAND NOW KNOWN AS CANADA | 2024

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Report contributors and strategic advisory group: This report is the result of the contributions of members of the ESSA Technologies Ltd. (ESSA) consulting team. Jordan Tam (ESSA subcontractor) and Nataschia Tamburello led the research design and undertook interviews. Celeste Digiovanni (ESSA subcontractor) and Jimena Eyzaguirre undertook interviews and led analysis. Alexandre Crew also supported the interview process. The ESSA team worked with a strategic advisory group, which played an important role in scoping the research and advising on the relevance of results. The members of the strategic advisory group were Angel Ransom (Senior VP- Environmental Services, First Nations Major Project Coalition), Aroha Miller (Program Manager - Coastal Stewardship Network, Coastal First Nations), and Shianne McKay (Senior Project Manager, Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources).

Photo credit: rebuilding a traditional fishpond on the island of Moloka'i by S. Kanda, 2019, provided courtesy of KUA.

SUMMARY

Capacity to steward their lands and waters is an inherent right of Indigenous Peoples and fundamental to the health and wellbeing of local communities, with action by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) critical to meeting global biodiversity and climate goals. However, long-term systemic exclusions and disenfranchisement have created capacity gaps for IPLCs to participate in environmental governance. Understanding how to better support capacities for Indigenous and locally-led governance is essential, growing in urgency and importance.

Commissioned by Nature United, this report documents and shares learnings from effective and inspiring capacity strengthening initiatives (CSI) with Indigenous and local communities, groups, and organizations. The question that guides this work is: What factors contribute to the effectiveness of leading capacity strengthening initiatives with Indigenous and local communities, organizations, and groups? Selected for their degree of Indigenous and local community participation, scale, relevance to the Canadian context, novelty, and global geographic diversity, these twelve CSIs are the heart of the research.



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|--|--|----------------------------|
| 1 – International Rangers Federation | 5 – Fundación Pachamama | 9 – Sea Women of Melanesia |
| 2 – Tribal Air Monitoring Support Center | 6 – Centro para el Desarrollo del Indígena Amazónico (CEDIA) | 10 – Mimal Land Management |
| 3 – Kua’aina Ulu Auamo (Kua) | 7 – Maliasili | 11 – Learning On Country |
| 4 – Maui Nui Makai (MNMN) | 8 – The Nature Conservancy/Mongolia | 12 – Vision Matauranga |

This report is the result of 1) analyzing the profiles of the twelve individual CSIs from outside of Canada using a common structure, 2) synthesizing information across CSIs about what works and in what contexts, and 3) integrating feedback from Nature United and external advisors on emerging findings. Taken together, the twelve CSIs:

- relate to environmental and natural resource stewardship and management,
- reflect varied origins, including grassroots Indigenous-led efforts and initiatives initiated by non-governmental organizations,
- work at different levels (individual, organization, network, enabling environment),
- use a range of capacity strengthening approaches and delivery methods to meet their goals, and

- face shared constraints that limit the impact of their work, including the lack of sustainable funding and structural barriers like rural to urban migration of youth that are beyond the scope of any one initiative to address, and,
- help us imagine how CSIs operating at multiple levels are component parts of a dynamic, living system.

Studying experiences of the twelve initiatives operating around the world led to the following conclusion: capacity strengthening initiatives (CSIs) supporting conservation and stewardship by Indigenous and local communities are effective because of the values that guide their work, including the primacy of local ownership, and because of their attention to a mix of strategic, operational, and people-focused practices. Going further, we identified ten key factors that shape the effectiveness of capacity strengthening, as summarized in the diagram below.

Values are beliefs that people and groups use as standards to evaluate what is good and what is acceptable behavior, including how people should relate to each other and with their surroundings. Values core to effective capacity strengthening initiatives are as follows:

1. **Local ownership.** When working with communities and local organizations, sustained success of capacity strengthening depends on local ownership. Ownership is important throughout the lifecycle of the initiative and how it is governed. Initiatives that support community decision-making capacity, stronger institutions, and capacity for self-advocacy bridge the gap between the community governance and external, statutory governance.
2. **Cultural suitability:** Culture is core to the success of capacity strengthening and has many layers. Broadly speaking, culture is the way of life, patterns, and norms for entire societies or groups within it. As a core value, capacity strengthening with Indigenous and native communities happens in relationship with and is guided by their distinct cultures, traditions, and customs. At a strategic level, tracking evolving social norms of western culture helps seize opportunities to gain traction on systemic change, such as funding and partnerships, and anticipate challenges. At an operational level, cross-cultural dynamics that occur within the capacity strengthening initiative, where organizational norms meet community or local norms, require skillful navigation.

Strategy reflects an organization's or group's long-term goals and how they plan on achieving them. What emerged as important for effective capacity strengthening initiatives is shown below:

3. **A long view.** Capacity strengthening is a social process that is often funded through short-term projects. A vision for change, trusted relationships with communities, and strategic partnerships sustain momentum and deliver valued outcomes efficiently. A proven track record opens doors to opportunities that generate new value and resources to reinvest in priority activities.
4. **Rights recognition:** Capacity strengthening supports individuals and communities assert their collective rights, land rights, right to live free from discrimination. Capacity strengthening initiatives integrated rights-based approaches formally and informally and do it in diverse ways. A common thread is the work to strengthen the accountability of government and others responsible for recognizing and securing statutory, inherent, and customary rights.
5. **Enabling laws and policy environment:** Legal and policy frameworks influence why, what, how, and where capacity strengthening takes place. Building awareness of this context increases the odds of success. Policy development and implementation is one approach to capacity strengthening at a systems level. Dedicated funding, the creation of new structures, and policy stability are key to adding capacity to the enabling environment through policy development.



Operations encompass practices to support successful day-to-day implementation of an initiative, with the following explored more deeply:

6. **Funding:** Organizations delivering capacity strengthening seek multi-year, unrestricted funding but face difficulties securing it, requiring persistence and strategic choices on funders to pursue. Demonstrating tangible results and effectiveness attracts funders. Advocating for change, experimenting with funding streams, and contributing to the development of new funding mechanisms are strategies used to enhance locally-led action.
7. **Evaluation and learning:** Evidence on effective capacity strengthening strategies, their contributions to on-the-ground outcomes like conservation, and the contexts in which they work best is sparse. Iterative learning, investing in tracking valued outcomes, and understanding systems-level impacts serves the supplier of capacity strengthening and participating individuals, communities, and organizations.
8. **Communications:** Communications support the effectiveness of capacity strengthening initiatives by fostering connection among participants, with target groups who may not be directly engaged, and between the CSI and external audiences. Use of technology, strategic communications with purposeful messaging, and brand development support success.

People refer to the steps taken and choices made in recruiting, enabling, and empowering staff and people served by the capacity strengthening initiatives.

9. **Individual and community empowerment:** Effective capacity strengthening initiatives put in place support systems for participants to build confidence in applying new knowledge and skills



Tapiche-Blanco River | Photo credit: CEDIA

gained. Participants' strong relationships with peers and supporters fosters feelings, emotions, and behaviours that enable acting on self-determined priorities. Either as integrated or complementary strategies, capacity strengthening initiatives that support economic self-sufficiency of locally-led initiatives increase the odds of sustainable self-determination.

- 10. Staffing and employment:** Capacity strengthening is about people, so hiring the right staff and retaining them is key to the effectiveness of this work. Disciplinary backgrounds, lived experience, people skills, and problem-solving abilities are all considered in staff recruitment. Employee retention is accomplished by paying attention to the growth of staff, building a strong organizational culture, providing emotional support to staff operating in demanding conditions, and ensuring youth and Indigenous representation among staff. CSIs can be a source of employment or wages for local community members and Indigenous knowledge holders, with fair compensation beneficial to the CSI and the community alike.

In comparing our findings with the literature, we learned that information on enabling factors for capacity strengthening has been provided and repeated in different ways and in different contexts for years, even decades. What seems to be lacking is follow through on these strengths-based and respectful ways of working – perhaps until now, when the urgency of action and ethical responsibility to uplift Indigenous environmental governance more pressing than in recent times. Nature United, authors, and contributors to this report hope that consideration of the insights and wise practices it contains inspire and contribute to the ongoing dialogue to advance Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship in Canada and elsewhere.

Readers curious to learn more about the twelve capacity strengthening initiatives can access a separate Case Study Report available [here](#), which contains detailed profiles of each initiative.

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POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

We acknowledge the systemic exclusions and inequalities from colonization and ongoing discrimination that have positioned people and groups at economic, social, and environmental disadvantage, creating significant gaps in education, economic, health and wellbeing, and governance outcomes. These gaps are precisely the object of capacity strengthening today.

We, the ESSA project team, are an interdisciplinary group of consultants with diverse identities, backgrounds, and privileges of being professionals living and working in the "global north". Our practice is informed by capacity strengthening engagements with several Indigenous partners as well as with organizations in developing countries serving local communities. This project draws on Indigenous perspectives in several ways, including by having a strategic advisory group composed of Indigenous members and by interviewing Indigenous representatives of capacity strengthening initiatives, who expressed thoughts on the topic from their own worldviews. Interviews also involved non-Indigenous collaborators working on behalf of Indigenous peoples, who relayed their experiences working with Indigenous partners and participants in capacity strengthening initiatives. Still, we acknowledge that the work we share in this report mainly stems from western ways of thought and that there are different conceptions of capacity and what is considered successful, desirable, or effective capacity strengthening. We, like Nature United, see this research as a contribution to strengthen existing initiatives in Canada supporting Indigenous-led natural resource management and conservation and inspire the development of new initiatives.

1. INTRODUCTION

Increased capacity of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities to steward their lands and waters is an important goal and is also critical for securing healthy ecosystems and communities.

NEED FOR THIS WORK

Stewardship of lands and waters is an inherent right of Indigenous Peoples (UNGA 2007) and also fundamental to the health and wellbeing of local communities. Indigenous Protected Areas and management of communal lands improve livelihoods and options for decent work, management capacities, and governance (Tran et al. 2020, Artelle et al. 2021).

Action by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) is critical to meeting global biodiversity and climate goals. IPLCs are stewards of landscapes and waterscapes that harbour close to 40 percent of the world's most important areas for biodiversity (WWF et al. 2021). Studies show that Indigenous and community lands store globally-significant amounts of carbon in forests and soil, and also present lower rates of deforestation than other areas (Rights and Resources Initiative 2018; FAO and FILAC 2021). Indigenous and local knowledge is key to informing global biodiversity and climate goals and actions that simultaneously improve local livelihoods (Reyes-Garcia et al. 2021). Without full participation of IPLCs, global efforts to reduce biodiversity loss and ensure healthy flows of ecosystem services will be ineffective.

However, long-term systemic exclusions and disenfranchisement have created capacity gaps for IPLCs to participate in environmental governance (Bullock et al. 2020). Within a global context of Indigenous resurgence, growing recognition of Indigenous rights, and localization of international assistance, understanding how to better support capacities for Indigenous and locally-led governance is essential. Supporting capacity for effective and socially-just climate action and conservation is growing in importance and urgency (Porzecanski et al. 2022, Artelle et al. 2019).

The question that guides this work is: What factors contribute to the effectiveness of leading capacity strengthening initiatives with Indigenous communities?

REPORT PURPOSE

Commissioned by Nature United, this report documents and shares learnings from effective and inspiring capacity strengthening initiatives (CSI) with Indigenous and local communities, groups, and organizations. The intention of the report is to summarize models used by CSIs and share reflections on what makes them effective in supporting IPLC-led natural resource management, stewardship, and conservation.

Box 1-1: Definition of capacity and capacity strengthening

“Capacity” is the ability of individuals, organizations, and societies to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve their own objectives (UNDP 2009).

Use of capacity *development*, *capacity building*, and *capacity strengthening* is often interchangeable. This report uses “capacity strengthening” because we acknowledge that all people (and the institutions they create) have knowledge and skills, and all can improve (Tsey 2012).

Capacity strengthening is dynamic, iterative, and responsive to shifting socio-ecological conditions where people, organizations, and societies interact (WHO 2001, Orozco-Quintero et al. 2020).

This report builds on decades of lessons on capacity strengthening as part of international development assistance (WHO 2001, UNDP 2009, ADB 2008) and the more limited evidence of capacity strengthening for

conservation (Porzecanski et al. 2022). The focus on capacity strengthening for and with Indigenous People brings in unique contributions. Addressing the rights and priorities of IPLCs, including assertion of land rights or communal ownership, and socio-cultural distinctions in governance, worldviews, spiritual beliefs, and ways of knowing, often demands tailored approaches (Cunningham and Nucinkis 2010).

This report uses two main sources of qualitative data and information: interviews and a literature review.

Looking across the experiences of twelve initiatives operating around the world identified four themes and ten sub-themes central to the success of capacity strengthening with Indigenous and local communities, groups, and organizations.

The goal is for this report and a companion report with case studies to be useful to practitioners that work with Indigenous People and local communities.

REPORT APPROACH

This report is the result of **analyzing** the profiles of twelve individual capacity strengthening initiatives (CSIs) from outside of Canada using a common structure, **synthesizing** information across CSIs about what works and in what contexts, and integrating feedback from Nature United and external advisors on emerging findings. Table 1-1 lists the CSIs we focused on, along with their main goals.

Table 1-1: The twelve capacity strengthening initiatives or organizations that informed this report.

1. <u>International Ranger Federation</u>	The IRF’s mission is to develop, advance, and promote, throughout the world community, the ranger profession, and its critical role in the conservation of natural and cultural resources.
2. <u>Tribal Air Monitoring Support Center</u>	The TAMS strives to develop tribal capacity to assess, understand, and prevent environmental impacts that adversely affect health, cultural, and natural resources.
3. <u>Kua’āina Ulu ‘Auamo (KUA)</u>	KUA’s vision is <i>āina momona</i> – abundant and healthy ecological systems in Hawai’i that contribute to community well-being.
4. <u>Maui Nui Makai Network</u>	MNMN’s mission is to connect communities across Maui Nui to care for and restore healthy ecosystems on which Hawai’i’s people depend.
5. <u>Fundación Pachamama</u>	Fundación Pachamama’s mission is to support self-determination of Amazonian territories and Indigenous Peoples and the permanent protection of the Amazon rainforest from accelerated destruction.
6. <u>Centro para el Desarrollo del Indígena Amazónico (CEDIA)</u>	CEDIA’s mission is to promote and facilitate participatory processes for the planning and sustainable management of the Amazonian territory, and the promotion of fundamental rights of Amazonian populations.
7. <u>Maliasili</u>	Maliasili’s mission is to accelerate community-based conservation in Africa through local organizations.
8. <u>The Nature Conservancy (TNC) – Mongolia Grasslands Program</u>	Though a Community-Based Natural Resource Management approach, TNC’s grassland program supports the development of Mongolian herder Community-Based Organizations.
9. <u>Sea Women of Melanesia</u>	The program’s mission is to raise awareness of the ecological and social value of the Coral Sea and Eastern Coral Triangle and support proactive approaches to community-based management of fisheries and other marine resources.
10. <u>Mimal Land Management Aboriginal Corporation (Mimal)</u>	Mimal brings benefits to country and culture for traditional landowners, as well as all residents of Arnhem Land in the Top End of Australia’s Northern Territory.
11. <u>Learning on Country</u>	The program’s vision is to empower communities to deliver integrated cultural and educational opportunities that will see young Indigenous people walking strong in two worlds.
12. <u>Vision Mātauranga</u>	The policy has a mission to unlock the innovation potential of Māori knowledge, resources, and people to create a better future.

CASE STUDIES

The complementary [case studies report](#) contains twelve detailed profiles of effective and inspiring initiatives from around the world that are focused on capacity strengthening with and for Indigenous People and local communities. We selected these twelve initiatives in three steps:

- We compiled an inventory of over 50 candidate initiatives sourced from Nature United and a survey to The Nature Conservancy networks, the ESSA team's networks, web searches, and by unearthing promising initiatives from the reference lists in published reports and articles.
- As advised by Nature United, focusing on initiatives outside of Canada, we generated a shortlist of initiatives based on the degree of Indigenous and local community participation, scale (regional, national, or multi-country), potential applicability to the Canadian context, and novelty.
- The shortlist was verified by Nature United, with additions made to boost applicability, geographic diversity, and diversity of capacity-strengthening goals.

We reached out to 20 initiatives or organizations. Representatives from twelve accepted participating in interviews to share experiences on capacity strengthening models and conditions enabling their success.



1 – International Rangers Federation

2 – Tribal Air Monitoring Support Center

3 – Kua'aina Ulu Auamo (Kua)

4 – Maui Nui Makai (MNMN)

5 – Fundación Pachamama

6 – Centro para el Desarrollo del Indígena Amazónico (CEDIA)

7 – Maliasili

8 – The Nature Conservancy Mongolia

9 – Sea Women of Melanesia

10 – Mimal Land Management

11 – Learning On Country

12 – Vision Matauranga

To document inspiring approaches used to strengthen IPLC capacity and identify factors contributing to their effectiveness, we [analyzed](#) two sources of information.

1. [Qualitative data from case study interviews](#). Between October and December 2023, we interviewed sixteen individuals leading diverse organizations or capacity strengthening initiatives in countries around the world. These individuals are listed in the Acknowledgements and represent the twelve organizations or initiatives we selected for case studies. From these interviews we developed twelve case studies, which are available in a [companion report](#) for practitioners interested in learning more about specific practices, lessons, and resources in context. Box 1-2 outlines our approach to select case study initiatives.
2. [A review of literature and web-based resources](#). This included a review of English and Spanish-language publications and resources on international development, conservation, and Indigenous governance, which are available in the [References section](#).

Exploring the characteristics, successes, and challenges of diverse experiences was important to identify insights of wide application. Taken together, the twelve CSIs:

- relate to environmental and natural resource stewardship and management,
- reflect varied origins, including grassroots, community-led initiatives to initiatives instigated by others, such as a non-governmental organization, entrepreneurs, or the government,
- work at different levels (individual, organization, network, enabling environment),
- use a range of capacity strengthening approaches and delivery methods to meet their goals, and
- help us imagine how CSIs operating at multiple levels are component parts of a dynamic, living system.

This report's main contribution is a [synthesis](#) of the experiences of twelve CSIs used to identify factors that support the effectiveness of capacity strengthening with Indigenous communities, local communities, and their organizations in the themes and sub-themes shown in Figure 1-1. Themes in the inner ring are consistent with practices of purpose-driven organizations (FSG 2023) and are as follows:

- **Values** are beliefs that people and groups use as standards for evaluating what is good and what is acceptable behavior. Values include beliefs about proper relationships between people (i.e., collectivism versus individualism) and between people and nature (i.e., reciprocal relationships versus production or profit oriented).
- **Strategy** reflects an organization's or group's long-term goals and how they plan on achieving them.
- **Operations** encompass practices to support successful day-to-day implementation of an initiative.
- **People** refer to the steps taken, and choices made in recruiting, enabling, and empowering staff and people served by the initiatives.

The next section of this report explores each theme in detail, providing concrete examples of attitudes, practices, and contexts that emerged from the research on leading capacity strengthening initiatives. For readers looking for additional background on capacity strengthening, [Appendix B](#) covers Capacity Strengthening Basics.



