

# AMALIMA LOKO BRIEF

## COMMUNITY VISIONING

Amalima Loko’s Community Visioning (CV) approach forms the foundation of the program’s people-centered efforts to enhance inclusive local ownership over food security, resilience planning, and sustainable development. Rather than following a top-down approach where development priorities are set by government or external development actors, CV empowers citizens to set the course for their communities by defining their own needs and goals and using their clear development vision to advocate for resources and support. Combining consortium partner ORAP’s locally proven community mobilization methodologies with global best practices from Mercy Corps’ CATALYZE approach, the process serves as the entry-point to intensive engagement with each of the 618 villages of the program area. Guided by exercises from the program-developed CV toolkit, the approach brings together, through a locally-led inclusive selection process, a representative group of community members, civil society, and government and traditional leaders, to define each community’s unique resources, assets, challenges, and priorities and create a roadmap, known as a Village Action Plan, to achieve their development goals. To date, Amalima Loko has guided over 32,000 participants through the process, leading to the development of 618 Village Action Plans. Rural District Councils (RDCs) then use these plans to inform the development of Ward Transformation Plans which define the direction of development action in the program wards for years to come. To date, community leaders have produced 95 Ward Transformation Plans. In addition to local development planning implications, Amalima Loko is using the learning from Community Visioning to reshape its program strategy.



Photo: Amalima Loko project staff.

### A tool for programmatic decision-making

When communities highlighted severe water shortages and great distances to access boreholes, Amalima Loko worked with BHA to increase emphasis on drilling and rehabbing boreholes under the program, bringing the target from 150 to 500.

This participatory, collaborative, and iterative process occurs in three phases:



# 1 PREPARATION & PLANNING STAGE

Amalima Loko begins the Community Visioning (CV) process by conducting introduction meetings at village- and ward-level in the target communities. These initial meetings build understanding and consensus of the CV process with community leadership, present the benefits of CV, and discuss the mobilization strategy and logistics. Key community stakeholders are afforded an opportunity to offer suggestions and feedback to refine the process based on their more intimate knowledge of their communities. Once the process is defined, engagement with the wider community begins, where the main goal is to build relationships, establish trust, and foster a sense of ownership and enthusiasm for the process among the community. Amalima Loko promotes the following principles of effective community engagement: 1) know the community, 2) work with local leaders, 3) ensure regular and clear communication, 4) develop strong facilitation skills, and 5) find ways to motivate communities.

**To date, 32,311** diverse citizens (community members, local leadership, and government stakeholders) participated in Community Visioning activities at village and ward level.

- **60%** of participants were female (19,552)
- **25%** of participants were youth under the age of 35 (8,139)
- **645** of participants identify as persons with disabilities

By design, Community Visioning should engage the entire community but the Covid-19 context at the program onset obliged the team to pivot strategy and establish a methodology whereby all voices could be represented even while participant numbers were limited. Amalima Loko worked closely with each community to define socio-economic groups and carefully conduct a participant selection process that ensures inclusion and representative participation. Groups typically include crop and livestock farmers, women, youth, different economic groups, social clubs, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Ensuring these groups equal participation in the CV process builds their social capital and can increase their sense of common purpose within their communities. In addition to community members, traditional and elected leaders (including chiefs and headmen, Ward Councilors, various ministries, government extension officers, veterinary services, ZIMPARKS, and RDC and DDC representatives) participate in and observe the CV process. This collaboration is an important part of building trust and consensus.

## Amplifying marginalized voices

Amalima Loko consistently emphasizes the importance of voice and representation of all social groups (Lead Farmers, paravets, village health workers, traditional leaders, tradespeople, women, youth, and people with disabilities) in the CV process. Training and sensitization of traditional and community leaders builds understanding of how diverse participation in the situational analysis and action planning is a foundational aspect of inclusive community engagement and necessary to support collective action and buy-in. Bringing diverse perspectives to the table ensures an inclusive planning process and action plan.

The program also promotes intentional opportunities for intergenerational dialogue to tackle harmful social norms hindering the meaningful involvement of youth in the community development process and intentionally engages older women, who are grandmothers and mothers-in-law, to participate as key influencers within the household. When youth participation was not adequate, Amalima Loko mobilized youth more intentionally in close collaboration with Ministry of Youth officials, marketing to them through sports teams and social groups that tend to attract young people. The program also leveraged youth volunteers from the USAID-funded DREAMS project in Nkayi and Lupane to encourage youth networks to actively participate in CV sessions. Youth participation is critical to the CV process given the rich insight they can offer on trends like mobility, migration, and employment.

