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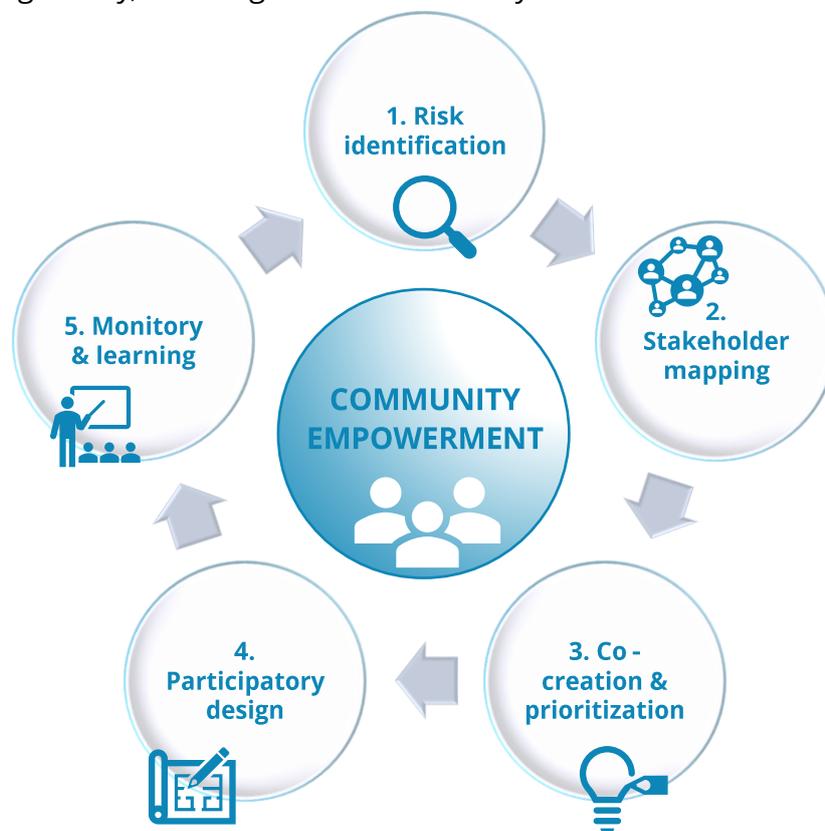
# INTERREG ITALY-CROATIA PROGRAMME 2021 – 2027

## Community empowerment

January 2025

## Community Empowerment

This manual provides a structured, practice-oriented framework for integrating community empowerment across the Nature-based Solutions (NbS) lifecycle in climate adaptation and flood risk management. It offers methodological guidance, participatory tools, and practical templates derived from AcquaGuard pilot areas. All participatory activities align with the D1.3.2 “Stakeholder Engagement Plan” to ensure coordinated, inclusive involvement of all relevant actors. Community empowerment is an essential element of decision-making, design, implementation, and monitoring. By integrating local knowledge with active participation, NbS interventions achieve technical robustness, social legitimacy, and long-term sustainability.



Community empowerment is embedded as a fundamental component across all phases of the NbS lifecycle, from risk identification and co-design to implementation, monitoring and adaptive management. It frames the methodological logic of this Manual, positioning:

- ✓ **Local Knowledge:** historical, experiential, and contextual information held by community members
- ✓ **Participatory Decision-Making:** collaborative processes involving stakeholders to guide NbS options
- ✓ **Continuous Feedback:** structured loops from community monitoring and reflection to adapt interventions