Figure 1-1: A summary of themes on capacity strengthening with Indigenous and local communities that emerged from interviews with representatives of twelve leading initiatives from around the world working on land and marine stewardship, conservation, natural resource and environmental management, and education.

2. FACTORS SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE CAPACITY STRENGTHENING WITH INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES, GROUPS, AND ORGANIZATIONS

A review of leading initiatives from around the world identified attitudes, practices, and contexts that increase the odds of success. They relate to values, strategy, operations, and people.

INTRODUCTION

The experiences of twelve leading initiatives helped identify ten themes with insights to support the effectiveness of capacity strengthening with Indigenous and local communities, groups, and organizations. The ten themes stem from iterative analysis of interviews with representatives of the twelve initiatives, combined with a review of the literature. In looking for patterns on why initiatives were effective and synthesizing these into insights, we focused on attitudes toward their work, their practices, and their context. In addition, the ten themes build on what we heard directly from interviewees on factors that helped or hindered their effectiveness ([see case studies](#)). In identifying these themes, we took an expansive view of capacity strengthening. More detail on methods appears in [Appendix A](#).

The following sections expand on each theme in turn.



VALUES

Values are beliefs that people and groups use as standards to evaluate what is good and what is acceptable behavior, including how people should relate to each other and with their surroundings. Values core to effective capacity strengthening initiatives include local ownership and cultural suitability in its many dimensions.

Theme #1: Local Ownership

Vesting Power Locally

Power is inescapable in capacity strengthening initiatives (CSIs) since assumptions are made about where capacity resides. A long-recognized success factor in capacity-strengthening is the degree of local or community ownership (Lavergne and Saxby 2001, Bolger 2008, Stevenson and Perreault 2008, IUCN and WCPA 2015, Spencer et al. 2017, Santy et al. 2022). As the hypothesis goes, participation in problem definition cultivates responsibility over, ownership, and durability of the solutions. Local or community ownership puts the



Program participants returning from data collection | Photo credit: Sea Women of Melanesia

concerns and priorities of people at the centre of CSIs purpose and processes, and, in advanced cases, locates control over the initiative's operations and the distribution of benefits locally as well. Ownership starts with the launch of the initiative, continues through the program cycle, and permeates the initiative's governance.

Being Mindful of the Spectrum of Local Participation and Ownership

The twelve CSIs reviewed for this report launched in a range of ways. Six originated with a top-down decision by a government agency or action by a non-governmental organization (NGO) to address a problem or need, identified through direct observation or consultation with and involvement of targeted communities. Other cases have bottom-up origins, created by a supporting group or organization in response to the call of community leaders or spiritual guides (see Figure 3-1 later in this report for additional context). Initiatives started through both top-down and bottom-up approaches can be effective. However, initiatives started from the bottom up seem more likely to advance outcomes with transformative potential for communities, such as the assertion of collective rights, the right to self-determination, and community cultural revitalization. Early community and local support for and ownership of the capacity strengthening effort gives the motivation and mandate to mobilize resources, as the following quote illustrates:

"I mean the main success factor from the get-go is the community support... If you don't have that support- if you're not being told 'this is what we want'- don't go out and do it. When you have a strong Board, and you have a community behind something, then you can confidently and actively chase it. Otherwise, you're standing on sandy ground, and you might get into trouble. Once you get that confidence you can enthusiastically and aggressively chase and be clear about what it is that you need." – Interview participant representing a network initiative.

Local ownership of CSIs can vary throughout program design, implementation, and overall governance. Frameworks like the Spectrum of Public Participation (IAP2 n.d.) are useful to characterize the degree of local ownership in CSIs. The degree of Indigenous, community, and local leadership factored into the selection of the twelve CSIs. On the spectrum of ignore-inform-consult-involve-collaborate-and-defer, the minimum degree of participation reflected in the twelve CSIs is involvement. Table 2-1 gives examples of practices CSIs use to involve, collaborate with, and defer to communities and local organizations.

A common practice is to involve target audiences of capacity strengthening in establishing an overall delivery strategy and in understanding baseline needs and aspirations. This information guides capacity strengthening offerings, their timing, and sequencing. When it comes to year-to-year operations, capacity strengthening providers often collaborate with the communities and local organizations they serve to make decisions on joint activities, with technical assistance taking on a coaching, supportive role. In one instance (**Learning on Country**), memoranda of understanding enable collaboration with community delivery partners – schools and rangers.

Capacity strengthening initiatives reviewed tend to vest decision-making power to communities they serve through their governance structures. For example, in **KUA**, community participants can decide to create working groups for a specific purpose and duration, such as advocacy for community fisheries, and they will receive support to run them. Examples of permanent structures include place-based and representative committees, as well as representation among leadership teams and boards. By sitting on committees community members provide direction on operational aspects of CSIs. Representation among leadership teams and boards grants community members control over strategic decisions like how money is spent.

Illustrated best by **TAMS**, data sovereignty is a strategy to support community decision-making, if not decision making over the capacity strengthening initiative itself. One of the objectives of TAMS is to give tribes the ability to control and interpret their own air quality information for their own purposes.

Table 2-1: Examples of community ownership in capacity strengthening initiatives (Source: framework adapted from Gonzalez 2021, examples are from our research).

Stance toward communities or local organizations	Involve	Collaborate with	Defer to
Engagement goal	Integration of local and community culture, values, needs, and assets into processes and planning	Community / local organization plays a lead role in program design and implementation	Decision making
Examples of strategies and activities from the 12 cases reviewed for this report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programming built on the knowledge of Indigenous history, land occupation, and migrations (CEDIA) • Participatory, ongoing needs assessments (Sea Women of Melanesia) • Online technical needs assessment forms (TAMS) • Interactive workshops, surveys to develop organizational strengthening plans (Maliasili, CEDIA) • Network surveys and feedback forums (International Rangers Federation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community gatherings to identify shared local priorities (KUA) • Open planning with local conservation organizations (Maliasili) • Annual operational planning with local committees (Learning on Country) • Memoranda of understanding to deliver land-based activities (Learning on Country, Mimal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in ceremonies to receive guidance (Fundación Pachamama) • Community-driven creation of working groups (KUA) • Local committees at implementation sites (Learning on Country) • Steering committee with representation from participating communities and / or nations (Learning on Country) • Rotating network chairs representing communities (KUA, MNMN) • Representation among organizational leadership and board (Mimal) • Formation and formalization of community organizations (TNC-Mongolian Grasslands) • Data sovereignty (TAMS)

Changing Systems

Capacity strengthening initiatives centred on community or locally-driven outcomes often come up against opposing forces at a broader scale. CSIs that are thoughtful about the interplay between local and external governance create lasting change (Table 2-2). The 12 cases reviewed illustrate different ways capacity strengthening initiatives confer indirect benefits to the communities and local organizations served. These include demonstrating the viability of their (better) ways of working, supporting grassroots advocacy, enhancing local talent pools, reducing barriers to accessing state-sanctioned instruments, and uplifting Indigenous norms and institutions.

Table 2-2: Examples of strategies used by capacity strengthening initiatives to support systems change (Source: this research)

Unfavourable context for communities and local organizations	Strategy taken by capacity strengthening initiative	Outcome
Top-down, colonial approach of large conservation organizations operating in the area	Leading by example: Creating a community-driven natural resource network	Attitude and behaviour change among large conservation organizations (e.g., hiring locally, more local investments, facilitative approach)
State and industry unsupportive of community fishery management	Advocacy: Building coalitions and participating in advisory committees on community fisheries Talent pipeline: Strengthening capacities of local talent pools accessed by the state	Support and state capacity for collaborative fisheries management
	Advocacy: Providing testimonies, drafting rules, engaging with State fishery officials	Policy influence

Unfavourable context for communities and local organizations	Strategy taken by capacity strengthening initiative	Outcome
Burdensome process to formalize locally-led marine conservation	Data and information: Providing support to navigate the onerous information requirements (e.g., ecological, cultural, traditional occupation and uses)	Registration of Locally Managed Marine Area recognized by the national government
Extractive economic development in the Amazon	Institutional strengthening: A process of land surveying, titling, organizational strengthening, and developing community life plans with Amazon native communities	Community inoculation from industry or state manipulation
	Institutional strengthening: Supporting the resurgence and consolidation of Indigenous governance (e.g., tripartite agreement among Indigenous federations)	Self-determined development centred on Indigenous rights and the rights of nature

Theme #2: Cultural Suitability

Whether societal, organizational, local, or traditional, culture is core to capacity strengthening. Culturally-suitable capacity strengthening means delivering support based on the unique contexts of the individuals, organizations, and communities being served. To work effectively in capacity strengthening that meets the needs and aspirations of Indigenous and local communities CSIs do well by paying attention to three interconnected ways culture shows up:

- CSI’s relationship to Indigenous and native cultures and traditions, including uplifting Indigenous leadership and knowledge if the CSI is led by non-Indigenous collaborators;
- Cross-cultural dynamics that occur within the CSI, where organizational norms meet community or local norms, and learning how to navigate these; and,
- Western culture and national culture that shape CSI’s operating environment, and getting skilled in tracking shifting norms to be ready to follow the energy that helps CSIs grow.

Uplifting Indigenous Culture

Initiatives led by Indigenous people and communities are attuned to the land-based, relational systems that characterize many Indigenous cultures (Adams et al. 2022). For Indigenous-initiated ventures, where cultural transmission remains strong, this comes naturally and becomes central to the way capacity strengthening is conceived and done. **KUA** and **MNMN**—both community networks led by native Hawaiians— had a robust grounding in traditional cultural values and place-based stewardship from the concept phase and is a success factor that carries through all their work. For MNMN, for example, relationship to place guided founding communities’ discussions on how and why to work together:

“The genealogy of our places became an important part of our organization. We each spent time looking at ourselves, places, names, stories, people and communities, Elders, families. And then we looked at what are important parts about who we are and the stories we could connect into the future, that were important stories handed down.” – Interview participant representing a network initiative.

Relationship-building with Indigenous and local communities and education on their histories and laws are fruitful pathways for initiatives substantially led by western collaborators to understand how to uplift Indigenous and traditional cultures. Taking responsibility for building relationships and learning without imposing a burden on communities themselves recognizes the ongoing and cumulative impacts of colonialism in disrupting local governance and cultures. It also reinforces trust between collaborators and communities, and can help accelerate the achievement of broader societal goals (e.g., educational attainment, marine and rainforest conservation, and a vibrant science and technology sector). Examples of CSI strategies and activities are as follows:

- **Sea Women of Melanesia's** work in support of local marine management areas aligns with customary land and stewardship practices in Papua New Guinea around community-enforced restricted zones, where no fishing, hunting, or gardening is allowed to support ecosystem recovery. Papua New Guinea's traditional matrilineal land tenure system, where women owned the land and reef and made decisions about their use, inspired the organization's creation and its focus on women's leadership.
- Prior to engaging native communities in the Peruvian Amazon in processes to formalize communities' legal status and land titles, **CEDIA** invests in understanding communities' history, visions, values, beliefs, and aspirations for the future. This includes deploying staff to communities to spend time with and get to know community members, and once relationships have formed, walking the territory with community leaders and other knowledge keepers.
- Alongside elders in the Achuar communities, leadership at **Fundación Pachamama** partakes of Wayusa (*illex guayusa*). This is a ceremony practiced by the Kichwa people in the Amazon involving communal sharing of sacred tea and interpretation of dreams. Such ceremonies help communities make sense of their current challenges and guide the collaborative work communities do with Fundación Pachamama.

Threats to cultural continuity loom large for many Indigenous communities served by the CSIs profiled in this study. CSIs speak of the passing of Elders and the resulting loss of language, customs, and traditional knowledge. Additionally, retaining Indigenous and native youth and young families in their home communities is increasingly challenging, with a lack of education options, inadequate housing, rising cost of living, and few or poorly compensated jobs within communities.

"Similar to climate change tipping points, we face cultural loss, these stores of traditional knowledge, which are enormous and that is also a very big challenge to confront, which we would like to do to permanently preserve the Amazon and its traditions. So, there is nothing more than gathering in a big ceremony to ask that all these things can be faced in the best way." – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on local organizational development.

These systemic challenges inform ways of working but are beyond the scope of any one initiative to address. Initiatives such as **Learning on Country** and **Mimal** offer inspiration in this regard. These CSIs operate within one region in Australia. Taken together they support cultural revitalization and community cohesion through inter-generational learning across youth, working adults, and Elders as part of two-way education and fostering Indigenous land stewardship as a career.

"We all obviously value education. But Aboriginal people in Australia value it in two ways, one in terms of what they see as the loss of culture, they see the loss of language, they want to maintain it. It's interesting that this program is in the Northern Territory, the northern part of the Northern Territory, because it's where culture is still very much alive and strong, and it's come out of those incredibly strong communities. It's actually having a role in communities where language and culture has been lost. You still got Elders, you still got people living on country, but they've lost a lot of that, and it's helping them to rebuild." – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on individuals' education.

Navigating Cross-Cultural Dynamics

Capacity strengthening initiatives (CSIs) that we reviewed work between worlds, they are a cross-cultural venture with the ability and flexibility to identify and build on what motivates people (Evans et al. 2004). Navigating between worlds starts with governance and extends to program design and delivery. CSIs "bend", "layer on", "integrate", "refit" western rules and standards with Indigenous and local ways of being, knowing, and working to stay true to the priorities of individuals, communities, and organizations being served. The following quote illustrate how this two-world exchange happens in governance, program design, and institutional strengthening activities.

“There is a real constant tension in our space between the sort of Western regulatory governance, government, and legislative model that we sit under, and the Indigenous government and how people may have managed things a little bit differently...It’s often about how you- the system doesn’t end up driving the decision making, or creating a direction that the Board and community don’t want to go down...Our whole plan and the whole process of that plan- which took a couple of years to put together in consultation- was about ensuring that what we’re trying to achieve is for community and everything else is bent to fit that.” – Interview participant representing a network initiative.

In day-to-day operations, CSIs work to balance local social norms with organizational norms as well as external expectations. Within one program or workplace collectivist and individualistic values can be at odds, as can traditional ways of stewarding land and waters be at odds with modern conservation and natural resource management. Strategies include adapting programming and outputs, adopting flexible work arrangements and wage structures for Indigenous staff and crew, and selecting funding partners with shared values.

Mimal’s experience running a ranger program is noteworthy. The organization navigates ways of working of rural *Bininj* (Aboriginal Australian people in the Northern Territory), who are unaccustomed to a 5-day, 40-hour workweek and consider meeting cultural obligations as an overriding priority. Based on constant communication, Mimal enables Indigenous staff to calibrate their ranger position to match their physicality and other needs, such as family responsibilities like helping to care for elderly relatives.

The ability to communicate and provide materials in the language of individuals and communities served garners understanding and acceptance of the work of CSIs. This sounds obvious, however, the use of English and expectations around its use prevail. A focus on communication primarily or exclusively in colonial languages may limit benefits to Indigenous communities and collaborators differently in different language contexts.

- Where CSI participants still predominantly or exclusively speak their local language (e.g., as in the Northern Territory of Australia or across Melanesia), carrying out CSI activities in other languages can limit broader community understanding, participation, and benefit.
- Where, on the other hand, local Indigenous languages have become endangered or lost, use of other languages can exacerbate cultural loss and deprive the community of opportunities to regain their language through applied language practice and intergenerational learning.

If not fully operating in the local languages, CSIs can employ and train local facilitators and stewards to engage with the broader community in their preferred language. For example, the linguistic diversity in Melanesia underscored the need for **Sea Women of Melanesia** to work with conservation leaders drawn from local communities, who can explain the program’s goals and benefits in their local language. The integration of translation activities in CSI’s work is also common and can provide opportunities for applied language practice for language learners, particularly when designed in collaboration with local language revitalization initiatives. For example, the **International Ranger Federation** translates key published resources for the ranger sector into 16 languages and uses simultaneous interpretation at regional and global events.

Because language often embodies cultural values, an emphasis on local language can also influence goals, governance, and practice within CSIs. For example, the **KUA** initiative in Hawai’i was inspired by the traditional Hawaiian word *kua’āina*, referring to people who actively live Hawaiian culture and act as backbones of Hawaiian cultural preservation, an important goal of KUA’s work alongside conservation.

Customization goes beyond language, especially for CSIs serving individuals and local organizations worldwide or on a continental scale. To increase local acceptance and relevance of capacity strengthening these CSIs either tailor their guidance and training materials, support local adaptations, and seek to draw content from the places they serve. For example, the **Maui Nui Makai Network (MNMN)** provides resources on its website to help communities kick start and maintain community-based resource management. This includes the following:

- guidance on applying for a **CBSFA** or other local management designations;

- guidance for [common measures of success](#) to be tracked alongside other monitoring metrics in each partner community to know if collective efforts are working;
- guidance and templates for developing [data sharing agreements](#) when collaborating on data collection with external partners such as scientists, resource managers, and government agencies; and
- general [principles](#) for *pono* (sustainable) fishing practices.

Tracking Evolving Social Norms

Western culture carries with it social norms that influence policy, acceptable environmental practices, funding availability, and other types of support for capacity strengthening. Although external to the initiative, these conditions make it more difficult or easier to operate, and CSIs are actively working to change the systems in which they operate. Broadly, CSIs can find themselves in two types of situations:

- Momentum exists for work they are trying to do. In this case, capacity strengthening initiatives can attract attention, resources, and invitations to partner, sometimes requiring swift decisions. Preparedness to seize opportunities like these is important and being clear on the CSI’s purpose and values helps avoid chasing project funding that does little to contribute to long-term goals. The cases reviewed highlighted evolving social norms around the recognition of rights and roles of women, and of Indigenous people, native, and local communities in society overall and in conservation and natural resource management specifically.
- At the same time, organizations delivering capacity strengthening can find themselves swimming against the current and even confronting active opposition from entrenched views. Referring to the CSI’s purpose and values as touchstones is also helpful here, to tell the difference between avoidable distractions and campaigns worth engaging in.

“We still had a fair bit of pushback. There are some men who are pretty entrenched in the patriarchy in Papua New Guinea. They don’t like the idea of women driving boats or surveying reefs or telling them how to look after their fisheries, but by and large, we just avoid that. If we sense any of that sort of sentiment, we just don’t engage with those particular people.” – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on individuals’ upskilling.

Within our 12 cases, evolving social norms combined with patience, advocacy, and persistent, purpose-driven implementation have led to important outcomes like the passing of community fisheries management laws (**KUA**) and decreased discrimination of Māori people within the science and technology system (**Vision Maturanga**).



STRATEGY

Strategy reflects an organization’s or group’s long-term goals and how they plan on achieving them. Building trusted relationships and partnerships, implicitly or explicitly supporting individuals and communities in exercising their rights, and being aware of or even disrupting the policy or legal environment emerged as important for effective capacity strengthening initiatives.

Theme #3: A Long View

Taking the Long View

Capacity strengthening is a strategy to change the status quo, which does not happen overnight (Ajulo et al. 2020). Capacity strengthening, whether training of individual leaders, supporting community networking, or

running organizational development programs, is a process – it contributes to social and environmental change (Lavergne and Saxby 2001). Capacity strengthening is both an outcome and a way to achieve valued outcomes. Without exception, the twelve initiatives contribute to changes that may take decades or generations to take hold.