Even when social groups are well-represented, a common challenge is reluctance from women, youth, and other marginalized groups to vocalize their needs and concerns. A key strategy to mitigate this is convening these populations separately to develop relationships and identify common priorities away from the broader group.

## Situational Analysis and Vulnerability Ranking

Once communities agree to the CV process and commit to active participation, the preparation process can begin. The first step of the CV process demands that communities coalesce a common understanding of the village’s history, resources, challenges, and hopes for the future. To achieve this, communities undergo a series of meetings with exercises leading to the development of a **Village Profile**, which distills their assessment of the social, economic, and natural resources in their community to identify assets and areas for improvement. Hard copies of the Village Profiles with plans, maps, historical timelines, and other materials are owned by the Village Head and Village Secretary. This important and introspective step leads to a deeper understanding of the community, reflects core community values, and identifies emerging trends and issues. The Village Profiles serve as a recorded outline of physical, social, and historical community dynamics while also providing a basis for measuring development progress. In addition to the concrete outcomes of undergoing this analysis, participants gain skills in governance, planning, coordination, social inclusion, and conflict management.

Each Village Profile includes the following information:

- History of the community
- Major challenges, current and historical (and how community overcame them in the past)
- Main livelihoods or sources of income
- Resources (natural, physical, human, social, and financial)
- Existing socio-economic infrastructure (e.g., schools, clinics, boreholes, etc.)
- Any ongoing projects
- Active and inactive community organizations
- Relationships with local government
- Any existing development plans within the community and/or the local government
- Photos and documentation of any assessments done prior to creating the profile

A Community Visioning toolkit developed by the program guides this situational analysis and vulnerability ranking. The tools were all carefully assessed by Amalima Loko’s resilience and gender and social inclusion specialists to ensure they are risk-informed and employ a social inclusion lens to effectively draw out resilience factors and social dynamics. The tools take participants through a series of participatory exercises to construct the analysis and ranking.

Community Visioning Toolkit	
<b>Historical timeline</b>	
<p>Amalima Loko facilitates a semi-structured group discussion to solicit information on historical events in the community. These are then organized into a historical timeline that typically begins with the founding of the community and attempts to identify all the landmark dates that had significant impact on people’s lives.</p> <p>Creating historical profiles can assist communities to identify patterns over time and draw out their development priorities. Usually, this tool is applied with groups that include diverse community members, always with elderly people and those who are the historical custodians in that community. An important aspect of this activity is the insight it offers into resilience strategies developed during previous crises and hardships.</p>	
<b>Community Resource Map</b>	
<p>The community resource map helps understand the available resources within the village. Rather than developing an accurate map, the primary objective of this exercise is to uncover how community resources</p>	

are perceived by different groups. The process uncovers resource challenges within the community and how these affect different populations by highlighting differences in access to, allocation of, utilization of, and management of resources. Visually demonstrating priorities and perceived resources and resource needs in a community offers valuable insight on the most effective ways of engaging the community.

### Socio-economic Map

This tool asks participants to collaborate to draw a map showing the village's social structures and institutions. Institutions and service providers identified in the exercise can include schools, churches, sports teams, fishing or farming cooperatives, women's groups, youth groups, businesses such as inputs distributors, markets, NGOs, government offices, and a range of other entities.

Through the exercise a clear picture evolves as to what degree community needs are met by local service providers, what gaps exist, and what institutions may need capacity strengthening. Ultimately, the tool will help to improve the standards, delivery, and quality of service to the target community and provide insight on the perceptions of service provision within communities.

### Seasonal Calendar

Facilitators work in groups to produce a livestock and a crop calendar by asking participants for details on how things change throughout the year. For example, when do diseases strike; when are people labouring in the fields; when do people commonly migrate for work; what are the income patterns at different points of the year? The information is then visualized into two diagrams depicting the changes across the seasons. These calendars are a foundational planning tool for Amalima Loko to understand the best windows of opportunity for development interventions and as communities think through the prioritization of their development plans. They offer an important assessment of food security, agriculture, and health in the community.

