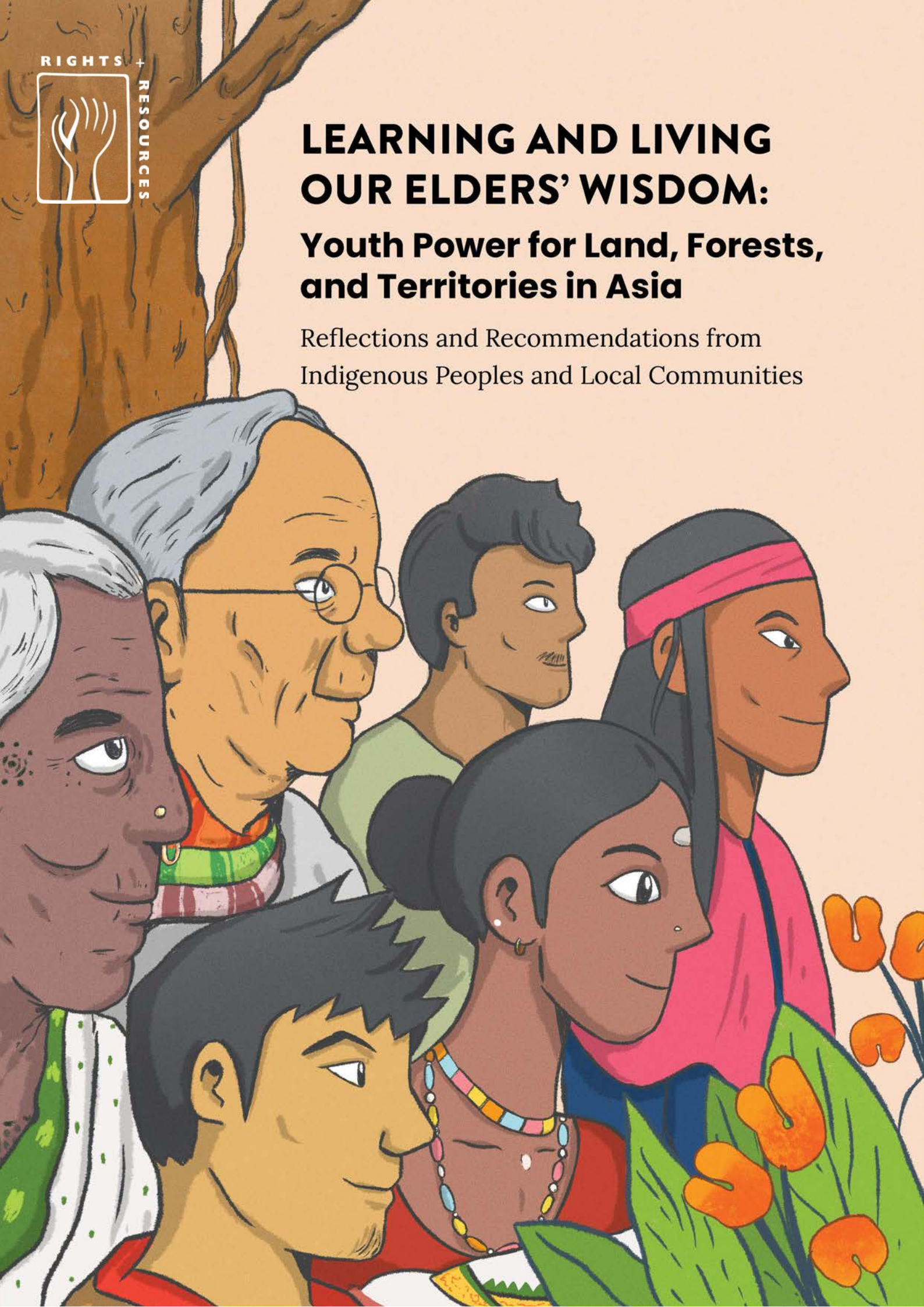




LEARNING AND LIVING OUR ELDERS' WISDOM:

Youth Power for Land, Forests, and Territories in Asia

Reflections and Recommendations from
Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities



CO-AUTHORS



Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Alliance (CIPA)



Published by the Rights and Resources Initiative, 2023

For more information and a recommended citation, please see “Annex 2: About the Co-Authors” on page 37.