Communities and organizations leading capacity strengthening initiatives are persistent and take the long view. Communities derive patience and strength from being rooted in place and from their vision about the future, sometimes outliving “external” change agents who come and go, as this quote illustrates:

“I mean, you can say our communities made a big difference in passing fishery management laws and it took decades to do it. And then you can also say, once this one guy retired, all of a sudden, everything changed.” – Interview participant representing a network initiative.

Capacity-strengthening organizations that work with communities and local groups are driven by purpose, a sense of duty, and responsibility to the people and partners they serve. This clarity of purpose guides actions to move closer to their goals, seizing windows of opportunity as they present themselves. Developing a strategic plan is a common practice among CSIs and a core activity of CSIs that focus on organizational development. Having a good strategic plan informed by a participatory process helps articulate the big outcomes worth achieving, as well as hypotheses to get there. It helps with operational planning and delivery, is a communication tool to engage with funders, and a north star against which to measure progress.

“What works well is to have a 10-year vision and be able to articulate – ‘OK, what would a decade won look like? What are the main aspirations?’” – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on local organizational development.

“We are now seeing the fruits of our labor, because we have gone from land surveys to land titling, to institutional strengthening, then developing community life plans, business plans, and natural resource management plans. Communities are seeing their earnings roll in. Communities have direct contact with domestic and international buyers. So, things are already looking different. But look at how much time has passed – more than 15 years.” – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on local organizational development.

Although capacity strengthening is a social process, delivery happens through projects. NGOs are common delivery partners of capacity strengthening with Indigenous and local communities. NGOs typically rely on external funding and the limitations of the broader funding landscape, including short-termism. Communities and the supporting organizations (e.g., these NGOs) adapt to short-termism in funding by doing three things:

- First, by breaking up a work program into bite-sized pieces to meet funder requirements, that, when added up, creates a meaningful whole. This practice holds promise when the destination is clear, and projects are designed to be complementary and synergistic. But it puts the onus on the strategic capacity and critical analytical skills of project designers. **CEDIA**’s experience illustrates this practice:

“Things have been done in doses, but they have been sequential, until forming a whole. The perspective started from the beginning, we knew where we wanted to go, but there was no money, you have to make progress in doses. So, this is what has happened in many watersheds.” – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on local organizational development.

- Second, by seeking funding partners that show flexibility. Some funders, chiefly philanthropic organizations, provide flexibility in delivery timelines and support multi-year projects, which is welcome. Flexibility in what is funded and how accountability is rendered is also important. Within the conservation sector, efforts are underway to understand the potential of three types of funding in strengthening conservation organizations: flexible funding to deliver on an existing strategic plan, flexible funding for organizational administration and development (often called “core funding”), and flexible emergency funding in the event of a crisis (e.g., COVID-19) (Mava Foundation et al. 2022). Case study CSIs not only select funding partners that demonstrate

openness to being flexible but also actively educate them on the value of working differently. This includes showing the value of intangible outcomes like “organizational strengthening” and the pitfalls of results-based management.

“But that really takes that long term view. This isn’t: ‘I’m going to give you a grant and you’re going to put up, 10 ranger stations this year’, right? This is like, you’re building a foundation for a long-term future- and I think it’s hard to get people on board with that sometimes.” – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on local organizational development.

“And the nature of our work requires that flexibility more – because we’re creating a social process to figure out what people want instead of deciding what they want, so the shape of the work can be really variable. It does not fit in a 1-year grant proposal, nor is the change they want achievable in the timelines funders may want.” – Interview participant representing a network initiative.

- Third, by demonstrating the proof of concept of their initiatives. This is a strategy best illustrated by **Mimal**, an organization that is set up to self-fund initiatives prioritized by their Board and community members. Mimal’s attitude is to just get going and to start small. [Theme #6](#) on Funding expands on this strategy.

Building Trust and Reciprocity

Trusting relationships are core to effective implementation of capacity strengthening initiatives and to achieving good outcomes (Tschirhart et al. 2016, Tsey et al. 2012). Trust is a two-way street: it’s given, earned, and, in optimal cases, reciprocated (Hancock et al. 2023, Metz et al. 2022). The lack of trusting relationships diminishes motivation and commitment to coordinate or collaborate on common goals, hamper communications, and can lead to superficial, transactional, short-term outcomes. Relationships are of different types in the CSIs we reviewed: 1) relationships between communities and organizations served and the organization doing the capacity strengthening; 2) relationships between the individual service delivery providers or researchers and community members; and 3) relationships among peers (individuals and communities) in networks.

Effective CSIs “move at the speed of trust” in that their strategies and operations are tuned to the rhythms of relationship building. These CSIs do not assume that the prospect of training or other types of capacity strengthening is sufficient for individuals or communities to engage. Effective CSIs recognize that the opportunity costs and risks for local communities and their leaders to work with unknown quantities can be steep, no matter how noble the mission.

The cases we reviewed reveal both technical and relational strategies for trust building, with outcomes including community disclosure, engagement, and reciprocity between CSIs and communities served, and among network participants (Table 2-3). Technical strategies relate to beliefs that a team member or collaborator is reliable, competent, and committed to shared goals, based on an evaluation of behaviours (Metz et al. 2022). Relational strategies relate to feelings about the care and emotional investment of a team member or collaborator in pursuit of shared goals.

Table 2-3: Examples of activities undertaken by capacity strengthening initiatives that supported trust building (Source: examples are drawn from interviews; strategy categories are adapted from Metz et al. 2022)

Trust-Building Strategies	Examples	Outcome
Technical Strategies		
Showing expertise	An international NGO delivering capacity strengthening to local conservation organizations uses technical assistance , such as completing a website update to bring immediate value to the local organization onboarded as a partner in the NGO’s portfolio.	Earning partner trust
Immediate action	An international NGO delivering capacity strengthening to local conservation organizations that become portfolio partners provides ready access to guidance and	Earning partner trust

	tools for organizational leaders to take with them for quick application right after training sessions.	
	A community-based natural resource network that coordinates gatherings in alternating communities, rotating responsibilities, leadership, and collective work. Participants cook, eat, and work on physical tasks together as a way of learning and getting needed work done through the principle of “sweat equity”.	Earning peer community trust
Interacting frequently	Members of native communities in the Amazon observe through multiple interactions in a short period of time that engaging with a national NGO focused on organizational capacity strengthening is free of adverse consequences, making members more open to share information about their lives,	Earning community trust
Relational Strategies		
Co-learning	A researcher embarking on the scoping and design of a project that brings together western science and Indigenous Knowledge spends time in community , meeting and listening to diverse community members where they are.	Earning community trust
	Through a period of co-existence , members of an Amazonian native get something in return from a researcher that conducted a situational diagnostic and needs assessment (e.g., contributions to communal tasks).	Earning community trust
Two-way communication	A research program intending to embark on research that brings together western science and Indigenous Knowledge visits communities and organizes repeated opportunities for interaction and feedback before starting a research proposal to support co-developing research design, sharing the vision for the research, and clarifying roles.	Effective program design and delivery
Authenticity	An international NGO delivering capacity strengthening to local conservation organizations starts with strategic planning and encourages senior leaders representing organizations in the NGOs portfolio of partners to share their perspectives openly and honestly , demonstrating self-awareness, humility, and commitment to the process	Earning partner trust
Vulnerability	An international NGO delivering capacity strengthening to local conservation organizations shows care for local leaders of partner organizations as individuals , serving as informal sounding board to test out ideas, and designs dynamic workshops that take people outside their comfort zones with both NGO and partner organizations making themselves vulnerable.	Earning partner trust

The impact of capacity strengthening initiatives links to the broader acceptance of individuals or communities that see a change in the status quo as disruptive. Trust – a precursor to acceptance – is engendered by clarifying the mutual benefits of implementation.

- For example, compliance with the **Vision Maturanga** policy was aided by institutional efforts to build the awareness and capacity of non-Māori researchers to navigate the transformation of the Science and Technology sector, including offering dedicated outreach and language courses for non-Māori people.
- In Papua New Guinea, community compliance with local marine protected areas advanced by **Seawomen of Melanesia** was aided by the provision of essentials that were lacking in the poverty-stricken villages, such as medicine, water infrastructure, and educational materials for children.

As a capacity strengthening approach, networks foster trust-building among peers. Reciprocity is one among several capacities cultivated in networks that support social learning. Social learning involves sharing perspectives and experiences to come to a shared understanding of problems and solutions (Johansson et al. 2013). In the cases reviewed, social learning, is illustrated by the **International Rangers Federation** and in community network building of **KUA** and **Maui Nui Makai**. Whether through knowledge exchange on ranger practices or experiential learning through construction of traditional community fishponds, evidence from reviewed cases indicates that learning extends beyond individual knowledge, skills, confidence, and enhanced practices. The mutual exchange enabled through networking nurtures solidarity and collectivism (see **Theme #9** on Individual and Community Empowerment).

“It’s very simple to me, bringing people who are generally alone and isolated together, to realize that their private issues are actually public issues.” – Interview participant representing a network initiative.

Forming Strategic Partnerships

Partnerships with values-aligned organizations and authorities extend the reach of capacity strengthening and sustainability of outcomes. Partnerships play a role in start-up phases of CSIs and, importantly, in growth and stability phases.¹ What we have learned from the reviewed cases is that, during start-up phases, connections to potential partners can tend to occur organically, through word of mouth and conversations between leaders with common goals. As a vision for capacity strengthening solidifies and initiatives roll out, organizations tend to employ strategies and seek formal relationships with organizations that can:

- enhance their reputation with key audiences,
- confer greater access to financial or human resources (e.g., volunteers’ time), technology, or other goods and services that are essential to delivering on their promise, and
- deliver complementary or synergistic services. Initiatives working within a geographic or thematic area often face competition over resources and instead can choose to engage in “ecosystem building”, with the intent of creating mutually-supportive networks with low competition.

In resource-constrained jurisdictions, where governments lack capacity or will to meet the needs of remote or marginalized populations even though they have authority to do so, partnerships with government agencies can look more like aid flowing the other way: the NGO provides equipment and services to assist government in exerting their authority to uphold human and Indigenous rights. In Canada, contribution agreements between crown governments with funding but limited personnel for mobilizing it can allow external non-government entities to provide additional technical capacity for planning and executing on-the-ground conservation, monitoring, and compliance over vast geographies.

Successful initiatives can attract significant attention and the promise of resources or assistance from potential partners or collaborators. It is through staying true to values, purpose, and operational needs that capacity strengthening organizations navigate the temptation to go fast, grow for the sake of growing, and, instead, are empowered to negotiate and renegotiate the roles of partners.

Creating Structures

Formal structures support the long-term delivery and success of capacity strengthening. Capacity strengthening initiatives often start out as small, targeted projects but there are several pathways through which their principles and practices can become mainstream and foster sustainability.

One pathway is through becoming a recognized supplier of services. For example, the success of the [Sea Women of Melanesia](#) in establishing a network of local people trained in marine surveying has led to Memoranda of Understanding with government and international development agencies, and contracts with corporations to provide reef assessment and monitoring capacity to the region where they operate. Another pathway is through the integration of principles and approaches into regional or national norms, standards, bylaws, and other instruments. Two examples from [Learning on Country](#) and [Centro para el Desarrollo del Indígena Amazónico \(CEDIA\)](#) illustrate how integration happens.

- Land-based learning programs abound in Australia. [Learning on Country](#) is distinct because their approaches meld into the education curriculum recognized by the state. This integration results in localized

¹ For further information on the evolution of capacity strengthening initiatives, including the transition from start-ups to stable initiatives, consult the companion [Case Studies Report](#).

curriculum development that achieves mainstream outcomes (enhanced literacy) in culturally-appropriate ways.

- Similarly, in another case, community life plans (“*planes de vida*”) resulting from CEDIA’s institutional capacity strengthening work with native Amazonian communities become binding when recognized by the regional planning system, thus affirming community priorities and rights in mainstream institutions.

Theme #4: Rights Recognition

Using Human-Rights Based Approaches

The concept of a rights-based approach to socioeconomic development is several decades old and applies to all aspects of human life (O’Leary 2017). Rights-based approaches empower people to know and claim their rights (“rightsholders”) and increase the ability and accountability of individuals and institutions responsible for realizing these rights (“duty-bearers”) (Theis 2003, UNDG 2003). Importantly, this approach connects shared standards and principles for human rights set out in international law to local action (D’Hollander et al. 2013).

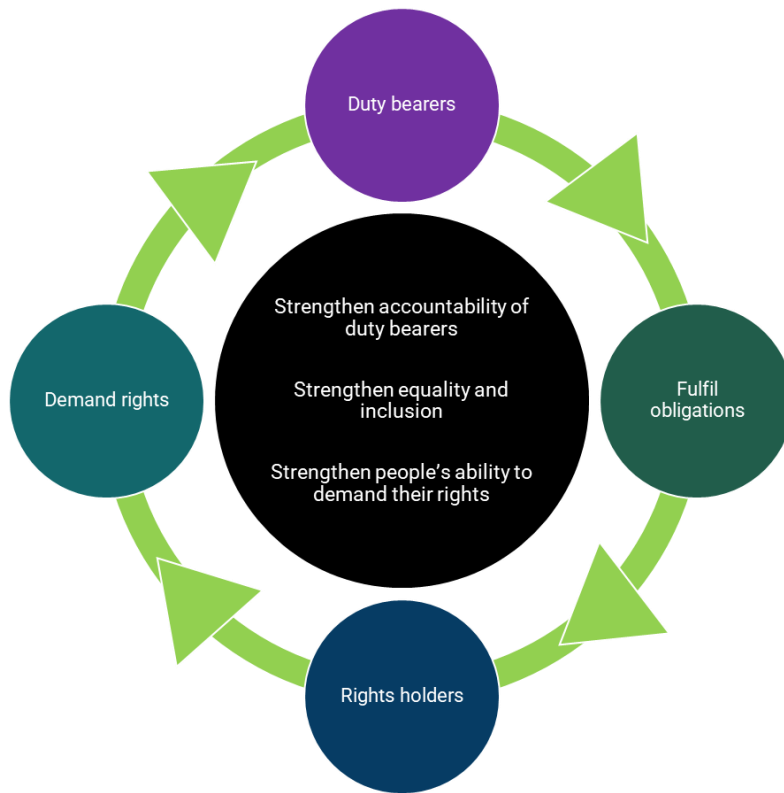


Figure 2-1: Relationship between rights holders and duty bearers and the virtuous circle resulting from strengthening both the demand and supply side of rights (Source: reproduced from Theis 2003).

Analysis of the case studies suggests that using a right-based lens in capacity strengthening holds promise for contributing to structural change, such as systemic discrimination and exclusion (D’Hollander et al. 2013, Figure 2-1). A growing number of governments, international bodies, and courts recognize the importance of a rights-based approach to addressing environmental challenges, including climate action and biodiversity conservation (Jodoin et al. 2021, Boyd and Keene 2021). Drivers for its application are both moral (i.e., it’s the right thing to do) and instrumental (i.e., it strengthens intended outcomes) (D’Hollander et al. 2013). It’s worth noting that critiques offered to the Indigenous-rights discourse include the failure to recognize the responsibilities and relationships of Indigenous peoples with their families and the natural world (Corntassel 2008). Box 2-1 has examples of aspects of right-based movements in Canada.

The twelve cases reviewed recognize and integrate human and Indigenous rights in capacity strengthening to different degrees. There are three types of integration (McInerney-Lankford and Sano 2010, OECD/World Bank 2013). Implicit integration advances human rights causes but with no explicit commitment to doing so. Explicit integration emphasizes accountability, specifically orienting programs around human rights norms and commitments. The middle category draws from human rights principles and other perspectives. Activities can target both rights-holders and duty-bearers. Governments are commonly but not the only duty bearers targeted. Business and funding organizations have key roles to play in realizing human rights and the authority of Indigenous peoples (UN EMG 2022).

Box 2-1: Examples of drivers and use of rights-based approaches to support Indigenous governance in Canada.

The following examples illustrate trends in the use of rights-based approaches to assert rights by and regain responsibilities of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

- Using the legal system and crown government endorsements of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to assert treaty rights and affirm Nations' title rights and jurisdiction over their ancestral lands, waters, and air (e.g., Blueberry River First Nation case and Gaayhllxid/Gíihlagalgang "Rising Tide" Haida Title Lands Agreement).
- Increasing recognition of nation-to-nation relationships, including through the involvement of Indigenous nations in decision-making on government-led projects (e.g., projects under the national Framework for Assessing the Cumulative Effects of Marine Shipping, Transport Canada 2022).
- Increasing instances of Indigenous nations asserting their own authority, rights, and responsibilities through conservation initiatives and declarations on their own terms, such as through the declarations of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and then seek support from partners to realize the vision (e.g., Tsawout First Nation and Taku River Tlingit).

CSIs implicitly use rights-based approaches by, for example, recognizing that training and instruction to Indigenous women by Indigenous women strengthens program impact and shifts power ([Sea Women of Melanesia](#)). When engaging with funders CSIs also emphasize the rightful place of local and Indigenous organizations in conservation and the related potential of long-term sustained impact (e.g., [Maliasili](#)).

Consideration of the unique roles, knowledge, and needs of women and youth is an approach to use a rights-based lens alongside others. For example, [Learning on Country](#) recognizes youth's right to participate in ceremony, accommodating interruptions in school attendance, as a means of keeping culture strong.

Explicit use of rights-based approaches appeared in several cases, including CSIs working with native Amazonian communities ([CEDIA](#) and [Fundación Pachamama](#)), a community network supporting native Hawaiian natural resource management ([KUA](#)), an initiative supporting Tribal air monitoring and airshed management ([TAMS](#)), and in the case of the only policy-focused CSI ([Vision Maturanga](#)). For example, [Fundación Pachamama's](#) CSI supports Indigenous Amazonian communities' right to self-determination working through global advocacy, community capacity strengthening, and legal defense (e.g., access to justice for environmental defenders; right to free, prior, informed consent; right to participation in decision-making). [TAMS](#) enables Indigenous tribes to set up and manage air monitoring programs under their own sovereign authority and as equal partners in air quality management along with States and other organizations. Targeting policy change (i.e., on the side of duty bearers), [Vision Maturanga](#) policy gives Māori knowledge its rightful place in New Zealand's research landscape.

Theme #5: Enabling Laws and Policy Environment

Understanding the Legal and Policy Environment

An enabling environment, including appropriate laws, policies, and funding, shapes the success of capacity strengthening initiatives (Bolger 2008, also see [Theme #6](#) on Funding). The legal and policy environment has influenced the initiation and effective operations of several of the twelve cases reviewed (Table 2-4). These experiences show that legal and policy frameworks are:

- drivers for the creation of CSIs (i.e., why they exist),
- influence CSI's strategic priorities (what they do), and
- influence CSI's operational priorities (how and where they work).

