SCAPES
GOVERNANCE ASSESSMENT TOOL

KANGCHENJUNGA CONSERVATION AREA, NEPAL, 2014: This man knows the value of natural resource management in fostering local governance for conservation and other development objectives. Community forest user groups helped Nepal weather civil conflict, and now are raising incomes and helping people adapt to climate change. Photo by Matthew Erdman for USAID

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To bear fruit over the long term, conservation efforts rely on good governance. If governance systems fail to enforce compliance with rules and regulations, some individuals and groups will exploit opportunities for personal gain to the detriment of the larger community.

This concern animated the design of the Sustainable Conservation Approaches in Priority Ecosystems (SCAPES) project — USAID's largest global conservation initiative to date — which included nine transboundary landscape-scale projects in 19 countries.

SCAPES's scope and ambition made it possible, and to some degree necessary, to develop a user's guide to improve natural resource governance. The end result was USAID's *Guidelines for Assessing the Strengths and Weaknesses of Natural Resource Governance in Landscapes and Seascapes.*

The guide, tested in three of the SCAPES landscapes (the Ustyurt Plateau, the Kilimanjaro landscape and the Greater Madidi-Tambopata landscape), helps practitioners — from governments to civil society groups — to identify key groups that govern access to and use of natural resources in a given landscape, and to assess those groups' strengths and weaknesses. That knowledge then allows practitioners to propose more efficient and sustainable conservation measures within the landscape.

The guide requires that a user first gather a handful of local experts in a focus group. The guide then provides a four-step process through which a facilitator can bring to light the local power dynamics. That process begins with identifying and mapping key "governance groups" (i.e., authorities that have jurisdiction over different spaces and natural resources within the landscape) and ranking them in terms of influence. Then the group discusses good governance from a local perspective and standardizes the strengths and weaknesses of governance groups, including assessing them in terms of three vital attributes: authority, capacity and power.

Throughout, the guide provides important definitions and conceptual distinctions to keep the discussion focused, as well as a facilitator checklist for each step, so that time is well spent and essential questions are asked. The guide provides clear directions for the facilitator, such as the proper use of maps, when to assign note takers, and how to revive stalled conversation.

KEY ATTRIBUTES OF EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

AUTHORITY is the perception of natural resource users and rights holders that a governance group genuinely represents their interests and has legal or customary jurisdiction to govern "their" natural resources.

CAPACITY refers to the knowledge and skills to decide what to do and the resources to implement those decisions.

POWER is the ability of a governance group to exert their authority and to do so without being regularly or repeatedly undermined by other more powerful groups.

Once the focus group is completed and the user has gathered information from additional sources, such as interviews with key informants and personal observations, the guide helps the user to analyze the results. This includes writing a narrative document, numerically ranking governance groups along specific criteria, and using radar or spider diagrams to present them visually. Finally, the guide helps the user to develop action plans, such as updating landscape conceptual models and building out results chains that indicate how new actions will lead to improved governance.

The guide offers a simple, low-cost and replicable means of analyzing the three core attributes of governance — authority, capacity and power — and is intended to be practical, flexible and straightforward. It is designed for use at multiple scales and its utility is not, in fact, limited to conservation projects, but may be used to strengthen governance in any situation. Like any new tool, it is expected to evolve over time as practitioners learn and adapt to new situations. To encourage such learning, users may access an online forum and contribute their own insights.

For more information, see:
Guidelines for Assessing the Strengths and Weaknesses of Natural Resources Governance in Landscapes and Seascapes: http://rmportal.net/library/frame/PDF/SCAPES-NR-GOVERNANCE-GUIDE-JUNE2013.pdf?set_language=es