



-Executive Summary-

**A Global Analysis of Sustainable Livelihood Initiatives
with Indigenous Peoples**

***The Nature Conservancy, Emerald Edge Social
Innovation Laboratory***

**Prepared for The Nature Conservancy, Communities, Economy, and Place
Initiative (CEPI)**

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Executive Summary

This project is the most comprehensive global analysis of sustainable livelihoods initiatives involving Indigenous Peoples. The study involved a desktop review and key informant interviews from organizations selected on the following criterion: they explicitly aimed to support economic development (livelihoods) among Indigenous Peoples and reinforce cultural and conservation priorities. After a web review of more than 100 organizations, 13 organizations were selected for analysis (see Table 1). These organizations are geographically diverse, and their operations cover Australia, Canada, the U.S, Kenya, Haiti, Nepal, Indonesia, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Namibia and Norway (among others).

This report describes their distinct organizational missions and strategies, and explores the architecture of their governance, networks, funding and resource-base, as well as their successes and failures.

Table 1: Organizations – mission and geography

Name of Organization	Geography
NAILSMA (The North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance Ltd.)	Northern Australia
Coast Funds	Coastal British Columbia
Coastal First Nations	Central Coast of British Columbia and Haida Gwaii
Ecotrust Canada	British Columbia
Ecotrust	Pacific Coastal United States
World Neighbors	Operates in rural areas in 13 countries worldwide
Amazon Conservation Association	Peru and Bolivia
NACSO	Namibia



(Namibian Association of Community Based Natural Resource Management Support Organizations)	
Natura Foundation Bolivia	Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia and Peru
CAPE Fund	Canada
Rainforest Alliance	Worldwide
ICR (The International Centre for Reindeer Husbandry)	Norway, Sweden, Russia, Finland, China, US, Canada, Scotland, Mongolia
Northern Rangelands Trust	Kenya

Desktop review

The first part of analysis involved a desktop review from each of the 13 organizations (pages 11-47). Descriptive data were gathered on: organization, strategies, governance and networks, funding and resources, and successful projects (as well as any failures identified). This review included organization web pages, internal documents, Google search and government website search engines. This review also provided background information for interviews and the information helped validate data.

The organizations are typically registered charitable organizations, although there are also non-profit societies, a business and an investment fund in the cohort. The oldest organization was established in 1951, and the most recent was established in 2008. Annual revenues ranged from \$590 thousand (USD) to \$48 million (USD). The number of employees ranged from 3 to 194 full time employees. All organizations had a focus on Indigenous livelihoods, yet only 10 of 13 organizations involved Indigenous Peoples in their governance, and 6 of 13 organizations had a majority of Indigenous Peoples on their board (Coast Funds, Coastal First Nations, ICR, Natura Foundation, NAILSMA, and NRT).



Key informant interviews

The second part of analysis involved interviews, conducted with senior representatives from organizations. Structured questions developed in collaboration with the CEPI team guided the interviews (see Appendix 1). While interviews were structured, the researcher probed and inquired into areas that were emerging as important as interviews progressed. Fifteen interviews were conducted (involving 13 organizations and 16 people) (see Appendix 2 for list). Three interviews were conducted in person and the remaining interviews were over Skype or phone. All were audio-recorded and transcribed. On average interviews lasted 40 minutes, with some ranging to 76 minutes.

Qualitative Analysis of Interviews

Several questions were explored in interviews and the transcripts were analyzed using basic text analysis. The first question is: **how do organizations engage Indigenous Peoples in their governance?** In answering the first question, we find **two modes of governance**: one, a **conventional ‘programmatic approach’**, where Indigenous Peoples play no meaningful role in the governance of the organization, and can only influence organizational culture from the bottom up; and, two, an **‘Indigenous-controlled’ approach**, where Indigenous Peoples in specific areas govern the organization to deliver sustainable livelihood outcomes. Within this ‘Indigenous-controlled’ approach, there are two approaches: organizations that are primarily supported by government, and organizations that rely on a mixture of public and private funding. There are two forms of political risk within the ‘Indigenous-controlled’ approach: while government support can provide a stable funding source, it is subject to political risk and the state can influence the direction of the organization – independence must be managed. The second form of risk is within the Indigenous-controlled organizations themselves, where political factors may drive decisions – there must be ways to manage conflicts and ensure transparent decisions. Many Indigenous-controlled organizations have created ways for traditional institutions to advise organizations



or review their decisions, so that the organization acts in ways that are consistent with local values.

The missions of the organizations were examined. The most common mission described by interviewees was: ‘to directly produce conservation and livelihood outcomes’ (9 responses of 13). **Most missions had remained consistent and had not changed since inception** (7 responses). Most interviewees agreed their organization had met the stated mission (9 responses).

Five general factors were identified in interviews as important to success. First was an *alignment of objectives and prioritizing communities*, working for communities is essential. Second, is *relationships*, which involves building trust with community through face-to-face engagement and active listening to local needs and values. Within the *relationship* theme are three sub-themes: *time*, or working with community timelines; *communication*, which means regular engagement and updates such as through newsletters and social media, and a focus on knowledge translation for technical information; and managing political influence by *separating politics* from decision making. The third theme is *funding*: stable funding that is linked to supporting communities to achieve their goals in their own ways. The fourth theme is *capacity*: programs need to build the capacity of individual and Indigenous collectives, such as helping re-build local governance institutions. There must be community ownership of the project through direct capacity building. The fifth theme is *complexity*: working with communities is complex, as is building sustainable livelihoods in these contexts. Solutions must address the root causes of problems to have meaningful impact. A collaborative approach with communities to resolve complex problems is the foundation for capacity building and relationship building – but this approach takes time and must be have sufficient and secure resources.