Awareness of the legal and policy environment surrounding CSI operations is important for several reasons including clarifying the need for it and who might be willing to pay for the outcomes, identifying potential partners and allies, as well as informing the selection of activities to maximize relevance and impact, supporting cost effectiveness. For **Maliasili**, for example, a first step in scoping out expansion to new geographies is understanding whether the creation, registration, and functioning of local African organizations is sanctioned and encouraged by their national government. A second step is mapping the policy environment for community-led conservation, and determining whether the environment is favourable.

Table 2-4: Examples of legal and policy instruments that form part of the enabling environment for operations of several capacity strengthening initiatives reviewed (Source: this research)

	Legal or policy instrument	Process or strategy
Influence why	Law of Native Communities and Agricultural Promotion (1974)	Legal recognition of the rights of native communities in the Peruvian Amazon to communal land tenure and slow progress in fulfilling these rights inspired the creation of a CSI under the leadership of a former public servant.
	Tribal Authority Rule (1998) Under the Clean Air Act	The U.S. federal law and regulations enshrined Indigenous rights to manage air quality on equal footing with states, catalyzing the creation of a CSIs supporting tribal environmental professionals and environmental monitoring.
Influence what	National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020)	Culturally-appropriate education program gained government attention (and continued funding) as a way to deliver on government commitments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians.
	Ecuador's Constitution (2008)	The rights of nature, Indigenous self-determination, and to live well (water, food security and sovereignty, and clean environment) are enshrined in the constitution enabling the work of a rights-based CSI that supports advancement of Indigenous development models in the Ecuadorian Amazon.
	Hawai'i revised statute 188-22.6 (1994)	CSIs work collaboratively with the state to advance community-based subsistence fisheries areas (CBSFAs), which are legally designated areas where the community and state government work together to protect and support traditional and customary native Hawaiian fishing practices.
	Amendments to the 1995 Environmental Protection Law of Mongolia (2005)	CSI supports the creation of formal community-based organizations, which are recognized as vehicles for communal natural resource management under national law ("conservation user groups").
Influence how, where	Chitwan Declaration (2019)	CSI based their multi-year action plan on the Declaration agreed upon at the 9 th World Ranger Congress, which reflects the priorities of 550 rangers from over 70 countries
	Legal and policy frameworks surrounding the registration of civil society organizations in Africa	In making decisions on new target geographies a CSI working with and through local African conservation organizations evaluates whether the creation, registration, and functioning of local organizations is sanctioned and encouraged by government.

Transforming the Legal and Policy Environment

The enabling environment itself is also a target for capacity strengthening. Tangible actions include creating new laws, regulations, and policies, and building implementation capacity (IUCN and WCPA 2015). Within the twelve cases, **Vision Mātauranga** uniquely illustrates how policy can strengthen the capacity of a sector and society overall.

Vision Mātauranga is a New Zealand investment policy framework enacted in 2005. The policy requires research conducted in Aotearoa-New Zealand recognize and support Māori knowledge, support Māori within the science sector, and engage with Māori meaningfully in research design. As a result of this policy:

- Funding and research proposals are assessed from a Māori lens and increasingly aligned with Māori interests, providing opportunities to strengthen Māori capacity within the science, technology, and research sector in New Zealand.
- Acceptance among the scientific and research communities within New Zealand about the value of Mātauranga and Māori indigenous knowledge has increased.
- Levels of Māori participation in post-secondary education and employment in research institutions have increased, with continued efforts underway to address under-representation.

Three key factors shaped the effectiveness of Vision Mātauranga: funding set asides, the creation of new structures within the science and research sector, and policy stability. After the policy's roll out, the government allocated funding, put in place several strategic initiatives and programs to support achievement of its policy objectives and address the systemic barriers confronted by Māori individuals and communities in the country's mainstream research, science, and technology sector, including a hostile academic environment, competitive funding, and siloed ways of working. As the sentiments below illustrate, dedicated funding along with clear guidance on how to access it created incentives to change attitudes and ways of working.

"Crown Research Institutes are all extremely well versed around Vision Mātauranga, and how it works within the CRI eyes. There's been a real change within those Crown Research Institutes. Well, the people, the staffing, and they have actually put effort into changing their structures, which is happening quite considerably." – Interview participant involved in a policy-focused CSI.

Nearly two decades after its initial implementation, the Vision Mātauranga policy remains in effect. Reflecting on the policy's impact, a Māori academic interviewed for this research identified policy stability as a main contributor to its success, *"I think that it's been effective because it's been allowed to exist for so long. At one point, I thought, it must be time for a review of this thing, but in hindsight, I think the fact that it has had that consistency and persistency is probably a factor that's helped it to be effective"*. – Interview participant involved in a policy-focused CSI.



OPERATIONS

Operations encompass practices to support successful day-to-day implementation of an initiative. Access to sustainable funding, iterative learning about what works, and communications for connection and brand development stood out as important for effective capacity strengthening initiatives.

Theme #6: Funding

Funding for capacity strengthening involves resources to sustain the day-to-day operations of the capacity strengthening initiative (CSI) and for self-determined activities of local communities and organizations.

Accessing Flexible, Ethical, and Diverse Funding

The ability to pay to do the work of capacity strengthening is vital; access to healthy sums of multi-year, unrestricted funding is a shared goal among the cases reviewed for this work. Securing funding is difficult and

requires focus, persistence, and, often capacity for outreach, funder relations, and proposal writing: *“if funding is found - it by no means happens by accident. It is a relentless drive that you have to chase funding and connect with teams, like our philanthropic supporters and at times we use grant writers and things, but we look for people who work hard to chase that money and make it fit with what we’re trying to do.”* – Interview participant representing a network initiative. For smaller operations, one grant or financial contribution can mean the difference between shutting down the initiative and sustaining work over a few years.

Overall, non-profit organizations delivering CSIs perceive government and multi-lateral organizations as burdensome funders, preferring funders with low administrative requirements and spending flexibility. But each source has pros and cons. The nature of capacity strengthening that is community or locally-owned means that activities and outcomes are often difficult to foresee in advance. Funders with rigid schedules, needing to define, control, or track success metrics, and those expecting regular financial and performance reports are philosophically and administratively challenging to work with (Adams et al. 2022). Working with foundations, especially smaller, private foundations, has been fruitful for cases reviewed, with some successes resulting from corporate partnerships as well. Corporate donations bear risk, however, and reputations can suffer immensely if corruption, greenwashing, or environmental and social harms are associated with corporate resources.

“We’ve had to cut ties with some potentially quite lucrative partners, because they just didn’t align with our ethics. Or they wanted to take too much control of what we were doing, or they wanted to load us up with admin stuff for a relatively small amount of funding.” – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on individuals’ upskilling.

To be clear and proactive, CSIs and partners develop ethical screens and principles to guide collaborative work funded externally (Box 2-2 shows examples of principles developed by the Tapestry Institute for the benefit of Indigenous communities and Lands worldwide).

Despite some negative perceptions of government as a funder, linked to their rigid accountability mechanisms, there are upsides to government funding. Capacity strengthening programming sustained by multi-year government funding can provide certainty to locally-led activities, including paying wages of local community coordinators and establishing contractual obligations with local delivery partners.

The experience of **Learning on Country** illustrates the benefits of government support at a programmatic level. The initiative contributes to the government meeting its policy objectives on equity in education. After a successful pilot project, the initiative secured a 10-year funding contract with the government, which has now been extended by six years.

Since relying on one funding source is risky, CSIs work hard to grow their portfolio of funders over time. For years, **Fundación Pachamama** relied on one funding source: its sister organization, Pachamama Alliance, who raises funds from individuals (not corporations). After ten to twelve years of operations, the CSI diversified funding sources to include international NGOs, foundations, and international cooperation from The Netherlands, France, and Italy. This did not happen overnight. The organization first started working with smaller international NGOs on a series of small projects and as Fundación Pachamama’s credibility and capacity increased, the organization was in a position to expand their portfolio of work with multiple, larger, and more demanding funding partners.

Box 2-2: Indigenous principles for collaboration with western philanthropy (Source: reproduced from Adams et al. 2022)

The following principles draw from the 2022 report [Standing our Ground for the Land: An Indigenous Philanthropy](#). Developed by a team of primarily Indigenous scholars and practitioners from the Tapestry Institute, these principles support the work of the IKhana Fund (<https://tapestryinstitute.org/ikhana-fund/>).

About the work

- There must be flexibility of time in the work we do.
- The processes of what we do are more important than outcome.
- We will try to articulate what success looks like, but it may not be possible to satisfy a Western funder's expectations of success metrics.
- Indigenous groups must lead collaborative endeavors, within our Land-based, relational ethical systems.
- Indigenous Process is essential. It is not enough for Indigenous people to simply be involved in a project for it to be truly "Indigenous" in its values, methods, and principles.

Principles for people of Western culture and how they should behave in collaborative relationships with Indigenous people

- Western collaborators must recognize the sovereignty of Indigenous people/s.
- Funders must relinquish control over our collaborative work together.
- Everyone is welcome on the Land and to Country, but the traditional owners/custodians of Land should be acknowledged.
- Because there must be flexibility of time in the work that is done, the donor cannot set those limits.
- Because the processes of what are done are more important than outcome, the donor cannot set demands for specific expectations of outcome. However, assumptions or hopes about outcome possibilities should be communicated for the purposes of fostering understanding as we learn to work together.
- Because it may be difficult or impossible to articulate what success looks like, the donor may not stipulate expected metrics of success. Again, assumptions or hopes about what success would look like should be communicated for the purposes of fostering understanding as we learn to work together.
- Western collaborators must be transparent about the source of the resources they intend to contribute to the work we do together. It is essential to make sure that resources do not carry lethal toxins into environments that will be harmed, rather than benefitted, by what these resources bring. We will ask you about the sources of funds you offer us, and you should let us know if you're aware of a potential problem we do not see.

Demonstrating Effectiveness to Attract More Funding

Having a solid proof of concept and tangible results attracts attention, increasing funders' willingness to invest increases. Securing healthy funding is a chicken and egg situation. The experience of one CSI among the twelve – **Mimal** and their Women's Rangers program—illustrates the value of self-investing to start small and just start, instead of waiting for adequate levels of resourcing and the support structures to be in place. The organization's board and communities they serve identified the need for a new program targeting female rangers, so the organization decided to re-direct funding from their economic development activities to make it happen. The organization's CEO emphasizes that scaling activities to the level that is affordable until more resources are found is a strategy that works. Both Mimal's and **Sea Women of Melanesia's** experiences suggests that philanthropic organizations and other funders are more attracted to funding initiatives that they can add value to rather than channeling funding to a brand-new concept with zero funding:

"But, eventually people do start to notice us getting these results on the board, and that's why we're now suddenly starting to get UN contracts, higher level philanthropists wanting to come in and donate significant amounts of money; it's a hard slog, but you just have to stay committed to the cause." – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on individuals' upskilling.

Supporting Institutional Strengthening

Funders willing to make general investments in organizational development and institutional strengthening are hard to find. The experiences of CSIs focused on organizational development suggest a disconnect between funders' understanding of the importance of strong institutions and their willingness to invest in it. Making the case that donors should be investing in both unrestricted core operating funds for organizations and investing in organizational development remains an uphill battle.

“Great idea [to support local organizational development working through a portfolio of local partner organizations]. Totally needed. No one’s going to fund you’. Because I do think a lot of the big money has been reluctant to invest in institutions— they contract for outcomes. Right? And I think that’s a big challenge in thinking about how you scale this work. You have to be willing to invest in institutions, which is inherently a trust-based exercise.” – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on local organizational development.

CSIs among our twelve cases pursue three strategies to address these constraints.

- First, include the more tangible aspects of organizational strengthening in proposals, such the development of strategic plans.
- Second, actively advocating for change by engaging with funding partners, with NGOs essentially serving as intermediaries. Although donor perspectives are underrepresented in published research, some work suggests an openness to engage in open dialogue and two-way learning with grantees, which is key to strengthening relationships, increasing local organizations' legitimacy in the eyes of funders, and developing more sustainable investment pathways (Santy et al. 2022, Mulder 2023). A donor is more likely to commit to long-term funding if a grantee has a clear mission and vision, a strong leadership team and strategic plan (Santy et al. 2022).
- Third, experimenting with new funding streams, such as carbon offset contracts to finance the management of protected areas and activities that local communities care about. Although private sector partnerships on market-based mechanisms involving land and community-based natural resource management are risky (WEF 2023, Rodewald et al. 2020, Smith et al. 2022), their potential to offer long-term funding streams tied to outcomes serving communities has merit.

Localizing Funding

Enhancing locally-led action and local access to funding is a popular topic in development and humanitarian assistance, global conservation, and climate change agendas (Colenbrander et al. 2018, Omukuti et al. 2022, Li et al. 2023, Mulder 2023). Local delivery remains a gap, despite calls for decentralized financial mechanisms to “directly empower local governance” (Li et al. 2023) and ensure funds contribute to local action, as well as growing international pledges and commitments (Omukuti et al. 2022). For example, less than two percent of global funding for climate and nature goals, directly reaches Indigenous Peoples and local communities (Rainforest Foundation Norway 2021, Rights and Resources Initiative 2024).

“You’re seeing a lot of big statements being made about localizing conservation. A lot of big commitments, with big dollars attached to them have been made. But we’re not seeing a lot of movement on localization happening. And we think it’s really important to the long-term success of conservation. There’s got to be mechanisms to actually get money on the ground, into the hands of those local organizations.” – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on local organizational development.

Two CSIs from the twelve reviewed are actively considering how global climate finance or conservation finance can flow more freely so Indigenous nations and local organizations can gain direct access to less restrictive funding than is currently the case. For its part, **Fundación Pachamama** sees the emergence of Indigenous-led funds and alliances, like the Mesoamerican Territorial Fund and the Amazon Sacred Headwaters Alliance as part

of the solution. The CSI is supporting “readiness” to absorb finance, with readiness exemplified by Indigenous organizations that are duly registered, with life plans, baseline assessments, and networks of youth guardians to support monitoring.

Theme #7: Evaluation and Learning

Research highlights the pressing need for better evidence on what works for capacity strengthening, how capacity strengthening contributes to on-the-ground outcomes (e.g., conservation), and in what contexts (Sterling et al. 2022). Well-designed evaluations in capacity strengthening projects are rare (Tsey et al. 2012). Additionally, current practice tends to focus on individual projects and their effect at target levels rather than assessing broader systemic changes (Porzecanski et al. 2022). As a lack of evidence of the effectiveness of capacity strengthening limits their sustainability, improvements in evaluation processes and resulting learning can only help (Robins 2007, Anderson et al. 2012, Santy et al. 2022).

Attention to evaluation and learning varied within the twelve cases reviewed, with the approaches described below key to understanding the effectiveness of capacity strengthening initiatives and to improving their effectiveness over time.

Iterative Learning

Learning is important to organizations and individuals delivering capacity strengthening initiatives for several reasons, including: 1) to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of internal processes, 2) to improve the relevance and fit of the delivery approach, 3) to ensure the work is beneficial to the individuals and communities served. A commitment to transparency and accountability to funders and individuals and communities served motivates self-reflection and independent reviews of internal organizational systems. For example, aside from meeting financial reporting requirements, **Mimal’s** approach to organizational strengthening includes joint work undertaken by the Board of Directors and staff to monitor collective progress on eight categories of healthy governance (Figure 2-2). To date, the organization has commissioned two independent reviews, sharing the results and related actions in annual reports.

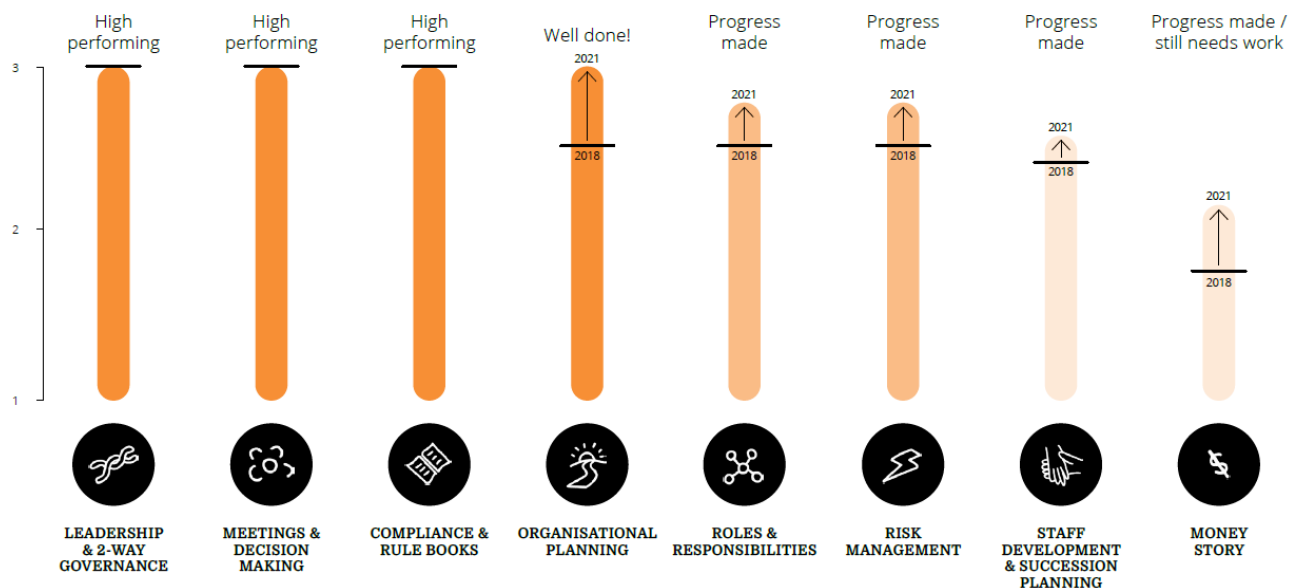


Figure 2-2: Results of two third-party reviews undertaken on Mimal, focusing on eight categories of healthy governance (Reproduced from Mimal’s 2022 Annual Report, “Blazing a Trail”).

CSIs bring an evaluative mindset to their work and use independent evaluations to guide program adjustments. The degree of formality and structure to this learning varies and depends on context, with large CSIs subject to

funder monitoring and evaluation requirements more likely to ensure systems and processes are in place for this. For example, with academic collaborators and input from program stakeholders, the **Learning on Country** program developed a rigorous and culturally-appropriate monitoring and evaluation framework and methodology, with evaluation results and recommendations leading to significant program adjustments over the years (Fogarty et al. 2015, Learning on Country 2020). In contrast, **Maliasili's** initial learning about effective approaches to organizational development of local African conservation organizations leaned on trial and error. Over its 10+ years of existence, organizational development programming grew to include leadership training and other services. Partner needs and Maliasili's own maturation drove program refinements.

