

## TNC's Freshwater Community-Based Conservation Program: Guidance for Program Development

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The Nature Conservancy's Global Water Team has embarked on a program of work to use community-based conservation to achieve both ecological and social outcomes. The goals of this document are to (a) define freshwater community-based conservation (fCBC) and (b) provide some examples of strategies that are captured within it.

**Community Based Conservation (CBC)** is conservation that strengthens the voice, choice, and action of indigenous peoples and local communities to shape and manage land and waters in ways that improves peoples' lives and drives biodiversity outcomes. **Freshwater** CBC projects emphasize freshwater resources and their management. The Conservancy's fCBC projects include the following 2 components:

- A. The project has a strong connection to **freshwater biodiversity** by focusing on the protection and/or conservation of freshwater species and/or ecosystems<sup>1</sup> and the services they provide. The project should have a focus on protecting or restoring freshwater ecosystem services (e.g., water purification, flood attenuation, aquifer recharge), addressing stressors specific to freshwater systems (i.e., alteration to hydrology, water quality, aquatic species or ecosystems), and articulating outcomes that are specific to freshwater ecosystems and species.
- B. The project is focused on **indigenous people and local communities (IPLCs)** as users and beneficiaries of the freshwater resource. A "community" usually refers to a well-defined group that self-identifies as a people and/or that has a shared identity, culture and/or values. Communities contain multiple diverse actors and interests that interact through institutions and change through time. We use the term "indigenous and local communities" to refer to communities that possess a close and profound relationship with their natural landscapes (territory, area, or habitat) which they depend on for cultural, religious, health, and economic needs. This includes the original inhabitants of a place and/or migrants who have settled in a place who have the aforementioned relationship with the natural landscape. Note that indigenous peoples and indigenous communities are usually original inhabitants of a place and thus consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in the territories, which they [indigenous peoples] originally occupied prior to colonization. Indigenous peoples have collective rights recognized under international law.

In fCBC programs, freshwater **conservation goals** are pursued by fCBC strategies that emphasize the role of IPLCs in decision-making about natural resources. fCBC programs are often strongly linked to other non-fCBC strategies (e.g., hydropower by design, sustainable agriculture), but because communities are often distributed along water bodies throughout river basins of interest, the community can often be an important entry point for system change. fCBC includes a spectrum of approaches that range from the formalized devolution of rights to communities, to practices that emphasize the co-management of

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<sup>1</sup> Freshwater species and natural communities are those that are dependent on freshwater ecosystems (rivers, lakes, wetlands, springs, aquifers, etc.) for all or part of their life history stages. This can include riparian and floodplain species and habitats which depend on freshwater ecosystems for processes such as seed dispersal; but does not include all species that simply use the water in a freshwater ecosystem.

resources. fCBC strategies involve many actors, including community members, government officials, and non-profit organizations, with decisions and feedbacks often occurring across multiple scales.

fCBC strategies vary along three gradients that have implications for their degree of effectiveness. Figure 1 provides illustrative examples of these gradients, and plots the gradients along three dimensions (x-axis, y-axis, and the size of the bubble). The scoring along the three axes are hypothetical values and will differ among geographies. The three gradients are:

1. **Degree to which benefits of sustainable natural resource management are locally accrued by the community and impacts from unsustainable resource use directly impact the community.** In Figure 1, this gradient is plotted on the **x-axis**, where a strategy with a score of 10 indicates a direct and immediate benefit to the IPLCs from good management, and a score of 1 indicates that benefits are accrued by other users (e.g., downstream users).
2. **Degree to which the communities have a responsibility for and ability to manage the freshwater resource, both in terms of their rights to manage the resource, as well as their reliance on the resource and their sense of responsibility for sustainability managing it.** In Figure 1, this gradient is plotted on the **y-axis**, where a score of 10 indicates the IPLC has complete control and a score of 1 indicates the IPLC have little control over how the resource is managed.
3. **Potential scale of impact of the strategy on the freshwater ecosystems and human communities in the targeted freshwater system.** In Figure 1 this is plotted as the **size of the bubble**, where a large bubble indicates significant impact across the system whereas a small bubble indicates minor or localized impact and the strategy would need to be accompanied by other types of strategies (e.g., policy, agreements with industry) for there to be system change.