### Vulnerability Ranking

The vulnerability matrix identifies potential hazards, vulnerable livelihood resources, and the coping strategies used by the community. While much of this information comes out of the previous tools, the exercise enables the community to collectively identify and delve more deeply into understanding their most significant vulnerabilities and existing capacities and gaps.

Participants work in their socio-economic groups and outline what they believe to be the community's most important livelihood resources. These lists are then categorized by the entire group by:

- **Natural resources** the community relies on for food, income, and livelihoods (e.g., forests, water, soils, minerals)
- **Key physical, man-made infrastructure** community development outcomes (e.g., roads, clinics, schools, boreholes)
- **Most important sources of income (financial resources)** (e.g., from the sale of livestock, crops, remittances, labor)
- **Most important skills or knowledge** for livelihoods in this area (e.g., fishing, woodcarving)
- **Key social resources/institutions**, both formal and informal, for community well-being (churches, burial societies, VS&L groups)

From the complete list, participants identify three main hazards (shocks and stresses) that threaten these resources and use dot voting to assess the degree of impact of each. The exercise concludes with a facilitated discussion to understand how these risks affect socio-economic groups differently and outline known coping strategies.

Once complete, Village Profiles are shared with the wider community for further discussion and validation. The Profiles then serve as a launching off point for communities to agree on development priorities that are aspirational yet achievable, beginning at the individual level and filtering up to the community level. These goals are then articulated into a **Vision Statement**.

### Key findings from Community Visioning planning stage to date

- **Four major shocks** identified as priorities to address: drought and water scarcity, livestock diseases, crop pests and diseases, and human wildlife conflict.
- Most Vision Statements revolve around *food security, access to clean water, improved incomes, vocational skills, and better livestock breeds.*
- **Priorities** expressed by communities in the action plans include increased water access to enable productive agriculture, improved health and nutrition and sanitation coverage, skills development in different livelihoods, and the conservation of natural resources—all vital to sustainable food and nutrition security.
- Identified **activities** included: dam construction, borehole drilling, dip tanks to address tick borne diseases, and irrigation schemes to enhance food availability.

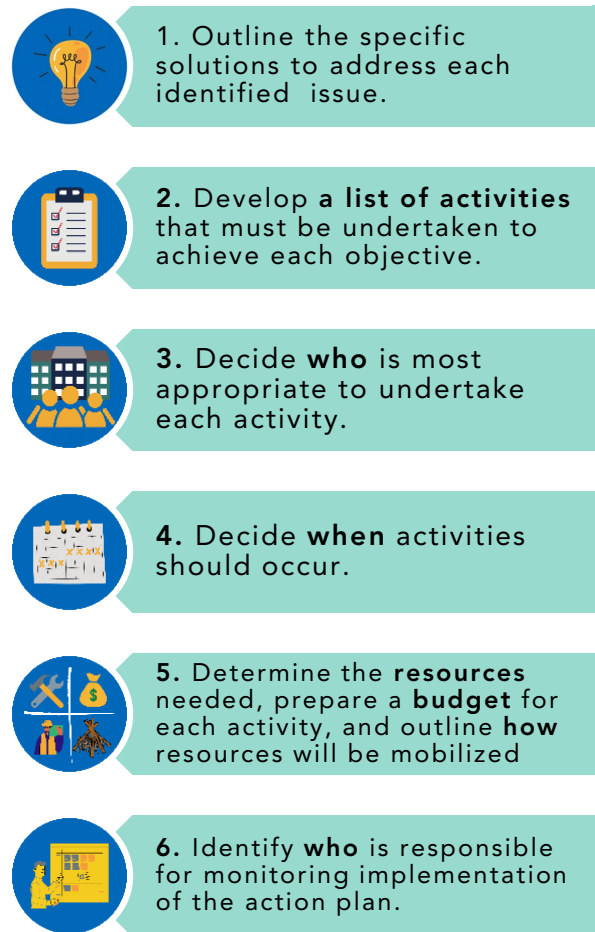
## Village Action Planning Meetings

Using the products from the assessment process, communities develop a comprehensive “road map” called a **Village Action Plan** which conveys the path to achieving their vision and objectives with specific steps. This marks a critical stage in the Community Visioning process where communities move from identifying needs, challenges, strengths, and capacities to defining concrete plans for their development.

Communities first think through potential solutions to the prioritized list of challenges they face. The goal is for community members to develop a common perception of a given issue and brainstorm concrete steps or actions for achieving the vision they have crafted together for their shared future. This collaborative problem-solving exercise is an important step in building consensus and local ownership over proposed interventions and solutions. Each socio-economic group has a role in defining the community’s goals and potential solutions, so the needs of marginalized groups are reflected in their plans.