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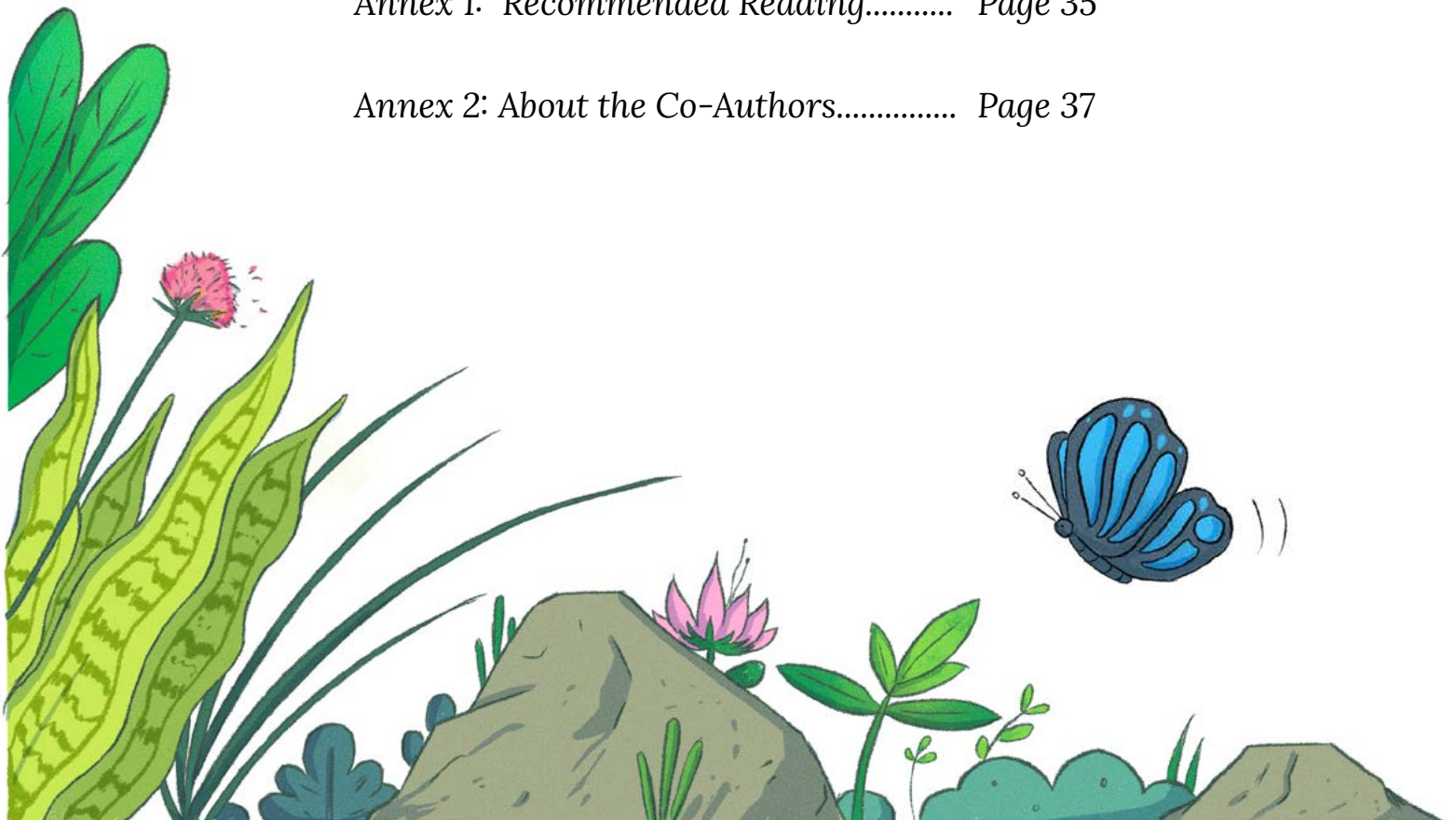
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An illustration of a community gathering. A group of seven people are sitting in a circle on a grassy field. A woman in a yellow shirt is speaking and gesturing with her hands. The others are listening attentively. They are gathered under the shade of a large, thick tree trunk on the left. The background is a simple white sky. In the foreground, there are some green bushes and small plants.