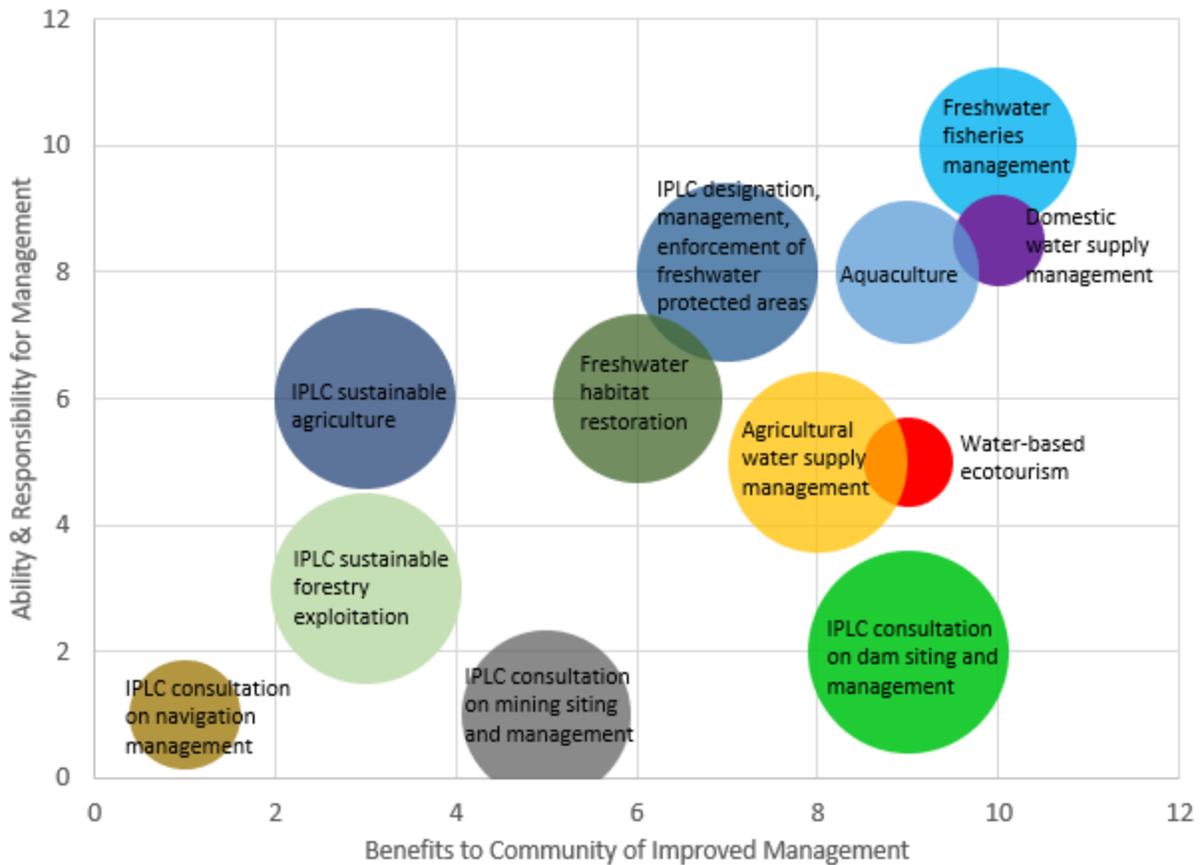


Figure 1. Examples of fCBC strategies and their variation by degree to which the benefits are accrued locally (x-axis); degree of IPLC control over resource management (y-axis); and scale of impact of the strategy (bubble size). All values are hypothetical and ranked on a scale from 1-10.

The example strategies included in Figure 1 include a range of ways in which IPLCs can be engaged in sustainable management of freshwater resources. The strategies that fall in the **upper right quadrant** of Figure 1 are **primary** fCBC strategies and therefore may be high priorities for fCBC programs. For example, for the case of freshwater fisheries management, especially for large river or lake ecosystems, there is a high likelihood that communities have a major responsibility for co-managing when, how much, and who is allowed to fish from the river or lake system. The benefits of improved fisheries management are accrued by local communities, because the communities are highly dependent on those resources.

Strategies that fall outside of the upper right quadrant may be seen as **secondary** because they are not the core of a fCBC program, but they are important for bringing IPLC considerations into non-fCBC programs. For example, a freshwater program may be focused on working with governments and corporations on energy sector planning, industrial agriculture, or forestry. The community is not the focus of the strategy but bringing community needs into the non-CBC strategies will be important for meeting broader ecological and social goals for the targeted freshwater system. With these secondary strategies, fCBC can still play an essential role, such as pursuing Free and Prior Informed Consent at the

state, national, or corporate level and ensuring IPLCs are able to fully participate in any multi-stakeholder platforms that allow their voices to be heard in decisions that will impact their ability to manage and benefit from freshwater resources.

Working through this process of plotting out where strategies fall within these axes can help a team to evaluate which strategies are mostly closely aligned with a core fCBC program, and which are secondary to other types of programs and strategies. This guidance is meant to be illustrative and is intended to guide freshwater programs as they develop fCBC strategies in geographies with important freshwater biodiversity.

Note that this document is a work in progress and will be refined over time as we develop greater expertise in this field. Please send any feedback to Allison Aldous ([aaldous@tnc.org](mailto:aaldous@tnc.org)).