Amalima Loko guides communities to develop their Action Plans with careful consideration of the factors and steps outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Village action planning process



## Ward Planning Meetings

### Interlocking planning approaches

Amalima Loko simultaneously works with community members, formed into Watershed Cluster Steering Committees, to map, identify, and prioritize the critical needs of the local watersheds. These priorities are considered in conjunction with the needs and actions laid out in the Village Action Plans and inform Ward Transformation Plans.

Prioritized actions can include hard infrastructure like boreholes and irrigation schemes or conservation efforts like erosion control measures.

Amalima Loko seizes the opportunity of the ward-level planning process to bring village representatives from the CV and watershed processes to present and seek to integrate their Village Action Plans and Watershed Cluster Plans into ward-level development plans referred to as **Ward Transformation Plans**. Ward planning meetings include local leadership and government stakeholders such as councillors, village heads, chiefs, headmen, religious leaders, ministry officials, and Rural District Council and District Development Coordinator representatives. The Ward Transformation Plans identify, prioritize, and set the course of development actions for the ward for the coming five to ten-year period.

## COMMUNITY VISIONING AS A TOOL FOR PROGRAM REFINEMENT

Community Visioning complements BHA's Refine and Implement approach to program refinement. The process provides a key avenue for capturing rich contextual detail including priority needs of each community to guide the program's implementation plans. Below are some findings that informed major programmatic shifts:

- Community members revealed a lack of trust in grain banks due to perceived favoritism and a lack of transparency. There were no known grain banks in the program area. Based on this learning, Amalima Loko opted to drop grain banks as a viable communal safety net. Instead, the program shifted focus towards enabling Traditional Leaders to better facilitate community members' access to available formal safety nets from government and NGOs by enhancing their understanding of available programs and supporting government and non-governmental service providers in effectively marketing the available safety nets to communities.
- While Village savings and loans (VS&L) groups are common throughout the project area their social funds are exclusive to contributing members. With this new understanding of VS&Ls, Amalima Loko removed them as a community safety net strategy and instead approached VS&Ls as an access to finance vehicle.
- Target communities identified water scarcity as a major challenge, expressing an urgent need for improved water access in their rural communities. Amalima Loko found strong opportunities for boreholes to have significant community impact if properly installed and managed. This information motivated the program to increase the target for borehole drilling and rehabilitation from 150 to 500.
- Communities called out Human Wildlife Conflict as a major shock more prevalently than anticipated (which was supported by findings from several R&I studies). This led the program to prioritize piloting and scaling up innovative approaches to address it. In Year 2 the program completed a chili strings pilot to deter elephants from cultivated areas which has since been scaled up throughout Amalima Loko communities impacted by elephants.
- Widespread participation in the government-led *Intwasa* program promoting Conservation Agriculture throughout target communities became evident through CV. This led to a major shift away from several activities that had planned to focus on promoting CA as they would duplicate or be overshadowed by these government efforts. Instead, Amalima Loko is working with the *Intwasa* Lead Farmers to offer complementary training in other areas such as water harvesting and soil and moisture conservation, and to fill any gaps not covered by *Intwasa*.

## 2 COMMUNITY ACTION STAGE

As CV progresses from planning to implementation, Amalima Loko equips local stakeholders and community members with extensive skills in leadership, resource mobilization, advocacy, and monitoring.

Rural District Councils (RDCs) use the final Ward Transformation Plans to coordinate implementation of development activities throughout the ward. The village representative at the Ward Planning Meetings shares the details of the selected ward priorities with their village. Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) then work with Community Action Groups (CAGs) such as VS&Ls, Care Groups, Community Health Clubs, Male Champions Groups, youth groups, and Asset Management Committees to plan and implement activities outlined in their Village Action Plans. Amalima Loko also revives VIDCOs and WADCOs as functional coordinating bodies and empowers them and CAGs to serve as stewards ensuring village and ward plans are implemented and monitored.

Amalima Loko supports government stakeholders and traditional leadership in engaging with CAGs to conduct community- and household-level interventions using the community's and households' own assets and capacities, which empowers groups, builds confidence, and strengthens social cohesion. Amalima Loko also trains community leaders and volunteers in leadership, monitoring, accountability, conflict resolution, and team management.

### COMMUNITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

- **618** Village Action Plans developed.
- Ward Transformation Plans covering all **95** program wards submitted to RDCs.
- **40,321** community members from **347** villages participated in collective actions towards implementing their Village Action Plans and Ward Transformation Plans, often self-led with no programmatic support, through partnerships with private sector, government, and NGOs.
- Held **four** Amalima Days—community-led celebrations to recognize and offer support to volunteers and groups, to strengthen government service providers' awareness of these groups, and to celebrate progress to date with the CV process.

The Community Visioning process empowered us to realize that we have the innate capacity to drive our own development. It is our first time to go through such a process. We can now proudly talk about the projects we initiated and concluded on our own without external support.

— Village Head, Kariangwe, Binga

Amalima Loko has triggered self-belief, we are self-reliant now. We are building this dip tank with resources we are mobilizing from our children in the diaspora. Contributions are coming from as far as the Cayman Islands, Canada, and several countries around Southern Africa.

— Vova Dip Tank Chairperson, Nkayi

Consulting community members is a constitutional requirement which builds mutual respect, shared principles, and shared aspirations that stakeholders should collaboratively work towards.

— District Development Committee, Binga

Amalima Loko provides direct funding and technical advisory support for the highest-priority projects identified in Ward Transformation Plans within the program's scope such as water management, land use, income generation, and nutrition and health work. To date, Amalima Loko has directly supported 193 communities with prioritized actions including drilling and rehabilitating boreholes, and through soil conservation on gullies that were impacting schools, health facilities, and grazing lands.

Already the organized efforts of Amalima Loko communities are paying off, as governmental and non-governmental service providers have acted on elements of some of the developed plans. Communities themselves are also assessing their resources from sources like remittances and sales of in-kind contributions to start implementation of the work outlined by their community plans. Through participation in the CV process and the development of the Ward Transformation Plans, local government representatives are more aware of community priorities and have committed to using the plans to inform prioritization during their annual budgeting process.

## WARD TRANSFORMATION PLANS: AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

**RDCs** are using Ward Transformation Plans to align resource allocations with community priorities. Examples include:

- Nkayi RDC allocated resources for rehabilitation of the Nkone dam, which breached during the last rainy season and is silting up.
- Lupane RDC seconded council engineers to support the rehabilitation of the damaged Ndimimbili dam.
- Binga RDC assigned technical oversight, builders, and materials for construction of new classroom blocks at Chilamba and Sinansengwe primary schools. The Binga Department of Veterinary Services provided materials to fence a dip tank in Mulindi village.

**Communities** are also using Ward Transformation Plans to mobilize and advocate for resources from NGOs, government, and private sector actors for capital intensive activities. For example:

- In Tsholotsho, community members are contributing funds towards the construction of boreholes and engaged surveyors to site them.
- In Binga, villages are working with service providers to install solar pumps for boreholes and construct schools.
- CAGs in Lupane held a soccer and netball tournament to raise funds supplementing household contributions to finish construction of a classroom block.

These efforts combined with collective actions have resulted in:

- Classroom blocks constructed in **88** villages.
- **57** soil erosion control activities, such as gully reclamation.
- **55** rehabilitated dams.
- **42** rehabilitated village-level access roads.
- Clinic construction initiated in **34** villages to reduce distances to the nearest health center.

Amalima Loko's capacity building efforts have also empowered Traditional Leaders and CAGs to finance priority activities by exploring innovative funding streams, such as external support from NGOs or remittances and donations from the diaspora community. Villages in Hwange have been particularly successful in raising external support for community-initiated activities from NGOs, and Tsholotsho has



shown that diaspora remittances and donations can be used to develop and sustain communal assets. Collective action activities in Lupane and Nkayi were initially implemented using locally mobilized resources but have since begun receiving financial support and material donations from NGOs and community members in the diaspora. Examples include:

- In Bhatanani and Chewumba villages in Hwange, the Japfter NGO and Impilo Foundation drilled and solarized three boreholes for community-initiated communal gardens.
- In Tinde village in Binga, the Baswilizi Trust rehabilitated an existing communal garden.
- In Sihlangene and Hlalakahle in Tsholotsho, Imvelo Safaris drilled two boreholes.
- In Nkayi, communities started constructing classroom blocks at Gonye Secondary School using local resources and secured a donation of 10,000 bricks from UNICEF.
- In Vova ward in Nkayi, communities used diaspora contributions to construct a dip tank.
- In Tsheli in Nkayi, community members used diaspora contributions to construct a clinic to make primary health services accessible instead of walking 15km to the nearest health center.