## GLOSSARY AND KEY TERMS

Acronyms	Definition
<b>DSM – Decision Support Matrix</b>	A structured participatory tool used to score and prioritize NbS options based on multiple criteria, including risk reduction, feasibility, cost, co-benefits, social acceptance, and maintenance. Supports transparent collective decision-making.
<b>MCA – Multi-Criteria Analysis</b>	Analytical framework used alongside DSM to evaluate trade-offs between NbS options according to selected criteria, allowing communities and experts to prioritize interventions jointly.
<b>NbS – Nature-based Solutions</b>	Interventions that use natural processes and ecosystem services to reduce climate risks, restore ecosystems, and provide socio-economic co-benefits.
<b>PVCA – Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment</b>	Community-led method to identify local climate vulnerabilities, adaptive capacities, and priorities for NbS interventions, including tools such as seasonal calendars, hazard mapping, transect walks, and capacity inventories.
<b>Stakeholder Map (D1.3.1)</b>	A structured overview of relevant actors, categorized by power, influence, and engagement capacity, used to plan inclusive participation in NbS design, implementation, and monitoring.
Key Terms / Glossary	Definition
<b>Adaptive Management</b>	Iterative process of monitoring, evaluating, and adjusting NbS interventions based on observed outcomes, community feedback, and evolving environmental conditions.
<b>Co-benefits</b>	Additional positive outcomes of NbS interventions beyond primary climate risk reduction, e.g., biodiversity enhancement, social cohesion, and recreational opportunities.
<b>Co-creation</b>	Collaborative process involving local stakeholders and experts in the design, planning, and adaptation of NbS interventions to ensure context relevance and community ownership.
<b>Elite Capture</b>	A situation where more influential community members dominate decision-making processes, potentially marginalizing vulnerable groups.
<b>Local Knowledge</b>	Traditional, historical, and experiential information held by community members, including data on floods, land use, ecosystems, and social vulnerability patterns.
<b>Maladaptation</b>	Unintended negative consequences of an intervention that increase vulnerability or create new risks, often due to insufficient local validation.
<b>Transect Walk</b>	A participatory field walk through the intervention area in which community members and experts jointly observe and record environmental, social, and infrastructural conditions to identify risks, resources, and opportunities for NbS.



## ROLE OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The overall goal for public authorities, stakeholders and local communities is to foster a green, resilient, and shared environmental vision through the use of NbS. The framework highlights how participatory processes evolve from the activation of local knowledge, through inclusive and transparent interaction, to the generation of long-term and socially embedded outcomes for flood risk reduction.



**ENGAGEMENT** is foundational, as communities hold critical place-based knowledge, including historical flood dynamics, hydrological memory, land-use and ecosystem insights, socially differentiated vulnerability patterns, and informal coping strategies. Systematic engagement ensures that this knowledge informs the co-design and prioritization of Nature-Based Solutions, reducing the risk of technocratic or context-blind interventions.

**COMMUNICATION** acts as a bidirectional process rather than a one-way dissemination of information. Transparent and accessible communication enables mutual learning between institutions and communities, enhances the legitimacy of decision-making processes, and supports inclusive participation. Particular attention must be paid to outreach strategies that actively involve marginalized and underrepresented groups, in order to prevent elite capture and ensure equitable representation of local needs and perspectives.



**IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY** reflects the long-term value of community involvement in NbS planning and implementation. Integrating local knowledge enhances the effectiveness and feasibility of interventions, while minimizing maladaptation risks. At the same time, early and sustained community involvement fosters local ownership and stewardship, supporting the maintenance, adaptive management, and social acceptance of NbS beyond the project lifecycle. This integrated perspective ensures that NbS deliver not only short-term risk reduction outcomes, but also durable social, environmental, and governance benefits.



## PARTICIPATORY STRATEGIES

Participatory strategies are based on structured methods to ensure inclusive and collaborative participation. Collaborative decision-making processes focus on the active and continuous involvement of stakeholders, valuing local knowledge as key elements for an accurate understanding of the territorial context. Through shared planning and structured dialogue, participants contribute directly to strategic choices, strengthening both responsibility and ownership of the proposed solutions. Based on the category of stakeholders, a different level of involvement is required target at a specific goal:



The support of digital tools can facilitate exchanges and interaction, promotes transparency and real-time feedback, it encourages constructive dialogue even around complex challenges. This integrated environment that supports the co-design of effective and widely supported NbS.