Continuous feedback from individuals and communities served supports learning and program improvements and helps keep CSIs accountable. Approaches used by the focal CSIs include formal assessments, workshops, and informal conversations, for example:

- **Maliasili**, which works with local African conservation organizations over a period of about five years, gets their partners to score themselves annually. With a heightened understanding of what it means to be an effective organization, it is not unusual for partner organizations to score themselves lower in a second or third year than they did upon onboarding with Maliasili. As partners' organizational capacity changes so does expectations of Maliasili's own work.
- **KUA** and **Sea Women of Melanesia** strive to gather feedback from network members or training participants throughout the year. After annual network events KUA has touch-base calls with network members to reflect on how the last gathering was, how it affected them, what they learned, and how it helped. Sea Women of Melanesia focuses on gathering feedback to improve training outcomes, including practical things like how many days in a row to be training and logistical aspects such as the appropriateness of accommodations.
- **Mimal** leans on community closeness to evaluate performance. The organization operates in a small community. Talking to the Board and senior community members is part of staff's jobs and people are all family and friends as well. In addition to formal monitoring and evaluation, Mimal Board members and staff hold active conversations with community members to hear about what is and is not working. This process of ongoing feedback helps Mimal stay on track, ensuring that the work they are doing is what the community wanted to see projects achieve for their people.

Ongoing conversations are important but take effort and intention to plan, do, and act on.

"It's important to have active conversations with people about what is and isn't working at lots of different levels and encourage people to give feedback. All of those things sound easy but- it's similar with finding funding and community consultation and that ongoing monitoring- those are all things that you have to actively do and consciously remind and hustle on, because otherwise they don't happen." – Interview participant representing a network initiative.

Measuring What Matters

Grant funding comes with monitoring and reporting requirements and CSIs often do more than what is required to satisfy their own curiosity. For some, key performance indicators of interest to funders do not fully align with what interests CSIs. Funders, particularly government, encourage tracking performance against quantifiable indicators, like the number of students trained or the number of Indigenous people employed. Organizations delivering capacity strengthening often have "why" questions and measure success in terms of durable outcomes, as the quote below illustrates.

"Government funders are often wanting numbers and are more interested in "We trained 50 people!" never mind that no one actually went beyond the first step, whereas our interest is about the successes- how many individuals are genuinely supported to move up into those roles, and sustain in those roles. It's easy enough just to promote someone up into a job and go "look! We've got a new Indigenous Coordinator" and then a year later, they've

disappeared off into the night because it was too hard and there were too many barriers. So, it's about: how do we break down all of those before we get there?" – Interview participant representing a network initiative.

Since each funder has different expectations for monitoring, evaluation, and learning, CSIs do well by owning and investing in these processes to serve their own needs and those of the communities they work with (see Box 2-3):

Box 2-3: Indicators of organizational development used by Maliasili to track the progress of local conservation organizations.

In addition to periodic organizational assessments and other approaches to tracking progress with local partners, Maliasili uses a core set of indicators as proxies for successful organizational development: organizational budget, team size, dependence on a single donor, diversity of funding sources, and one or two metrics of "on-the-ground" impact (e.g., change in area of community managed fishery closures; change in community titled land area). These indicators apply across their portfolio of local partners, which also helps paint a picture of Maliasili's overall effectiveness.

Being able to demonstrate visible, quantifiable results is sometimes necessary to attract well-deserved attention.

"Results count more than anything else. There are a lot of people in the marine conservation space, making a lot of noise, but not actually getting much done. I think we tend to roll the other way. We just walk softly and carry a big stick, you know, if someone says, okay, what are you guys doing? Have a look at this. This is what we've got done. This is how many communities we've engaged with. This is how many rich survey images we've collected. This is how many women we've trained. I keep reiterating that to the women, it's like, the results will count and eventually people start to notice." – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on individuals' upskilling.

Monitoring Contributions to Societal and Systemic Change

Understanding the value of capacity strengthening efforts at a population or systems level is uncommon, although at least two of the twelve cases reviewed are moving in this direction. The **Learning on Country** program is exploring collaborating with government entities to track the life outcomes of program participants over the next 20 years. **Fundación Pachamama's** monitoring framework is grounded in indicators reflecting the right to living well and the rights of nature in the Ecuadorian Constitution. The organization uses project-level indicators as well as these systems-level indicators to track their contributions to Ecuador's transition to a society that upholds those rights. These types of efforts can be resource-intensive but are valuable to fill knowledge gaps and to help CSIs acquire resources, strengthen their own capacity, and achieve greater impact in the world.

Theme #8: Communications

Communications support the effectiveness of capacity strengthening initiatives by fostering connection among direct participants, with target groups who may not be directly engaged, and between the CSI and external audiences, such as funders. Use of technology, strategic communications with purposeful messaging, and brand development are practices highlighted by about half of the twelve cases reviewed.

Using Technology to Foster Connection

Internet, communications technologies (ICTs) and social media play an important role for capacity strengthening initiatives operating in remote locations and across large distances. For the **International Rangers Federation (IRF)**, the use of ICTs has reduced barriers to engaging with the federation's global network of Rangers making activities more inclusive. *"What I've seen is the ability of people to communicate has improved. So, the internet, but certainly mobile phones, have been a huge benefit to us, being able to get to Rangers. As you know, communities in rural areas etc., are often remote, communications are poor, and so engaging with them is quite difficult. The key part is to try and engage with our membership and hear their voices."* Additionally, IRF

members in some global regions use social media tools, such as WhatsApp groups, to share ideas, challenges, and lessons, sustaining the community of practice.

Radio technology is also harnessed. Working in the Peruvian Amazon, **CEDIA** has used High Frequency (HF) radio to enable native communities spread across the territory to unify their vision as land defenders. HF radio is one of the earliest low-cost and long-distance communication methods available (Wang et al. 2022). It is typically used to equip teams that are hundreds of kilometers away from a central location.

The global COVID pandemic shifted perceptions about what is possible to accomplish with remote technologies. For example, the use of Internet-enabled videoconferencing for planning and project meetings has become standard in many cases, including for **Learning on Country**: *“we decided one way to do this was using technology, virtual meetings became part of that, at first not as much, but COVID changed that, and we realized they would become part of the norm of how we connect to each other.”* This technology is not appropriate for all uses, of course, with CSIs adept at discerning when in-person interaction and interaction in community are irreplaceable.

Providing Clear Messaging and Guidance

Strategic communications, which supplies purposeful content intentionally, is a practice that enables success of at least two of the twelve cases reviewed. The **International Ranger Federation (IRF)** invests in providing clear messaging, and practical and accessible guidance. The organization has produced several resources to share their message with rangers and the world. Additionally, the IRF makes the effort to translate their written documents into six main languages based on their worldwide operations. Similarly, one of **Maliasili’s** core values is *“making the complex simple”*. This value is exemplified by the critical thinking and diagnostic skillsets staff apply to reveal practical, tangible solutions that bring value to partners and funders alike (see Maliasili’s toolbox with organizational tips and tricks [here](#)). This value carries throughout Maliasili’s strategic communications, with clear messaging supported by both analytical and experiential evidence, and use of beautiful graphics and photography.

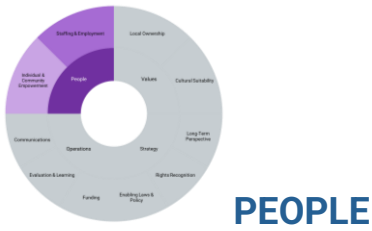
Investing in Branding

Once seen as a tool to manage external perceptions of an organization or initiative, today’s view of a strong brand is one that achieves close alignment between an organization’s or initiative’s internal identity (mission and values) and external image (Kylander and Stone 2012). Although their goals and approaches differ, brand development has been critical to the success of the Sea Women of Melanesia and The Nature Conservancy’s Mongolia Grasslands program.

Sea Women of Melanesia has pursued a deliberate approach to branding, marketing, and multimedia storytelling to extend the reach of its outreach activities, raise its visibility to potential funders, and pursue successful partnerships with the private sector. Corporate partnerships often demand high visibility of the activities they support to benefit their own brand exposure. This has motivated the program to invest in branding, which has paid off since the exposure has no doubt played a role in increasing the overall visibility of the program’s work to other funders that are now further expanding its base of supporters. According to Sea Women of Melanesia’s leadership, *“brand development is absolutely crucial. In this day and age, everybody’s looking at their phone every day. Everybody can access information on what the organization is doing. Having a coherent brand appearance, having a coherent mission, and having compelling imagery, and lots of information coming out of what the organization is doing is really, really important.”*

In contrast, **The Nature Conservancy’s Mongolia Grasslands** program uses branding to support community cohesion and a shared identity. The program organizes an annual nomadic festival with counties to bring together the community-based organizations (CBOs) involved in the program. These nomadic festivals are opportunities to celebrate culture, build relationships between the TNC project team and the CBOs, and for CBOs to share information about their successes in pastureland management, economic initiatives, and lessons learned. The program defines these annual festivals as branding activities, bringing a positive message to communities in which they take place and creating a shared identity among CBOs as key to upholding their

traditional communal rights and to achieving ambitious and durable conservation results for Mongolia's grasslands.



People refer to the steps taken and choices made in recruiting, enabling, and empowering staff and people served by the capacity strengthening initiatives.

Theme #9: Individual and Community Empowerment

Empowerment is the freedom of choice to act on issues that individuals and communities define as important (Narayan 2002). Capacity strengthening initiatives reviewed for this study stand out for their attention to intangible aspects of capacity, such as building confidence, connection, and a shared identity, as well as for their contributions to economic self-sufficiency of community-led initiatives. Taken together, CSI intentions and actions have potential to empower the individuals and communities served.

Building Confidence and Connection

Effective capacity strengthening initiatives focus on outcomes that go beyond gaining new knowledge and skills to include support systems and confidence in the application of new content. Research focused on conservation planning and implementation suggests that gaining new knowledge and skills through training is insufficient to enable enhanced practice. Individuals' belief in their ability to complete the task successfully and the opportunity to learn from peers support the application of new capacities acquired (Bruyere et al. 2022).

The broader attention to intangible, psychological, and social aspects of capacity strengthening is evident from the practices of the CSIs reviewed. Table 2-5 summarizes the outcomes of a range of capacity strengthening processes or strategies undertaken by or linked to the twelve cases, based on analysis of interview data. Outcomes focused on increased knowledge and upskilling are associated with all processes or strategies, which is unsurprising. What's more revealing is the range of outcomes that catalyze or work to reinforce turning new knowledge and skills into self-determined action.

At an individual level, the case study CSIs illustrate how motivation to learn and confidence in one's skills can grow. Participation in an internship broadened a trainee's perspective on employment opportunities in air quality monitoring and the regulatory framework surrounding this issue; this was a "gateway" to a career in air quality monitoring for and with Tribes. In another case, trainees' use of automated data collection and analysis technology for reef mapping engendered increased autonomy and efficiency, bolstering confidence in their ability to do the work well (i.e., self-efficacy).

Most outcomes spring from relationships, including those with suppliers of capacity strengthening and with peers. Beyond knowledge and skills, individuals and communities participating in capacity strengthening have gained confidence, pride, motivation to learn, a sense of belonging, a sense of identity, self-reliance (Table 2-5). These outcomes are a result of activities such as youth participation in land and sea camps as part of culturally appropriate school programming; mentorship by peers and by capacity strengthening leads; peer coaching on community-based natural resource planning; exchange of knowledge, experiences, and testing new content in peer networks; and networking with peer communities in extended committee meetings.

Table 2-5: Examples of outcomes with the potential to contribute to individual and community empowerment and the processes and strategies related to these outcomes (Source: this research). Most outcomes rely on processes and strategies built on relationships (i.e., relational), with fewer corresponding to actions taken at the individual level.

	Process or strategy	Outcome(s)
Individual	Participation in an 8-week internship ^a	Knowledge, skills, motivation to learn
	Use of innovative environmental mapping technology	Knowledge, skills, task efficiency, confidence
Relational	Participation in land / sea camps with Rangers and Elders	Knowledge, skills, confidence, pride, cultural rebuilding
	Provision of mentorship (peer mentorship and mentorship from capacity strengthening leads)	Knowledge, skills, confidence
	Coaching assistance on community-based natural resource management	Knowledge, skills, confidence, belonging
	Community participation in Steering Committee meetings and forums to share stories and experiences	Knowledge, inspiration, belonging
	Peer networking	Knowledge, inspiration, motivation to learn, belonging, identity, self-reliance
	Leading major activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community network gatherings • Sea expedition and reef survey 	Knowledge, skills, confidence, self-reliance, sustainability

^a Not part of the capacity strengthening initiatives reviewed, but a linked program or service.

The combination of access to a circle of peers and opportunities for participants to go beyond their comfort zones in low-risk settings accelerates learning (Leberman and Martin 2002), as the following quote illustrates. The quote describes **Mimal's** approach to empowering women rangers to represent themselves and their experiences in large conferences. This is a sequential approach that includes attending conferences, shadowing program leaders, co-presenting, and presenting.

"To be able to do that, to build that confidence over time and have those opportunities, always with that knowledge that ability to not- you're not forced- you can always step out, you've got some backup and cover, so no one's left standing out on a limb. I think that's an important part of the process, and what that Strong Women's Network has reinforced in that space is that need for the wider circle of peers to provide you that confidence." – Interview participant representing a network initiative.

Experiences from CSIs also illustrate the power of peer networks in creating a shared identity and a sense of belonging. This was evident in the work of the **International Rangers Forum, Mimal, KUA** and **MNMN**, with the following quote from **MNMN** describing the benefits of network building among native and Indigenous communities beyond the Hawaiian archipelago.

"It helped us to see that we're not alone, and that we're doing here at home is what many others are doing across parts of the global earth that we will probably never ever see, but if we're all doing it. That process built within us a sense of identity and empowerment that is common across other Indigenous communities, and we began to see ourselves in them, and I hope vice versa." – Interview participant representing a network initiative.

Another noteworthy outcome is the sustainability of capacity strengthening activities. Capacity-strengthening initiatives can struggle to determine when to scale back direct support to allow individuals and communities served to take over. In the case of the **Sea Women of Melanesia**, the global COVID-19 pandemic brought many challenges, but also presented a silver lining when international travel halted and provided the Sea Women in training a chance to take over field operations themselves and become self-sufficient sooner than may have occurred otherwise.

Supporting Livelihoods and Economic Self-Sufficiency

Capacity strengthening activities support workforce development and local entrepreneurship as strategies to strengthen local economies centred on community values. Since the CSIs reviewed are associated with conservation, land, and natural resource management, examples of livelihood or economic development relate to nature and natural resources.

- The **Learning on Country** program is an incubator for land and sea ranger-based work. In addition to basic programming for secondary education, Learning on Country sites embed Vocational Education and Training, which prepares students for the workforce. Students can complete course certificates in conservation and land management, maritime studies, and first aid, which align with ranger work. Some students pursuing this path have transitioned to full-time employment as local rangers following completion, although few positions are available each year. Since the program teaches transferrable skills, students also find work in other natural resource sectors, tourism, arts, or community services.
- **Mimal** offers bespoke training and flexible work arrangements to ensure that rangers (male and female) are fully equipped for their careers in land management, including local, social, and cultural skills that communities need people to have to become leaders. The organization's approach to onboarding is sensitive to the needs, attitudes, and behaviours of local youth and those aspiring to earn livelihoods as rangers. Mimal develops and implements customized work arrangements, providing the opportunity for people to identify the work level that suits them. Mimal is a delivery partner to the Learning on Country program and, more broadly, offers economic development opportunities by commercializing land stewardship services (e.g., fire management).
- To complement organizational development, **The Nature Conservancy's Mongolia Grasslands** program supports herders' income diversification to meet both financial security and conservation goals. Activities include supporting community-based organizations in creating new income streams (e.g., handicrafts, dairy/meat production, and tourism), supporting the development of sheep wool value chains, assisting in establishing ecocamps that assign 30% of the share of proceeds to conservation, and implementing a strategy for healthy livestock growth through nutrition-rich food for lambs (TNC n.d.).
- Entrepreneurship and business planning is part of **CEDIA's** capacity strengthening strategy with native communities in the Peruvian amazon. Through a multi-year process, CEDIA works with native and Indigenous communities on land surveying, land titling, developing community life plans, natural resource management plans, and, ultimately, business plans. This process, which can take upwards of 15 years, equips communities to carry out economic development on their own terms, in their own territory. CEDIA as an organization has evolved in lockstep with communities' needs and aspirations. For example, they currently have the capability to supply quality seedstock to support sustainable community aquaculture.

Achieving the goal of progressing community-led initiatives to a point of long-term self-reliance without external support is an aspiration that many capacity strengthening initiatives grapple with. *"We want to build these organizations where they can carry out their own organizational development, and not need us for that, and not need us for funding ultimately, but it's a process to get to that point."* – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on local organizational development.

Theme #10: Staffing and Employment

Human Resource Planning

Since capacity strengthening is about people, hiring the right staff and retaining them is key to the effectiveness of this work, making human resource planning an important investment. Recruitment, retention, and representation were topics raised by several case study CSIs.

In recruiting staff to deliver capacity strengthening programs and activities, CSIs pay attention to disciplinary backgrounds, lived experience, people skills, and problem-solving abilities. Academic backgrounds and expertise in social sciences (including anthropology and sociology), conservation, agroforestry, water resource management, are among the disciplines sought after by CSIs. **CEDIA** prides itself on employing a large complement of social scientists, about 40% of their staff. Both cultural knowledge and the western side of technology and land management are important for land-based programming, such as that delivered by **Learning on Country**, with the same blend of background applicable to people qualified to generate strong **Vision Maturanga**-based projects.

Lived experience, particularly experience being part of a community of the kind targeted by CSIs also factors into hiring decisions. **Maliasili** hires for both expertise and lived experience and considers that understanding of the operational context and being of a certain place equally important. Maliasili's experience has shown that, at times, being an outsider, acting as an independent intermediary, is helpful in establishing partnerships with local conservation organizations. In **TAMS**, knowledge from working for a Tribe, being raised in the local area, and being a member of the Nation is as or more important than technical knowledge. **Learning on Country** and a researcher manager speaking to **Vision Maturanga** see experience having lived, worked, and spent time in Indigenous communities as essential, and, in this way avoiding a reputation as *He harore rangitahi* (a mushroom that blooms for one day, or a flash in the pan). CSIs mentioned several attitudes, skills, and aptitudes that they looked for when hiring, including flexibility, listening skills, compassion, passion, humility, a team orientation, critical thinking, and a diagnostic skillset to deliver practical, tangible solutions.

CSIs support employee retention by paying attention to the growth of staff, building a strong organizational culture, and providing emotional support. Succession planning and organizational restructuring are two strategies that **Maliasili** uses to create growth and development pathways for staff. **Mimal** and **Sea Women of Melanesia** focus on role design, making sure to align responsibilities with skills and potential as well as challenging staff to grow but at a reasonable pace. An aspect of organizational culture that stands out from **Maliasili** and **Fundación Pachamama's** experience are the efforts made to create connection and belonging among staff. Internal check-ins and planning meetings are participatory (i.e., not just leadership) and have a rhythm. Fundación Pachamama has Monday morning circles with staff and participatory organizational planning every month, three months, and six months. Each of these meetings has a specific purpose. CSIs working in remote conditions, under difficult circumstances can expose staff to burnout and a tough emotional load. The **Learning on Country** program and implementation experience of Vision Maturanga illustrate what can be done to support staff's wellbeing:

- **Learning on Country** delivers services in remote communities facing high suicide rates among young people and losses of Elders. It can take 12 months for new staff to understand community cultural protocols and build strong relationships and trust. Because of the importance of relationship building, staff living in a community always make themselves available. Program managers ensure prospective employees understand the demands of living in a community, the challenges, and extraordinary learning opportunities the work can bring. Once employed, program managers check in daily with community coordinators, with a specific focus on supporting mental wellness.
- Because the pool of people qualified to create strong **Vision Maturanga**-based projects is small, the potential for burnout of qualified researchers is high. As well, researchers focused on topics like the impacts of climate change can take a toll on staff's mental health. Health and wellbeing check-ins are one way to provide emotional support to researchers in the field and support them in setting boundaries.

