Tool Name: Community Profile	
What is it?	A community profile is a data sheet that records information on a broad range of factors (such as environmental/natural features and management, sociodemographic characteristics, political and economic structures, local institutions, economic activities and livelihoods, basic household and community facilities, and social organization).
What can it be used for?	• providing basic information (where little is known) before starting to work in an area • understanding the context of a community so that specific areas, issues, and linkages can be identified and analyzed
What does it tell you?	• a basic understanding of a community as a whole • information on particular areas of interest (such as which local institutions might be important for household livelihood strategies and need to be investigated in more depth)
Complementary tools	Various participatory tools, key informant interviews, focus group discussions
Key elements	A variety of tools are used to build up an overview of a community.
Requirements	
Data/information	This tool uses secondary data and documents that relate to the community and any particular focus of the profile (such as livelihoods and institutions).
Time	1 to 2 days
Skills	High level of participatory facilitation and social analytical skills
Supporting software	No software needed
Financial cost	If conducted as part of a participatory study, additional costs will be minimal.
Limitations	The community profile provides general data only; therefore it lacks depth of analysis when used on its own.
References and applications	Messer, N., and P. Townsley. 2003. *Local Institutions and Livelihoods: Guidelines for Analysis.* Rural Development Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome. http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/006/Y5084E/y5084e00.HTM; Module 3: "Doing the Community Profile." http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/DOCREP/006/Y5084E/y5084e06.htm.

Community Profile: Procedures and Examples

Time, Materials, and Skills Needed
This procedure requires one to two days and requires a simple data recording sheet on which key standardized qualitative and quantitative information about a community can be recorded. The data compiler should have a good understanding of the economic, social and political context of the communities that are sampled and should have experience in using the data collection methods used for the exercise.

Possible Approach
The following possible approach (which relies heavily on Messer and Townsley 2003) is a general example that can be adapted to suit the local context, views of local analysts, and the research objectives. These steps and methods can be combined in various ways, depending on the context.

Step 1: Identify Research Issues and Set Objectives. Community profiles do not need to provide data on every aspect of a community. The community profile should provide an entry point so that researchers have a better idea of where to look, whom to interview, and which approach to use in future research to provide deeper understanding and learning.

Start by developing an initial checklist of key issues and questions of interest. This list is only a starting point and can be added to or amended at any point during the process. Issues and questions might include the following examples:

- **Resources:** What principal natural resources are available in or to the community? Who uses them and how? Where are these resources located?
- **Livelihoods:** What different activities do households use to support their livelihoods? Who is involved in these livelihood activities (differentiated by social and economic group)? How many people and households depend on these activities? When and where do these activities take place?
- **Community structure:** How many people and households live in the community? What is the gender composition and age structure of the community? What are the different social, economic, ethnic, and cultural groups? How are those groups defined? Where do different social, economic, ethnic, and cultural groups live?
- **Local institutions:** What are the formal organizations and associations? What are the rules, regulations, and customs? Who is affected by them and how?
- **Community infrastructure:** What services are available in the community (transport, power/water supply, markets, agricultural extension, health, education, and so on)? Who has access to these services? How expensive are the user fees?
- **Community history:** How long has the community been in existence and how was it founded? When did different social, economic, ethnic, and cultural groups settle in the community? How has the community changed over time and what has caused those changes?
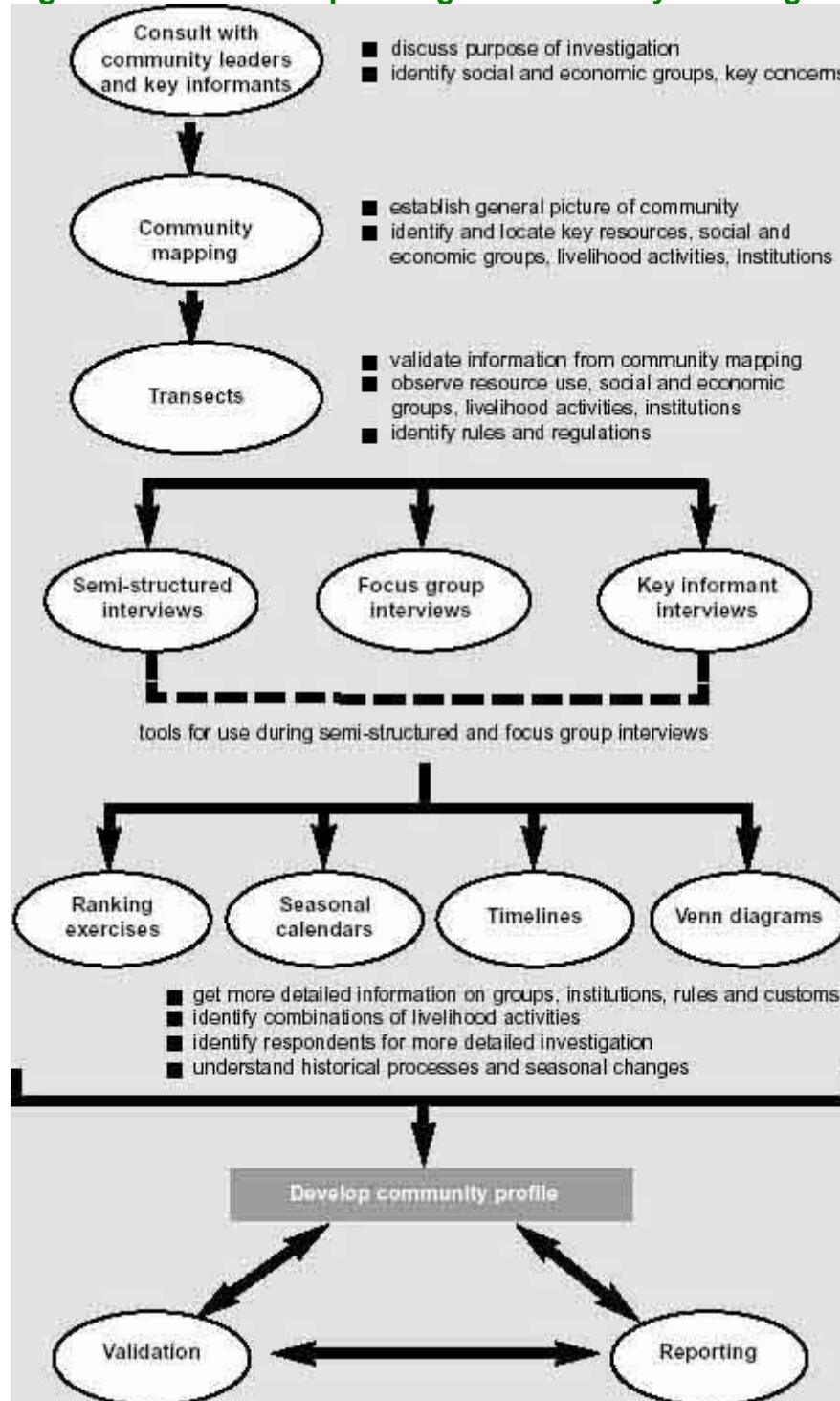
Source: Messer and Townsley 2003.