The most cited barriers to success were: geography, and the tyranny of distance to markets (cited 8 times), **political and governance risk**, like tenure insecurity and conflict (cited 7 times), **relationships and coordination with local groups** such as with Indigenous Peoples, where cultural norms and mistrust may



prevent cooperation (cited 7 times), and economic barriers, where for example, natural resource extraction may crowd out other values (cited 5 times).

The most cited failures were: the design of the organization and human resources (cited 8 times); program related failures, like struggling to include youth (cited 6 times), business related failures, and funding issues (cited 3 times each).

The most cited lessons from failures were: around how to design projects, including closer program alignment to community goals (cited 8 times); more attention on collaborations and relationships (cited 6 times); and an emphasis on capacity rather than funding (cited 4 times). The most cited unique governance or resources the organizations brought to their mission were: unique programs to meet its mission (cited 6 times), and a unique organizational structure, which included novel formations between community and umbrella organizations (cited 6 times).

The resources and networks most important to success were: business related networks that provided expertise and stable funding to organizations (cited 7 times), relationships with local organizations (cited 7 times) and links to community members themselves (cited 5 times).

Insights

There were some common patterns emerging from this study of diverse organizations supporting sustainable Indigenous livelihoods. There were two modes of governance documented in this study: a conventional ‘programmatic approach’ and an ‘Indigenous-controlled’ approach. In a programmatic approach, Indigenous Peoples play no meaningful role in the governance of the organization, and can only influence strategy and organizational culture from the bottom up. This approach can create a distance between the organization and the Indigenous communities where the organization works, which can be problematic for relationships. In an ‘Indigenous-controlled’ approach, Indigenous People themselves govern the organization to deliver sustainable livelihood outcomes in ways that reflect local values. It is important to note that ‘Indigenous-controlled’ organizations tend to be reliant on public funding, which can make political risk an important factor to be managed.



Building relationships is key to success in this context, based on trust and communication, as well managing the effect of politics on investment decisions is key. Interviewees emphasised that a long-term approach that aligns with local objectives, and that puts local people first is important to success. Understanding community needs outside of funding is crucial, as is dispensing with short timelines and one-size fits all approaches for engagement.

There were some common themes across these diverse organizations, which offers general insight into the design of sustainable livelihood models. First, organizations tend to maintain their missions; this suggests a concrete vision that establishes a foundational set of values for the organization, which guides the activity of staff.

Second, there were three common barriers to sustainable economic development initiatives that appear to be universal: geography (or the tyranny of distance from markets), political and governance risk (tenure insecurity and conflict), and community relationships (where norms of mistrust are widespread, and with good reason). Working within this context requires organizations to navigate remoteness through innovative livelihood approaches, and to design governance in ways that respect local institutions and build trust, which takes time to build. Most of the failures expressed in the interviews were around organizational design, or ignoring the local context, and accommodating this is crucial.

An important and surprising point raised in interviews was the unique collaboration between business networks and the organizations' activities. Catalyzing private sector networks brought stable capital and expertise to meet the sustainable economic development challenge. Designing programs to draw on outside business expertise is an important principle.



Context and Purpose

Achieving sustainable development requires a focus on changing social, economic, political and cultural institutions. This change process seeks to reorient the behaviour of actors at individual and more collective scales. Change agents are those actors or organizations that, in the absence of regulation, seek to reorient the behaviour of others to be more sustainable. Foundations across the world are acting as change agents to catalyze sustainable development, or economic development that supports cultural and conservation priorities.

Part of this change process requires change agents to envision and create new institutions to support sustainable development. Recent examples of these approaches include the development of carbon markets, where voluntary markets to sequester or mitigate carbon through payments to reforest or curb logging have grown considerably, and have evolved into the global “Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries” (REDD+) program.

These kinds of programs require the design of new kinds of institutions, rules and incentives to facilitate more sustainable development, and to accommodate equity, conservation and cultural priorities. There can be challenges in creating these programs, including economic and political barriers. Additionally, the institutional design may have flaws that can at times be fatal to the success of the program. For example, incentives paid for reforesting areas may have perverse outcomes, such as actually promoting deforestation. Creating the space to envision, design and test these innovative institutional approaches is important to sustainable development.

One such approach is through social innovation labs. Social innovation labs offer a novel mechanism to produce solutions to complex problems. Complex problems are those problems that are dynamic, such that efficient solutions are challenging to develop, and these solutions involve trade-offs that have impacts on social equity.



Social innovation labs create the space for diverse actors to come together to envision, design and test solutions, in ways that reflect the complex interests of different actors (or stakeholders).

This project aims to support the development of a social innovation lab for TNC's Emerald Edge program. It does this by considering the approaches of 13 sustainable development initiatives from across the globe, and learning from these experiences, this analysis offers insight into the networks, governance and resources required to support the success of the social innovation lab.

An area that is particularly important in this context is collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, who in many parts of the world have rights to self-governance, as well as rights to natural resources. Work with Indigenous Peoples is important for developing solutions and institutions for sustainable development, yet these collaborations have received less attention than is warranted.

One of the key outcomes from this work is to explore the involvement of Indigenous Peoples in governance for sustainable development, and how Indigenous Peoples can be better integrated into the social innovation lab.