In line with the communities and groups CSIs are serving, Indigenous and youth representation among staff is a priority of many CSIs. For example, about 50% of **Fundación Pachamama's** staff are under 30 years old and are from the interior where the organization delivers capacity strengthening. Administrative staff and management

are concentrated in headquarters in Quito. Over 50% of Fundación Pachamama's and **Learning on Country's** staff are Indigenous, whereas all of **CEDIA's** community facilitators are Indigenous.

Supporting Decent Jobs

The operation of CSIs provides opportunities to support decent jobs for community members, including as full-time staff, as community liaisons, and as suppliers of knowledge and wisdom.

Employing local people who live in the community to deliver aspects of capacity-strengthening initiatives fosters community engagement and effectiveness of the work. **Learning on Country's** experience is worth highlighting, as the program hires local coordinators, Indigenous Rangers, and Elders who possess invaluable cultural knowledge and skills. These individuals deliver aspects of a culturally-based education curriculum, ensuring that educational activities are culturally appropriate and effective. By involving traditional landowners and senior cultural figures, the initiatives not only gain legitimacy but also benefit from the deep-rooted knowledge and expertise of the local people.

An effective strategy for capacity strengthening at both technical and socio-cultural levels involves preparing and working with Indigenous community coordinators or facilitators, referred to as *promotores*, in Spanish. These individuals act as essential links between their communities and broader project teams, monitoring progress and providing follow-ups. *Promotores*, who are fluent in the local language and deeply embedded in the community, ensure that initiatives are culturally appropriate and resonate with the community's needs and values. **CEDIA** adopts this approach, with successes engaging local facilitators who can bridge the gap between the community and CEDIA, which is an "external" organization.

Fair compensation is important in employing local community members and ensuring the sustainability of CSIs. A good practice in delivering **Vision Maturanga** research projects is budgeting for the compensation of community knowledge holders, such as Elders and cultural experts, acknowledging their significant contributions. The distinction between honoraria and full compensation requires careful consideration, respecting cultural differences in views on compensation for knowledge shared. Some views suggest that Elders and other knowledge holders contributing to CSIs or research in similar way as other technical specialists might, should receive remuneration just as contractors or consultants would.

Community and local organizations can face high staff turnover, as competition for qualified employees is high and individuals can face great pressures to leave home communities. As part of their work on organizational strengthening **Maliasili** supports local African conservation organizations to develop competitive compensation structures. This is necessary to retain talent, especially in roles prone to high turnover, such as enforcement officers or functional staff like accounting and communications. Although not always possible for CSIs operating on small budgets, addressing affordability challenges, and providing living wages are essential to ensuring that local employees can afford to stay and thrive in their communities.

The question guiding the work in this report is: what factors contribute to the effectiveness of leading capacity strengthening initiatives with Indigenous communities? The experiences of twelve initiatives operating around the world supplied the answer, pointing to attitudes, practices, and context related to values, strategy, operations, and people. For readers seeking to understand what these capacity strengthening initiatives do and how they operate, the next section of the report includes summaries of the initiatives. Detailed case studies are available [here](#).

3. A SNAPSHOT OF INITIATIVES

The heart of this report is the experience of twelve inspiring initiatives from around the world that work on capacity strengthening with and for Indigenous People as well as local communities.


INTRODUCTION


This report draws inspiration and lessons from twelve organizations and initiatives from around the world that work on capacity strengthening with and for Indigenous People as well as local communities. Criteria to select these twelve included: degree of Indigenous and local community participation, scale, relevance to the Canadian context, novelty, and geographic diversity. What follows are snapshots of each of the twelve initiatives. Detailed case studies are available in a companion report available [here](#).

Snapshots of each capacity strengthening initiative capture why the initiatives started, who is targeted, what the focus of capacity strengthening is, how they work, and what makes them successful.

INDIVIDUAL SNAPSHOTS

1. International Ranger Federation





Rangers | Photo Credit: W. Atoche-Montoya, IRF

Geography:	Global, with 169 ranger associations as members from all global regions.
Level:	Ranger sector / network.
View of capacity strengthening:	An empowerment process.
Genesis:	Established in 2020 in response to the 2019 World Ranger Congress.
Goals:	1) To provide a global forum for rangers to share successes and lessons learned in their protection of natural, historic, and cultural heritage, 2) to promote the exchange of information and technology among countries with varying levels of public and government support for protected area management.
Approaches:	Partnerships (e.g., The Thing Green Line), peer to peer learning, participatory approaches.
Modalities:	Workshops and training sessions; networking; online tools and guides.
Impact:	United voice for rangers; enhanced status of the ranger profession; empowered rangers; stronger ranger associations.
Success factors:	1) Hiring staff with on-the-ground and organizational experience in ranger affairs; 2) providing practical and accessible guidance; 3) building trust with rangers and communities; 4) creating opportunities for co-developing knowledge resources for rangers with the ranger membership.

2. Tribal Air Monitoring Support (TAMS) Center



Air quality program office | Photo Credit: TAMS, Northern Arizona University

Geography:	Indigenous lands across the United States.
Level:	Individual.
View of capacity strengthening:	Help to do air quality monitoring projects that communities want to implement.
Genesis:	Multi-organizational partnership involving the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and US Indigenous tribes, established in 1999.
Goals:	1) Support tribal priorities for air quality monitoring; 2) provide support for the long term; 3) enable data sovereignty; 4) expand offerings toward environmental monitoring; 5) increase education and empowerment of tribes to take control of their own air quality programs.
Approaches:	Regional hubs; partnerships (e.g., US EPA); blended learning (in person and virtual courses); technical assistance; equipment loans and lab services.
Modalities:	Workshops and training sessions; academic courses; online toolkits and guides; help-desk support.
Impact:	Nearly 2,000 professionals trained, from over half of all US tribes.
Success factors:	1) Changes to federal laws enshrining Indigenous rights to manage air quality leading to TAMS' creation; 2) focusing on local and regional priorities; 3) relying on long-term, established partnerships and funding; 4) sharing networks and resources.

3. Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo (KUA)



Rebuilding a traditional fishpond | Photo Credit: D. Kanda, 2019, KUA

Geography:	Six of the eight main Hawaiian islands.
Level:	Network for community-driven learning and stewardship.
View of capacity strengthening:	Increasing your ability to do what you want to do - whether it's in work or in life.
Genesis:	Initial learning network called into creation by community Elders and leaders, officially founded in 2012.
Goals:	1) Strengthening the power of communities as decision-makers; 2) positioning communities as managers of natural resources; 3) building sustainable community-based organizations, and 4) enabling communities to adapt to changing environmental conditions.
Approaches:	Peer-to-peer learning; technical assistance.
Modalities:	Networking (including gatherings), experiential learning (e.g., community clean up), workshops & trainings; tools and guides.
Impact:	Connected individuals, funding mobilized for community projects, influencing international NGO ways of working.
Success factors:	1) Grounding in traditional Hawaiian cultural values and practices; 2) nurturing social processes and relationships; 3) changing social norms on the rights and roles of native Hawaiian communities; 4) increasing collaboration with state agencies in support of community-based management.

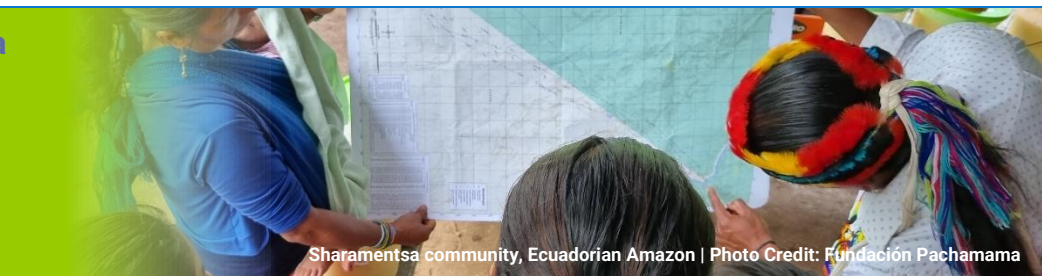
4. Maui Nui Makai Network (MNMN)



Community planning session | Photo Credit: MNMN

Geography:	Three of the eight main Hawaiian islands.
Level:	Network for community-driven learning and marine conservation.
View of capacity strengthening:	Something taught as a process that requires ongoing learning and adaptation.
Genesis:	Coalesced organically through prior partnerships and projects, officially founded in 2013.
Goals:	1) Connecting communities to care for and restore healthy ecosystems on which Hawai'i's people depend; 2) learning from diverse experience of community-based management to help member site care for seaward areas.
Approaches:	Peer-to-peer learning; technical assistance.
Modalities:	Networking (including gatherings), experiential learning ("working with our hands"), workshops & trainings; tools and guides; coaching.
Impact:	Over 1,000 people connected and accessing activities and guidance; over 15 trainings hosted; local marine management strengthened.
Success factors:	1) Grounding in traditional Hawaiian cultural values and practices; 2) nurturing social processes, relationships, and community cohesion; 3) providing coaching to communities to avoid reinventing the wheel; 4) formal recognition of community rights and roles in natural resource management.

5. Fundación Pachamama



Sharamentsa community, Ecuadorian Amazon | Photo Credit: Fundación Pachamama

Geography:	The Amazon in Ecuador and Peru.
Level:	Organizations
View of capacity strengthening:	Supporting Indigenous self-determination.
Genesis:	Founded in 1997 in response to a call to action by the Achuar people whose lands and culture were threatened by extractive economic development.
Goals:	1) Promoting respect for collective rights, territorial defense, and the rights of nature; 2) supporting local processes seeking to protect areas of high biodiversity; 3) supporting alignment of and advocacy by Indigenous organizations locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.
Approaches:	Direct assistance (unrestricted funding); technical assistance (e.g., legal defense); partnerships.
Modalities:	Workshops & trainings; peer networking; experiential learning.
Impact:	Avoided deforestation and biodiversity loss in the Ecuadorian Amazon; a united voice on Indigenous land governance and vision for sustainable development.
Success factors:	1) Respect for spirituality and ceremony as guiding forces; 2) holistic decision making that honours the reciprocal relationship with Indigenous peoples; 3) responding to the evolving needs of Indigenous communities as they work through local processes.

6. Centro de Desarrollo del Indígena Amazónico (CEDIA)

Community land titling in Loreto | Photo Credit: CEDIA



Geography:	The Peruvian Amazon.
Level:	Organizations
View of capacity strengthening:	Working with Indigenous Peoples to strengthen community institutions for the protection of land rights.
Genesis:	Founded in 1982 by a former Peruvian public servant who had worked on the Law of Native Communities and Agricultural Promotion.
Goals:	1) Fostering organizational capacities for land and natural resource management; 2) supporting the development and implementation of community sustainability plans ("life plans"); and 3) strengthening community capacity for their inclusion in protected areas planning
Approaches:	Training of trainers (community facilitators or <i>promotores</i>); technical assistance; partnerships.
Modalities:	Workshops and trainings; tools and guides.
Impact:	Improved natural resource and land management by 35 Indigenous communities, 450 native and "campesino" communities supported, over 20,000 people served (trained, advised), assisted 195 communities in developing life plans.
Success factors:	1) Investing in learning about Indigenous communities (history, visioning, language provenance, values, expectations); 2) establishing and maintaining trusted relationships with communities; 3) partnering with governments to support enforcement of laws and policies; 4) social science capacity.

7. Maliasili



Team building | Photo Credit: Maliasili

Geography:	Africa, currently active in twelve countries.
Level:	Organizations
View of capacity strengthening:	Taking care of the nuts and bolts of what makes an organization effective with a focus on impact.
Genesis:	Established in 2010 as a result of the founder's experience living and working on conservation in Tanzania.
Goals:	1) Strengthening local organizations for optimal performance; 2) catalyzing self aware, brave, and capable leaders; 3) increasing funding to and influence of local organizations.
Approaches:	Partnerships; technical assistance; peer-to-peer learning; blended learning.
Modalities:	Workshops & trainings; networking; coaching; online toolkits and practice guides; help desk support; experiential learning (e.g., site visits, hikes).
Impact:	99 conservation leaders trained; 49 local conservation organizations strengthened; funding mobilized for local conservation; 350,000km2 of biodiverse landscapes reached.
Success factors:	1) Organizational culture that nurtures humility and supports partners find answers themselves; 2) hiring staff with the right blend of technical expertise, critical thinking & people skills; 3) providing practical guidance and clear messaging; 4) instilling processes that build trust; 5) growing smartly.

8. TNC Mongolian Grasslands Program



Mongolian grasslands | Photo 34566958 © Jingaiping | Dreamstime.com

Geography:	Mongolia, supporting herder communities in the Eastern Steppe.
Level:	Community capacity through organizational development.
View of capacity strengthening:	Using rights in legal frameworks and applying appropriate methods for communities to use soil and land for their own conservation purposes.
Genesis:	Following amendments to environmental laws TNC started working on grasslands conservation in the early 2000s, launching the Mongolia Grasslands Program in 2017.
Goals:	1) Establishing community-based organizations; 2) pursuing self-sufficiency through conservation-related economic activities; 3) advancing protected areas management.
Approaches:	Train-the-trainer; peer-to-peer learning; technical assistance.
Modalities:	Workshops & trainings; networking; vocational education.
Impact:	Establishment of 230 CBOs covering 18 million ha, reduced grazing intensity, enhanced stewardship capacity of herders and rights assertion.
Success factors:	1) Recruiting local coordinators to support implementation; 2) tapping into the resources and expertise of the TNC global team; 3) amendments to environmental laws enabling the formation of CBOs with authority over natural resource management.

9. Sea Women of Melanesia

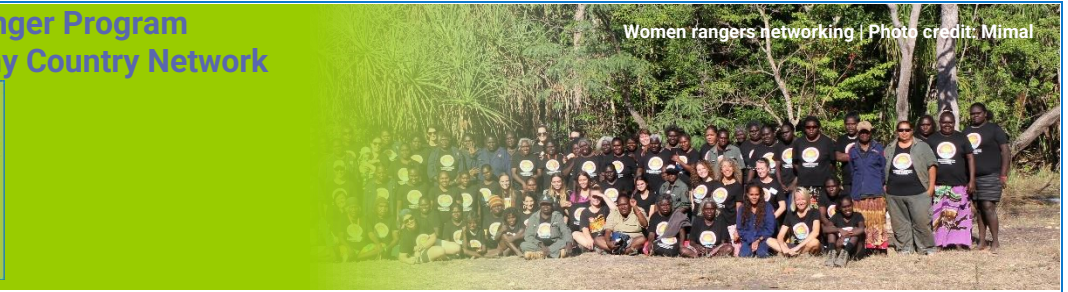


Program participants returning from data collection | Photo credit: Sea Women of Melanesia

Geography:	Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Australia's Great Barrier Reef region.
Level:	Individuals (and community).
View of capacity strengthening:	Established in Papua New Guinea in 2018 as a major program of the Coral Sea Foundation based on the experiences of the founder.
Genesis:	Initial learning network called into creation by community Elders and leaders, officially founded in 2012.
Goals:	1) Strengthening the connection between Indigenous women and their traditional sea country; 2) empowering Indigenous women from local communities with practical marine science skills and conservation knowledge; and 3) forging new links across a network of Indigenous Sea Women.
Approaches:	Sea-based learning; direct aid (medical supplies, menstrual products); partnerships.
Modalities:	Workshops & trainings; online toolkits and practice guides; experiential learning.
Impact:	Over 30 Indigenous seawomen trained; marine resource management advice delivered to 25 coastal communities; over 20 new marine reserves proposed; improved quality of life for 100s of community members.
Success factors:	1) Addressing broader community needs; 2) working with communities with champions; 3) changing social norms toward women's empowerment; 4) leveraging technology, marketing, and partnerships.

10. Mimal - Women's Ranger Program Strong Women for Healthy Country Network

Women rangers networking | Photo credit: Mimal



Geography:	Northern Territory of Australia (south-central Arnhem Land).
Level:	Individuals.
View of capacity strengthening:	People building up their own capacity and providing support around that.
Genesis:	Started by a group of Indigenous landowners in the 1990s, Mimal was incorporated in 2015, with the network launched in 2018.
Goals:	1) Increasing understanding that healing country means healing people; 2) enabling female rangers to support each other; 3) increasing female rangers' capacity to share knowledge and information, and control over their Caring for Country work.
Approaches:	Peer-to-peer learning; land-based learning; participatory approaches; partnerships (Learning on Country).
Modalities:	Workshops & trainings; networking (annual forum); experiential learning.
Impact:	Increased confidence and advocacy ability of rangers; policy influence (gender equity in land management).
Success factors:	1) Centering the organization's activity in community needs and strengths; 2) reinvesting proceeds from economic development activities to fund capacity strengthening; 3) starting small with the resources available to provide an anchor for additional funding; 4) using flexible work arrangements.

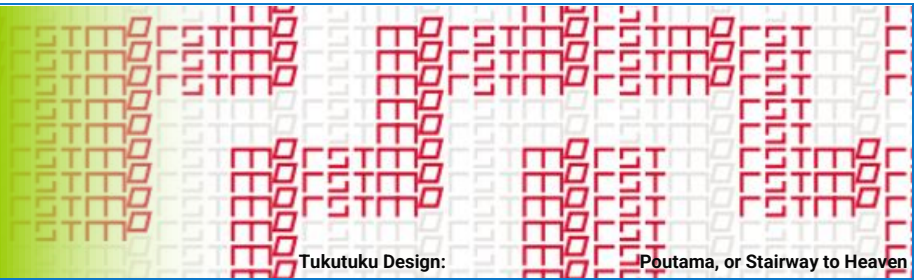
11. Learning on Country (LoC)

GunBulanya group shot| Photo credit: Learning on Country



Geography:	Northern Territory of Australia.
Level:	Individual (and community).
View of capacity strengthening:	Maintaining culture and students' connection to where they come from, and the value of that.
Genesis:	A model piloted by Indigenous communities in 2010, formally established via government funding in 2013.
Goals:	1) Increasing intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledge and customary practice; 2) developing partnerships between ranger groups, schools, and local community; 3) improving school attendance and learning.
Approaches:	Partnerships; blended learning; peer-to-peer learning.
Modalities:	Experiential learning (camps, field trips), vocational training, networking (forums).
Impact:	3,273 Indigenous students have participated in LoC activities, 173 Indigenous staff employed, improved school retention.
Success factors:	1) Indigenous ownership and direction; 2) policy commitments and government funding, 3) integration of vocational training and pathways to jobs; 4) commitment to evaluation and learning.