It might be appropriate for community members or key informants to identify key issues through key informant interviews or focus group discussions before the

fieldwork starts. Once an initial list of the issues and questions has been developed, appropriate methods/tools and data sources can be identified.

Step 2: Select and Sequence Tools. A wide range of tools and methods can be used to gather data to build a useful community profile, which might include participatory tools (such as community resources mapping, transect walk, seasonal calendars, timelines, Venn diagrams, ranking exercises, and so on); interviews (such as semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews/discussions, key informant interviews); and review of secondary data. The tools chosen should be logically sequenced to progressively build a community profile. The diagram in figure 1 suggests a possible sequence, but remember to be flexible and to adapt the approach to the local context and research needs as new information or situations arise.

Figure 1. Possible Sequencing of Community Profiling Tools/Methods

Source: Messer and Townsley 2003.

Step 3: Record the Data. A large amount of information can be generated during the research; data recording from different tools should be ongoing so that data is not mislaid, forgotten, or reported inaccurately. At regular intervals review the findings, discuss the directions of the research, and record key information and learnings. This process will facilitate the production of the final community profile at the end of the research period and will enable any changes to be made as the process progresses.

Tables can help to track and order the gathered data and can enable research teams to identify data gaps more easily. Different tables can be used to review and record key information regarding different topics (such as social and professional groups, local institutions, livelihoods, and so on) and can provide easy reference points during later stages of the process. Tables can also record information such as the team members, tools/methods, and the informant, which can be useful if problems or inconsistencies arise at later stages. Table 1 shows an example of a table used to record information on local institutions.

Table 1. Sample Data Recording Sheet for Principal Local Institutions

Principal local institutions identified	Role, activities, area of influence of institutions	People/ groups affected by institutions	Team members	Field methods	Visualization tools	Type of respondents
Identify different institutions mentioned during course of the community profile	Identify the role and activities of different institutions and the general area where they are concerned or the influence they have	Identify particular groups that are affected by or concerned with these institutions, including their members	Identify the members of the investigating team who collected the information relative to this particular group	Record the different field methods used to identify this strategy	Record the different visualization tools used during the interviews that can be used to illustrate the learning	Identify who provided the information
FOR EXAMPLE:						
Youth club	Organizes sports activities for village youth

Organizes village "clean-up" campaigns

Works in experimental fish farming in local village pond | Young people in the village (male and female)

Whole village (through "clean-ups")

Experimental fish farmers

Young people from other villages (through exchange visits) | Ravi and Musa | Focus group interview | Seasonal calendar

Ranking exercise (comparing involvement of men/women, adults and youth in different village activities) | Group: male/female |
| Malaney: traditional land tenure arrangement | Controls access to best quality agricultural land

Ensures land use remains within families of limited group of landowners | *Estanio*: original inhabitants of area

Abaduk: more recent settlers (most people in the community) | Daniel and Ravi | Key informant interview | Resource use map (showing land distribution and use)

Timeline (illustrating history of settlement) | Individual: male (*estanio* community leader) |

Source: Messer and Townsley 2003.

Change the format of the table to suit the particular research and information needs. The aim is to have a systematic method of recording the information provided by local analysts.

The findings that have been systematically recorded can then easily be used and analyzed during the preparation of the final community profile.

Step 4: Validate the Findings. It is important to cross-check and validate the information obtained during the participatory data-gathering process (and the analysis of this data) with community members and local analysts. Information can be validated through community meetings with a wide cross section of the community or in smaller focus group discussions, which provide opportunities to compare the interpretation of information collected with local analysts' understandings. This process can also enable an understanding of how local people's views and interpretations might differ from each other and from the analysis of outsiders. Where there are serious differences of opinion, the reasons should be investigated and noted.

Points to Remember
A community profile should not seek to explain or detail every aspect of a community situation/context. It should focus on key areas or issues of concern to the research and community and should be undertaken with a flexible approach.