Category: **Obligation to Facilitate Public Participation in Environmental Decision-Making**

Sub-Category: **Innovative Participatory Mechanisms**

Name of Good Practice: **Grassroots Legal Advocates or “Community Paralegals”**

Key Words: Participation, Local Community, Empowerment, Advocacy

Implementing Actors: Civil Society Organisation: Namati; Local Community: various

Location: Sierra Leone, Mozambique, India, Bangladesh, Kenya, Myanmar, Uganda, and Liberia

Description: Namati is an international civil society organisation dedicated to putting the law in people’s hands through building a global movement of grassroots legal advocates who work with communities to advance justice. The objective of training grass roots advocates is to empower communities to exercise their rights and participate in processes of governing. Namati, working with locally-based partner organisations, develops, tests and implements legal empowerment programs in Africa and Asia. Grassroots legal advocates, or “community paralegals,” focus on legal empowerment to support individuals, communities and civil society to protect lands, natural resources and ecosystems. According to Namati, “these paralegals are trained in basic law and in skills like mediation, organizing, education, and advocacy.  They form a creative, problem-solving frontline that can engage formal and traditional institutions alike.”

For example, in Myanmar, Namati and its national partner organisation, the Civil and Political Rights Campaign Group, have trained a corps of more than 30 paralegals to support families to register and protect their land rights. According to Namati, “in just the first 6 months of the program, paralegals handled thousands [of] cases from 150 village tracts located across six states and divisions. The paralegals educate individuals, farmers’ groups, and communities about Myanmar’s legal framework on land and how to complete the administrative processes to register farmland claims.” In India, Namati states that its “community paralegals are supporting local communities to exercise their rights to demand and access information on environmental impact assessments; monitor and report cases of non-compliance with environmental regulations; and to use existing environmental laws to protect their health, livelihoods, and local environment from industrial pollution and ecosystem degradation.”

**Further Information:**  Namati’s website has various publications, blog posts, and summaries describing the community paralegal programme: <http://www.namati.org>; see also Marena Brinkhurst & Rachael Knight, “Namati: Innovations in Legal Empowerment,” at: <http://conference.unitar.org/yale2014/sites/conference.unitar.org.yale2014/files/2014%20UNITAR-Yale%20Conference-Brinkhurst%20and%20Knight.pdf>.