12. Vision Mātauranga



Tukutuku Design:

Poutama, or Stairway to Heaven

Geography:	Aotearoa-New Zealand
Level:	Enabling environment
View of capacity strengthening:	Ensuring the potential of Māori knowledge in science, and innovation is seen as dynamic and something that can be worked on.
Genesis:	An investment policy framework for the science sector implemented in 2005 by the New Zealand government.
Goals:	1) Economic growth through distinctive research and development; 2) environmental sustainability through Māori relationships with land and sea; 3) health and social wellbeing among Māori communities; and 4) Indigenous Knowledge in research, science, and technology.
Approaches:	Partnerships; blended learning; funding; peer-to-peer learning.
Modalities:	Academic programs; experiential learning; networking (doctoral networks).
Impact:	1) Increased acceptance in the science sector of the value of Māori knowledge; 2) increased Māori enrollment in post secondary education.
Success factors:	1) Policy adoption among central government funding agencies; 2) integration of Māori leadership within research institutes, 3) persistence and policy stability.

Taken together, the twelve initiatives highlight the importance of systems thinking in embarking on capacity strengthening.

COLLECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

Exploring the characteristics, successes, and diverse experiences was important to identify insights of wide application. Taken together, the twelve capacity strengthening initiatives (CSIs):

- relate to environmental and natural resource stewardship and management,
- reflect varied origins,
- work at different levels (individual, organization, network, enabling environment),
- use a range of capacity strengthening approaches and delivery methods to meet their goals, and
- help us imagine how CSIs operating at multiple levels are component parts of a dynamic, living system.

Figure 3-1 situates the twelve initiatives by the level their work targets (horizontal) and the extent of leadership by Indigenous Peoples or local communities (IPLCs) in starting the initiative (vertical). External leadership refers to (non-Indigenous or local) people who drive or motivate the launch of the capacity strengthening initiative. In this case, external leadership tended to come from not-for-profit organizations.

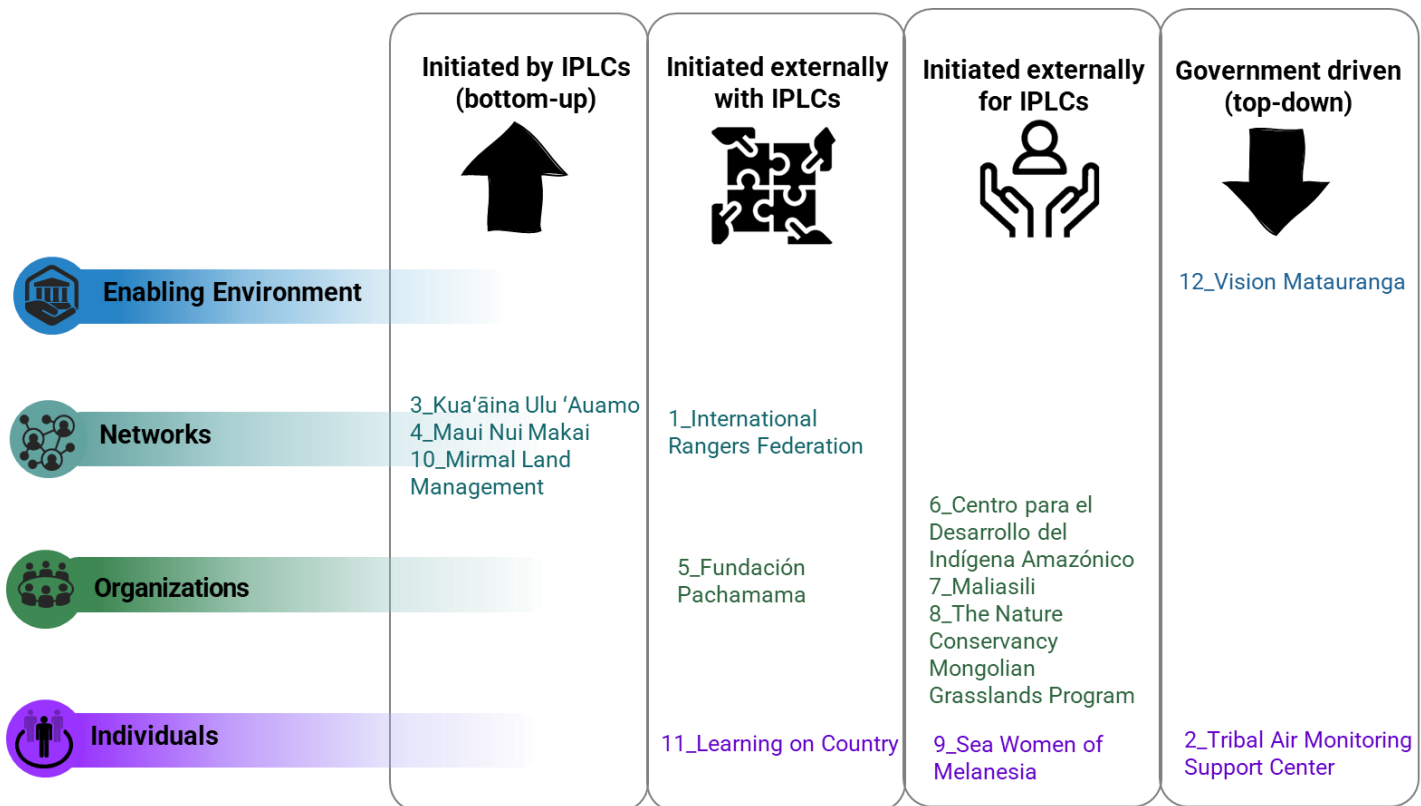


Figure 3-1: Listing of the twelve featured initiatives organized by level of capacity strengthening targeted (horizontally) and their genesis – how they got started (vertically). IPLCs=Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. External means instigated by others, such as a non-governmental organization, entrepreneurs, or the government. Note that this mapping simplifies some nuances. For example, the primary author of Vision Matauranga was a Māori researcher who joined government and championed the policy motivated to counter negative perceptions of Māori. The policy is a top-down, government-driven initiative, but an Indigenous person played an important role in its creation.

Even with this small number of initiatives three observations are noteworthy:

- **Indigenous and native individuals and communities have an affinity for networks.** Within our set of case studies, KUA, MNMN, and Mimal's Strong Women for Health Country network illustrate this point. These CSIs couple experiential learning with peer networking, which the literature suggests to be effective in building conservation capacity (O'Connell and Carter 2022). Beyond those initiatives studied, Indigenous networks are increasingly common – from regional (e.g., British Columbia's [Guardian Gatherings](#)), to national (e.g., the [National Indigenous Guardians Network](#)), to international levels (e.g., the [Clam Garden Network](#) of Canadian and U.S. First Nations and collaborators).
- **National (CEDIA and Fundación Pachamama) and international (TNC, Maliasili) not-for profits take a lead role in supporting organizational capacity of Indigenous and local communities.** Aside from technical strengths of conservation and environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the funding and policy landscape shapes this “intermediary” role. For example, to achieve impact at scale, philanthropic organizations often partner with NGOs who, in turn, work on projects and programs with several communities (MAVA et al. 2022).
- Like practices documented in global studies (see [Appendix B](#)), **peer-to-peer learning and partnerships are the most used capacity strengthening approaches** among the twelve cases, with workshops and training sessions and networking as the most used delivery methods.

Sustainable funding is the chief constraint faced by leading capacity strengthening initiatives and the communities and groups they serve.

COLLECTIVE CONSTRAINTS

The CSIs reviewed are successful in strengthening individuals', communities', organizations', and network capacity, and one set out to add capacity to the enabling environment. Despite their achievements, these CSIs all face constraints limiting their impact. In order of frequency of mention, common constraints include the following:

- **Access to sustainable funding.** Nine of the twelve CSIs expressed constraints related to financial resources, including the need for increased volumes of funding, more flexible funding, or funding with longer time horizons. CSIs in some cases continue to pursue a reliable funding model than can support growth in their reach and provision of capacity strengthening services to match the demand. The lack of mechanisms for Indigenous and local communities and organizations to gain direct access to funding was a constraint raised by CSIs focused on organizational development. International funding flowing through national or sub-national governments is slow to reach local organizations, with risk aversion and the need for efficiencies and economies of scale deterring some funders (e.g., philanthropic organizations) to directly fund local organizations.
- **The broader operating environment.** Structural and systemic constraints hinder CSIs' performance and impact in several ways, with constraints including the high cost of living and underservicing by infrastructure and employment opportunities in remote regions where CSIs operate. These constraints create migration pressures and other socio-demographic conditions, leading to difficulties in retaining individuals and particularly youth within their home communities to work on local conservation initiatives.

Broader national and sub-national cultural contexts can remain divided on recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples, creating opposition to the goals of CSIs, such as extractive development and industrialization patterns that are incompatible with worldviews of communities CSIs serve. Operating in a context of significant historical and ongoing Indigenous disadvantage and disenfranchisement contributes to difficulties with the recruitment and retention of qualified staff.

Finally, climate change exacerbates threats to the health of ecosystems and to the wellbeing of human and wildlife communities, and, by extension, to the sustainability of CSI outcomes. For example, in relation to TNC's Mongolian Grasslands Program, extreme weather events present formidable challenges for Mongolian herders and community-based organizations in maintaining effective operations. Increased frequency or intensity of extreme weather and climate places the continuity and success of the CBO initiative at risk and emphasizes the need for capacity strengthening to adopt a climate resilience lens.

- **Staffing and succession:** Despite CSIs' attention to human resource planning, their operating environment (as described above) can still contribute to staff turnover and staff retention issues, resulting in decreased service reliability. For example, within TAMS, the equipment manager is critical to the program that loans out equipment for air quality monitoring. A vacancy in this role hinders equipment maintenance and loan services. Even when the CSI itself has a talented and stable workforce, recruitment and retention can be a challenge for their local partners (e.g., local conservation organizations competing for talent pools with international NGOs), making good practices in staffing core to capacity strengthening targeting organizations.

Founders of CSIs play an important role in getting these initiatives off the ground and to a scale that achieves impact. Attention to succession planning necessary to ensure these leaders' exit is graceful and undistruptive to operational continuity.

- **Technical constraints:** CSIs relying on equipment, technology, and technical content to successfully operate can face constraints when the amount or quality of these inputs do not meet their needs. For example, TAMS has dealt with supply chain issues to obtain equipment to their air quality monitoring programming. As another example, Maliasili wants to build on African-led sources for their curriculum and training materials as part of their organizational development programming. However, materials in Maliasili's leadership program for local African conservation organizations mainly draw on North American information, with African-led content currently underrepresented in published works.

The snapshots of capacity strengthening initiatives (CSIs) in this chapter illustrates a breadth of forms these ventures can take, including having different origins, working at different levels (individual, organization, network, enabling environment), and using a range of capacity strengthening approaches and delivery methods to meet their goals. At the same time, these leading CSIs face shared constraints that limit the impact of their work. These constraints, including sustainable funding and structural barriers like rural to urban migration, are beyond the ability of any one initiative to address but are for the collective effort of many actors in a system.



Sharamensa community, Ecuadorian Amazon | Photo Credit: Fundación Pachamama

4. CONCLUSIONS

Motivated by the urgency of and ethical responsibility to uplift Indigenous environmental governance, this report set out to identify factors that make capacity strengthening initiatives with Indigenous and local communities, groups, and organizations effective. We identified these factors by studying the experiences of twelve inspiring initiatives from around the world that have lessons to offer as individual cases and as a collective suite of interventions. These initiatives were selected based on the high degree of Indigenous and local community participation, scale, relevance to the Canadian context, novelty, and geographic diversity.

What we learned is that capacity strengthening initiatives (CSIs) supporting conservation and stewardship by Indigenous and local communities are effective because of the values that guide their work, including the primacy of local ownership, and because of their attention to a mix of strategic, operational, and people-focused practices. This report offers insights on ten themes that explain why capacity strengthening initiatives are effective, digging deeper into 27 practices as further guidance and illustration.

In comparing our findings with the literature, we also learned that information on enabling factors for capacity strengthening has been provided and repeated in different ways and in different contexts (see the UN Development Program's 2003 default principles for capacity development) for years. What seems to be lacking is follow through on these strengths-based and respectful ways of working. As reconciliation and localization goals and commitments gain traction and as Indigenous Peoples and local communities claim and reclaim stewardship over their lands and waters, lessons on capacity strengthening principles, approaches, and delivery models, such as those included in this report, can guide advocacy and investments in sustainable self-determination. The urgency to take action to stay within safe planetary boundaries and uphold social justice is too great to keep ignoring lessons on what works.

For international organizations, western collaborators, and funders working to advance conservation goals while being of service to local communities and Indigenous partners, we relay the following advice from the leaders interviewed for this study:

"Respect that there is capacity there."– Interview participant representing an initiative focused on local organizational development.

"There's a lot more capacity there than people acknowledge, but that also doesn't mean that there isn't a need to invest in those institutions."– Interview participant representing an initiative focused on local organizational development.

"Spend more time to engage with people, have the capacity to ensure that you have better communications and can build stronger relationships." – Interview participant representing an initiative focused on local organizational development.

For Indigenous organizations and groups dreaming about new projects or programs, advice from one leader interviewed for this study offers inspiration:

"If you have community support and a vision of what it is that people want. Just start. It sounds really obvious, but there's a tendency to spend a lot of time getting everything right and ready in a lot of projects, and then the momentum or the funding or the landscape changes, and you lose that momentum." – Interview participant representing a network initiative.

For all readers, our hope is that consideration of the insights and wise practices gleaned in this report inspire and contribute to the ongoing dialogue to advance Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship in Canada and elsewhere.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: METHODS

This research involved three phases, as shown in Figure 0-1. The **Foundational Phase** focused on clarifying research needs and priorities and research planning. An initial meeting with Nature United clarified the goal of the project, its objectives, and the key questions guiding the research. The goal of the project was to understand and document leading approaches for capacity strengthening for Indigenous-led natural resource management and stewardship at broader scales in the lands now known as Canada. The intent was to achieve this goal by accomplishing the following project objectives:

- Finding relevant examples of capacity strengthening initiatives across diverse sectors globally, focusing on regions where Indigenous natural resource management is exemplary, to expand ideas of “what is possible”;
- Highlighting the factors that appear to contribute to the effectiveness of these initiatives, as well as the factors that appear to be barriers to effectiveness;
- Summarizing and synthesizing the key lessons learned and share them with individuals and organizations that have an interest or mandate to strengthen capacities for Indigenous-led conservation or natural resource management in Canada.

To advance the above goal and objectives, the project aimed to answer the following question: What factors contribute to the effectiveness of capacity strengthening initiatives with Indigenous communities, groups, and organizations?

In the Foundational Phase we also recruited members of a Strategic Advisory Group,

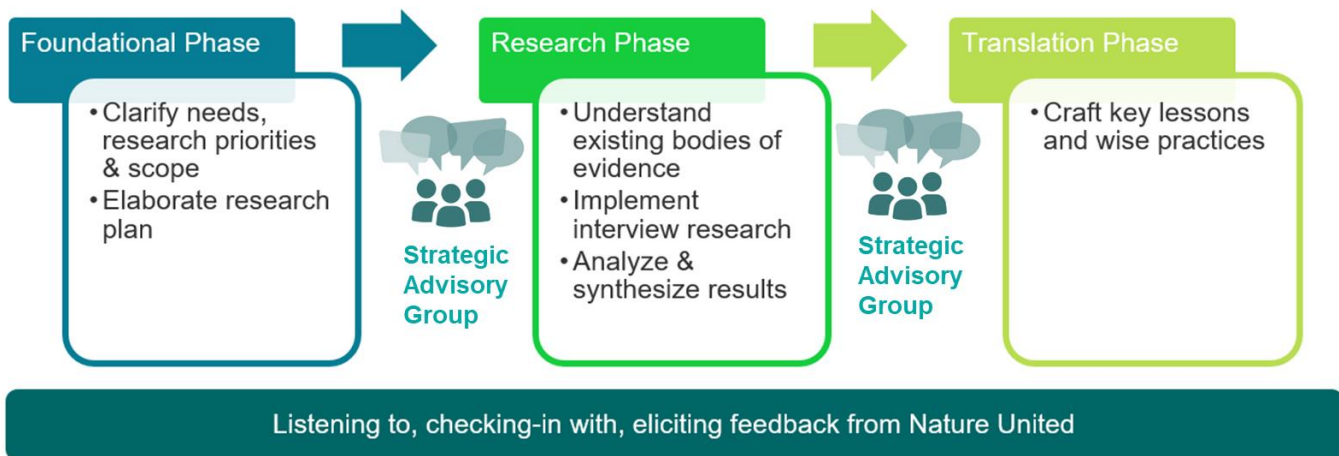


Figure 0-1: Conceptual diagram summarizing the three project phases and steps.

The **Research Phase** took a considered and systematic approach, guided by the insights and wisdom of the Strategic Advisory Group. The research approach was analytically rigorous and exploratory and culturally grounded, anchored to the project’s objectives. The research relied heavily on key informant interviews, supported by the literature, taking this qualitative approach in recognition of complex, context-specific, and a highly dynamic field that capacity strengthening entails. The Research Phase had four main steps:

1. Compiling a longlist of Indigenous-capacity strengthening initiatives (from a global literature base) and characterizing these initiatives based on desk-based information;
2. Developing a shortlist of Indigenous-capacity strengthening initiatives (from a global literature base);
3. Collecting descriptive and evaluative data on each of the shortlisted initiatives via interviews; and

4. Analyzing and synthesizing the collected data, to be communicated in reports. Analysis of interview data involved an iterative approach to thematic coding. We used realist synthesis to identify what works, for who, in what contexts, focused on understanding underlying mechanisms by which an intervention works (or not). We started with theories of change of all capacity strengthening cases interviewed and then develop middle range theory describing clusters of cases. Next, we identified sub questions according to the middle range theory and extracted data from interview transcripts in evidence tables.

The middle range theory focused on identifying codes by capacity strengthening approach, using the following approaches in our exploration:

Approach	Education and skills-building of individuals - ES Organizational development – OD – includes organizations that represent Indigenous communities Network building - N Policy – P
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Below are the initial coding tables resulting from segmenting the cases by capacity strengthening approach:

Theory area 1 ES– attributes of capacity strengthening initiatives (CSIs) supporting education and skill building of individuals

Recognition of rights	Recognition of women’s rights, equity; Recognition of Indigenous rights to manage air quality; Policy recognition of the need to close gaps in life outcomes
Ownership	Community ownership Indigenous driven Indigenous ownership
Legitimate cultural fit	Culturally-appropriate education standards and curricula Inter-generational learning Technology / equipment access and use
Collaboration	Long-term partnerships, Networks

Theory area 2 OD– attributes of CSIs for organizational development

Recognition of collective rights in legal and policy frameworks	Legal and policy framework enabling organizing Recognition of communal pastureland rights (authority to control and manage NR) Rights enshrined in laws Rights recognition
Ownership and control	Indigenous owned Indigenous first Facilitative approach
Long-term perspective	Long-term partnerships; Long-term partnership with TNC
Staff	Employing local facilitators The right complement of staff (interdisciplinary)

Theory area 3 N – attributes of networks for capacity strengthening of individuals and communities

Recognition of rights and roles	Legal recognition (rangers); protection of rights, health and safety; Employment as rangers Recognition of rights and roles for communities in NRM
Embedding culture	Grounding in Hawaiian culture – central to activities
Participatory processes	Co-development
Reciprocity	Mutually-supportive and trusted relationships with IPLCs (rangers) Sweat equity Mutual respect (partners)

Theory area 4 P – attributes of policy change supporting Indigenous science & technology

Earmarked funds	Integration within central government funding
Structures	Structural changes within research organizations
Stability	Policy stability

Because of the small sample size, instead of disaggregating results by capacity strengthening approach we presented cross cutting insights. We supplemented our analysis and synthesis with a review of academic and practitioner literature to compare against and supplement findings from the analysis.