Amalima Loko also supports online discussion platforms and accountability mechanisms between community leadership and community members to strengthen diaspora partnerships aimed at funding high-cost activities.

As the program launches into Year 4, Amalima Loko continues to monitor, coach, mentor, and support local actors in achieving their goals and holding each other accountable.

## 3 SUSTAINING STAGE

Community Visioning is, at its core, a sustainability mechanism. Empowering communities with the necessary tools and skills to collectively and inclusively define, plan, implement, and monitor their own development trajectory inherently promotes local buy-in and ownership. However, with so much momentum created through the initial process, it is key to foster sustained community and local stakeholder motivation to ensure forward progress is divorced from program support.

As the CV process progresses, Amalima Loko works to ensure sustained: access to resources, technical and managerial capacity, and the motivation of participants and service providers—and facilitates key linkages that will help these sustainability factors remain strong long after the program has ended.

### RESOURCES

The program is developing resource mobilization skills for community coordinating bodies to effectively mobilize internal resources, secure external resources from other NGOs and relevant government departments, and secure funding from the diaspora. Village Action Plans, Ward Transformation Plans, and watershed plans lay out the way forward for communities. Widespread participation in VS&L groups is

Community Visioning is designed to be iterative and ongoing, and communities are encouraged to set benchmarks to monitor and measure their progress towards achieving their vision over time. Managing community development activities requires monitoring for results, challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned and community members must be included in this process.

Activities in this stage include annual and periodic review meetings, learning visits, and local celebrations and exhibitions to motivate community actors. As the program winds down, support of VIDCOs and CAGs will gradually transition to district- and ward-level Government of Zimbabwe staff and other local actors. By the end of the program, these local groups stakeholders will fully drive their own development process.

providing households with capital they can invest to support the development and maintenance of community assets.

## CAPACITY

Amalima Loko is building capacity of VIDCOs and WADCOs to mobilize communities, engage in new partnerships, and to channel community needs and successes to external stakeholders, such as other NGOs and relevant government departments. The program is also building the capacity of Traditional Leaders and communities to support inclusive planning processes, to lead and monitor the implementation of their community plans, and to inculcate a regular review process for making necessary changes and updates. Amalima Loko is training CAGs to lead and implement priority projects and ensuring AMCs have the functionality to govern and maintain community assets.

## MOTIVATION

Communities are motivated by the recognition of both their coordinating efforts and subsequent progress in realizing their development plans through community-led celebrations such as Amalima Days, which also strengthens government service providers' awareness of these groups. Already Amalima Loko is seeing positive signs of sustainability in the community motivation that the CV process and development of village and ward plans generated. Many communities launched into successful implementation of collective actions with no additional support from the program. Traditional Leaders and volunteers have shown they are motivated by the appreciation from community members for their efforts.

## LINKAGES

Amalima Loko is fostering linkages to sustain community momentum including between communities and service providers, market linkages that provide households with increased incomes, and with potentially interested investors like diaspora communities. Traditional Leaders are also demonstrating their commitment by connecting their communities with external stakeholders who can support their plans – skills fostered by Amalima Loko. Strengthening cross- village coordination among communities with shared assets is also reinforcing the sustainability of efforts.

### Local Capacity Building

To date, Amalima Loko has trained **9,848** participants (4,702 traditional leaders, 3,994 CAG leaders, 1,066 youth, and 86 persons with disabilities) in topics including: Inclusive leadership, conflict management, social accountability, community-based M&E, and safety net dialogues.

Traditional and CAG leaders are equipped with enhanced leadership and governance skills, improved understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and are better able to link community members to resources and service providers, and to advocate on behalf of their communities.

Other capacity building efforts include:

- Increasing capacity of WADCOs and VIDCOs to oversee implementation of village and ward plans and promote inclusivity in governance processes.
- Equip CAGs with the skills needed to effectively prioritize, implement (including mobilizing and managing resources), and monitor the activities outlined in their Village Action Plans.
- Empowering community members to use their Village Action Plans to advocate for resources and hold their leaders accountable.
- Empowering women, youth, and other marginalized groups to actively participate in and lead governance processes.