The **Knowledge Translation** phase involved sharing our initial findings with the Strategic Advisory Group and Nature United in separate meetings, which yielded feedback on the findings’ relevance and on the format of final reports. Additionally, this report and the companion Case Study Report benefitted from Nature United’s feedback at different stages in the writing process.

As with any research of this kind, our work met a few **limitations**. The main ones are as follows:

- Availability and responsiveness of interview candidates, despite offering honorarium, extending timelines, and leaning on pre-existing relationships where they existed.
- Limited direct engagement with Indigenous Peoples in communities, about a third of interviewees are Indigenous or representatives of native or local communities. The research covered initiatives across global regions conducting face to face interviews closer to communities was not possible, was cost-prohibitive. In retrospect, we should have leveraged attendance at global conferences during the project timelines to recruit and interview people.
- Two touchpoints with a Strategic Advisory Group composed of three Indigenous women with diverse professional affiliations informed the research design, validated early findings, and steered the reporting format, which was good. But scheduling constraints and desire to not contribute to these experts’ workloads meant we kept engagements short. The final product would have benefitted from more time with the group for deeper reflection and iteration on findings.
- On a substantive note, this research does not explore too deeply whether capacity strengthening efforts result in conservation outcomes. Measurement and evaluation of capacity strengthening outcomes (socio-cultural, ecological, or otherwise) is fertile ground for further research.

Interview questions

1. As you heard in the description, this research is seeking to learn more about different approaches to strengthening capacity as well as enabling conditions for success. Based on your experience with [the initiative], what are the key elements of capacity strengthening?
 - Prompts
 - i. What does capacity strengthening mean and why is it important?
2. Can you describe how [the initiative] started?
 - Prompts
 - i. Where and how was the need for [the initiative] identified? Who identified the need?
 - ii. Are there any particularly important internal or external factors to [the initiative] that made it possible for [the initiative] to get started?
 - iii. To what extent did [the initiative] consider and plan for the potential influence of external (i.e., external to the organization) factors on its effectiveness (E.g., political, social, economic, environmental, and cultural factors and contexts)? How did the initiative account for these external factors in its origins and design?
3. Can you briefly describe the goals/objectives of [the initiative] and how [the initiative] was meant to achieve these goals/objectives?
 - Prompts
 - i. Did the approach to achieving these goals/objectives change over time?
 - ii. How did you decide what the goals and objectives of the initiative would be?
 - iii. How did you decide what approach you would take to achieve the goals and objectives?
 - iv. What groups/populations do you serve and how did you identify that group?
 - v. What was your role in [the initiative]?
 - vi. Where did / does [the initiative] operate? Was it in more than one location?
 - vii. Who and/or what other organizations were involved? How?
 - viii. How long has [the initiative] been operating?
4. Can you describe the core capacity-strengthening activities of your initiative and its results?
 - Prompts
 - i. Was capacity strengthening an explicit focus of [the initiative]? What kinds of capacity did you focus on (e.g., network building, train-the-trainer) and why?
 - ii. What was the overall strategy, explicit or implicit, for strengthening capacities?
 - iii. What core activities were delivered? Which of those were most successful?
 - iv. What were the results of the initiative? E.g., impact on the groups being served?
 - v. How did the initiative consider issues of equity in its planning or operations? For example, differential access or impact on diverse populations?
 - vi. What do you think makes this initiative unique? What is the “secret sauce”?
 - vii. How have you measured/evaluated/tracked the impact of this work?
5. What factors or conditions within your organization contributed to the success of this work?
 - Prompts
 - i. What partnerships or financial commitments were secured? When?
 - ii. What were [the initiative’s] capital and operational costs?
 - iii. What human resources were needed or required for the initiative?
 - iv. How was [the initiative] governed?

- v. What mechanisms or practices were in place to ensure transparency and accountability of [the initiative] with respect to finances, performance, and decision-making?
 - vi. How did [the initiative] adapt to shifts in the broader, external context?
6. What was [the initiative's] approach to working with and including Indigenous peoples and perspectives?
- Prompts
 - i. Was this approach explicit or conscious?
 - ii. Did [the initiative's] approach change over time? How?
 - iii. Did [the initiative] consider the unique histories/beliefs/worldviews of Indigenous peoples? How?
 - iv. To what extent were Indigenous peoples involved in [the initiative]? E.g., genesis, design, implementation, monitoring, etc.
7. How would you describe the relationships between those delivering the initiative and the groups served?
- Prompts
 - i. Could you describe the experience of someone accessing/participating in the initiative?
 - ii. What did the initiative do to build and maintain relationships with the groups they served? With other stakeholders? With other partners?
 - iii. How did these relationships change over the life of the initiative and why?
8. In your opinion, what were the most influential factors or conditions that impacted the effectiveness of [the initiative] for better or worse?
9. What advice would you give others starting or engaged in capacity strengthening initiatives related to Indigenous-led conservation in Canada?
10. Do you think [the initiative] could be duplicated successfully elsewhere?
11. Are there any questions we should have asked?
12. Do you have any final questions for us?

APPENDIX B: CAPACITY STRENGTHENING BASICS

For years, deficit-based approaches led to simplistic solutions that did not serve communities. Today, asset-based approaches are gaining steam.

From Deficits to Assets

Capacity strengthening is historically rooted in a deficit-based perspective. This perspective seeks specific solutions to problems faced by an individual or a community. It assumes that something is wrong with the individual or community and can foster dependency on external supports to overcome the diagnosed problems (University of Memphis 2021).

For example, for decades, a deficit-based perspective drove capacity strengthening targeting Indigenous participation in Canada's forest sector (Stevenson and Perrault 2008). Programs often provided individuals the education, skills, and training needed to participate in forestry and resource extraction, management, and planning. However, the gains in individual skillsets to address short-term challenges of participating in the workforce were insufficient to address the long-term goals of communal forest stewardship (Stevenson and Perrault 2008).

Today, a focus on building on strengths or assets present in individuals, local communities, and their organizations increasingly guides capacity strengthening initiatives (Ahmed 2004, Morley 2015, Calliou 2015). Instead of "fixing", pointing to what is wrong, diagnosing and labelling specific problems, this shift in mindset means working to facilitate, pointing to what is good, and pursuing opportunities to enhance strengths (Hammond and Zimmerman 2012). An asset focus prompts practitioners to understand essential factors contributing to resilient communities, including the wider enabling environment in which they function. This understanding highlights the need to tackle capacity strengthening from multiple perspectives (Bolger 2008, IUCN and WCPA 2015, Porzecanski et al. 2022).

Capacity is present in people, communities, organizations, and within society. Before deciding how to strengthen capacity, practitioners must ask: whose capacity? capacity for what?

Framework for Capacity Strengthening

Figure 0-2 is a generalized framework to help put capacity strengthening initiatives (CSIs) into context. By illustrating the levels and dimensions of CSIs, the framework guides us to answer two questions: whose capacity? and capacity for what?

- **Levels:** levels are the objects or targets of capacity strengthening, recognizing that capacity is present at different levels of human action, from the individual community, network / sector, to the wider enabling environment ("the who").
- **Dimensions:** dimensions are the subjects of capacity strengthening, ranging from individual skills to community governance capacity to institutional capacity for policy implementation ("the what").

By design, the framework centres on human capacity. At the same time, our capacity and perspectives shape our relationships to nature (Adams et al. 2022). Interactions with nature differ across capacity levels, influencing how nature is included in decision-making. For example:

- Individuals connect to nature through experiences and activities in specific places, for personal enjoyment, for employment, or for both. Individual's capacity to protect these places and to continue to access nature's benefits is relevant is important.

- Organizations and communities protect the interests and preferences of their members, including uses of nature. Among other competencies, capacity among these organizations and communities to balance conflicts across the specific wishes of their members is important.
- Networks or sectors operate at a scale where capacity for coordination and pooling resources toward shared goals makes sense.
- Enabling environments, like legal and policy frameworks, are far removed from personal contexts and specific places, instead reflecting the prevailing norms, worldviews, and values across a large group of people. Capacity to create the conditions for good outcomes at lower levels where connection to nature is more direct is useful.

Workshops and training sessions are a popular choice in capacity strengthening initiatives, although approaches and delivery methods are wide ranging.

Capacity Strengthening Approaches

Several approaches and delivery methods exist to support capacity strengthening at different levels. Table 0-1 and Table 0-2 list common approaches and delivery methods supporting conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. These lists illustrate the range of options to consider when designing capacity strengthening initiatives. Robust evidence on the effectiveness of CSIs supporting conservation outcomes is lacking (Sterling et al. 2022). However, the tables below show the approaches and delivery methods that practitioners perceive to be most effective, based on a global study (UNEP-WMC. Nd). Training is the most used delivery method for capacity strengthening for conservation

Capacity-strengthening **approaches** provide the direction to plan specific interventions, which use one or more **delivery methods** to achieve agreed-upon goals (UNEP and WMD nd).

(Sterling et al. 2022, UNEP-WMC. Nd).

Perspectives on capacity strengthening are shifting, from a focus on individual and community capacity deficits that need fixing to a focus on facilitating a process for self-enhancement of strengths. Since capacities are present at multiple, interacting levels, being clear on the level and dimension of capacity to target is important. Once clear, design of capacity strengthening initiatives follows, with a range of approaches and delivery methods to consider.

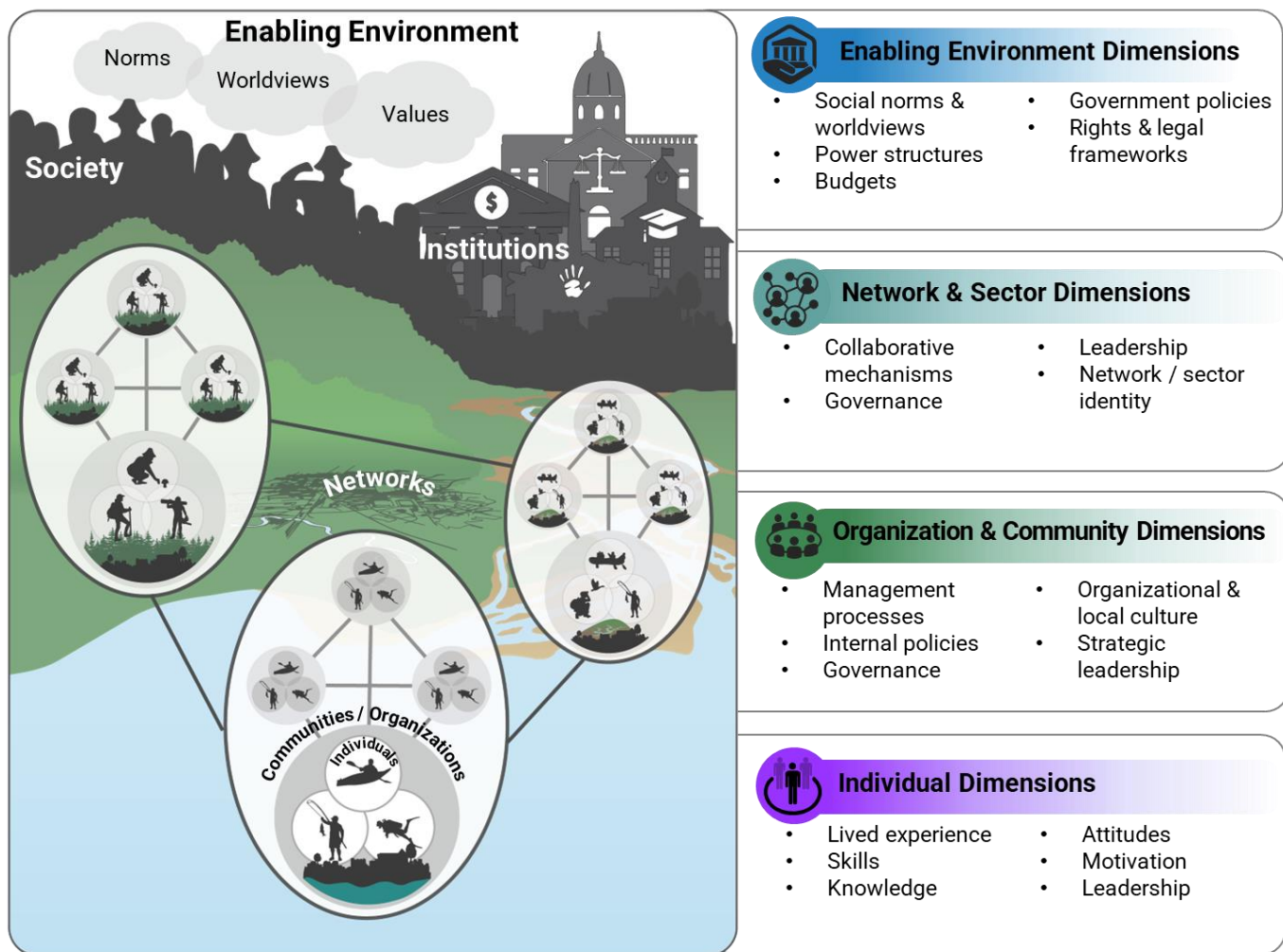


Figure 0-2: Capacity is present at multiple levels of human action (left side of the panel), which interact in multiple ways. Different dimensions of capacity (right side of the panel) are important at each level. The combination of levels and dimensions of interest shape the selection of capacity strengthening approaches and delivery models to pursue (Source: Authors' own creation based on Porzecanski et al. 2022).

Table 0-1: Capacity-strengthening approaches commonly used in support of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Based on a survey completed by parties to the UN Convention on Biodiversity, IPLCs, and other organizations in 2018, approaches shaded in light blue are perceived as most effective in achieving desired outcomes (Adapted from: UNEP-WMC. Nd, available [here](#)).

Name	Description	Strengths / challenges
Approaches		
Train-the-trainers	Strategic targeting of trainers who then train others and maximize the reach and impact of the initiative.	After the initial training the process can be self sustaining, although “refresher” updates are often necessary.
Peer-to-peer learning	Flexible approach to harness the power of peer relationships and exchange to maximize the relevance and acceptance of content and processes.	Potential to discuss and address actual challenges or opportunities with peers in similar situations. The proliferation of communities of practice increases the risk of duplication.
Regional hubs and centres of expertise	Institutions or organizations acting as focal points for specialized knowledge, resources, or activities within a particular geographic region.	An approach that has worked well through bilateral or multilateral cooperation agreements on a range of issues. Can play a role in aggregating demand for and catalyzing capacity strengthening efforts.
Participatory approaches	Design and implementation of a series of activities with selected communities, within a defined timeframe, clear goals, roles, and responsibilities.	High potential for community ownership and empowerment to achieve intended outcomes. Use of participatory approaches can be narrow (e.g., limited to assessment) or comprehensive, which needs to be clear from the outset.
Building relationships and long-term partnerships	Partnerships between institutions with the goal of strengthening capacities of one of them (e.g., twinning) or mutually enhancing capacities. Associated with coaching and mentoring.	Usually based on long-term cooperation. A regional focus enhances relevance, although cross-cutting themes can also be addressed.
Land / sea-based learning	An educational approach that incorporates the land, environment, and outdoor spaces as integral to the learning process.	Increasingly used in Indigenous education to promote cultural revitalization, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and livelihood opportunities for those doing the teaching.
Blended learning	The combination of different delivery methods to maximize impact. Typically programming that includes face-to-face workshops and e-learning modules.	Potential for rapid roll-out to large groups. The combination of delivery methods must be mutually reinforcing, requiring skillful design. Delivering of e-learning brings technological challenges.
Technical assistance	A specific scope of work usually delivered through a project (e.g., development and testing of a decision support tool for use by protected areas managers).	More effective when tailored to the specific context, which is not always the case if relying on external consultants.
Equipment and lab services	Loaned or subsidized access to technical equipment and lab services, often to perform environmental monitoring.	Reduces barriers to data collection, analysis, and use in decision-making. Reduces the need for each community to buy and maintain equipment and have lab services.
Direct aid	Financial, material, or other forms of assistance provided directly to individuals, families, or communities to address immediate, basic needs.	Recognizes the limits of capacity strengthening in the absence of basic needs being met. This is not a long-term approach.

Table 0-2: Capacity-strengthening delivery methods commonly used in support of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, Based on a survey completed by parties to the UN Convention on Biodiversity, IPLCs, and other organizations in 2018, delivery methods shaded in light blue are perceived as most effective in achieving desired outcomes (Adapted from: UNEP-WMC. Nd, available [here](#)).

Name	Description	Strengths / challenges
Delivery methods		
Experiential learning	A learning approach that emphasizes hands-on experience, reflection, and active engagement in real or simulated environments (e.g., culture camps, study visits, fellowships).	Experiential learning that includes collaboration with peers that find themselves in similar situations is valuable. Implementation of this modality can be costly.
Workshops and training sessions	A gathering for selected groups of people to learn or improve skills on specific topics. A popular delivery method, often used in combination with others (e.g., guidance documents).	Face-to-face workshops promote peer exchange and are ideal for contexts where remote participation is unfeasible. They can be expensive to deliver, and one-off trainings may not lead to durable results.
Academic programs	Degrees, graduate or post-graduate courses, specialized diplomas.	Suitable when learning goals are complex, multifaceted, and require time to be achieved. Delivery by individuals with practical experience in the subject matter is helpful, as is incorporating peer-to-peer learning.
Professional and peer networking	Event-based opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing among groups with similar identities or affinities (e.g., community gatherings, professional forums, communities of practice).	Foster relationships among groups with similar interests, providing the basis for peer-to-peer learning. Catalyzes working trusted, relationships, which are critical to the sustainability of capacity strengthening.
Online tools, toolkits, and practice guides	Web-based promotion and dissemination of knowledge and expertise available, including distinct products and exchange enabled through web portals and online forums.	An efficient way to increase access to data, information, and knowledge to many, free of cost in many cases. The proliferation of online platforms and web-accessible knowledge products can be overwhelming, presenting barriers to uptake. Technological constraints can limit use.
Coaching	A personalized process between a coach and client that helps individuals or groups achieve specific goals through self-discovery and reflection.	The tailored support can increase self-awareness and help individuals take ownership of their own development. Coaches can introduce their own biases into the process, so cultural competency is critical.
Vocational education and training	Learning that focuses on gaining knowledge and skills required in specific occupations (e.g., rangers) or in the workplace more broadly	It plays an increasing role in adult retraining and upskilling, in alignment with labor market needs. A downside are challenges related to recognition of these programs compared to academic credentials.
Help-desk support	A department or person that provides targeted assistance and information in real time.	Help desks can be human resource intensive as a team of specialists versed in different aspects of the topic of interest and adept at navigating cultural contexts. They may suffer from underuse if they lack local / regional contacts.