INTRODUCTION

The first time that Minahasa Indigenous youth leader Nedine Sulu asked people in her village in North Sulawesi, Indonesia if they wanted to open a school for Indigenous youth, they were baffled. “*But where’s the building?*” they asked, gathered under a nutmeg tree.

“*Are you comfortable here? Under the shade of the pohon pala?*” she asked in return. Upon hearing a chorus of affirmations, she announced, “*Then this is our school.*”

Together, they began to study their mother tongue through traditional songs and literature. They documented cultural practices, foods, and expressions, sharing them online through smartphone-produced short films. Treks with elders introduced youth to medicines, forest foods, and practices of ecological care for their territory. Culture, Nedine observes, introduces youth to their ancestral cosmology and philosophy, creating a space where “*Indigenous youth can figure out who we are, and connect with ourselves and our identity, our generation, and the generations to come.*”



Across Asia, youth are showing leadership in their communities in similar ways. Intergenerational collective governance of land, territory, and natural resources is crucial to the futures that youth like Nedine seek to protect. As this report will show, their commitment to their communities extends to the ecologies that form the

basis of their culture, livelihoods, and cosmologies. Yet the homelands that they steward are often sought as commodities by economic and political actors in pursuit of profit and power. Indigenous Peoples and local communities who also govern their commons collectively are often sidelined by legal, political, and economic systems that protect those in power rather than those fighting for their collective rights and self-determination. This leads to immense struggle.

Movements emphasize the need to intentionally cultivate the next generation of leaders to defend hard-won rights and protect against intensifying threats. This report brings together the experiences of youth activists that have responded to this call. The objective of this report is to highlight the many forms of leadership that youth show across these struggles—as strategists, innovators, creatives, and mobilizers—as well as the many layers of challenges they face to receive respect and recognition as leaders. We demonstrate that youth from Indigenous and local communities are often self-motivated to defend their land and territorial rights as part of a lifelong journey to understand who they are in the world. Youth are active across scales—from local community organizing to global platforms—and employ a variety of strategies to drive change within and across spaces. The report also synthesizes key recommendations from youth

activists to the world about how they can be best supported in intergenerational leadership, presenting five principles for advancing youth leadership.



This report is co-authored by 16 organizations from across Asia, spanning youth groups, Indigenous networks, and ally organizations. The Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) initiated this process in 2020 as a mapping exercise. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many groups updated and consolidated their strategies, and this report presents both “before” and “after” findings. Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) and RECOFTC, which are both RRI Partners, formally joined in 2023 for a broader partnership on youth. The final report is co-authored by all groups involved in the process, as well as some new relationships established after the report was drafted. Key resources referenced can be found in Annex 1. Each co-author’s detailed organizational biography can be found in Annex 2.

Part 1 offers a summary of the economic and social factors that affect young people’s relationship to their ancestral lands and territories. The section discusses the different pathways youth take to learning about their rights to lands, territories, and resources, emphasizing the importance of culture and identity. It also explores how youth leadership is strengthened through training and mentorship.

Part 2 dives into youth leadership trajectories, covering stories from Cambodia, Indonesia, and India. We explore how youth show leadership for collective land rights.

In **Part 3**, the authors outline five key principles for youth engagement. These add to existing guidelines such as the [Land Rights Standard](#) by answering the question of how youth want their allies to support them.

The authors have endeavored to represent the stories and experiences of youth across locations, genders, classes, ethnicities, and other aspects of difference. Where “youth organizers” are referenced in this report, it refers to both elders and youth who organize other youth. The term “youth” refers to youth from both Indigenous Peoples and local communities (as defined by the United Nations), unless otherwise specified. The ASEAN Youth Development Index defines youth as ages 15-35. The authors collectively observe that “youth” identity is based less on age and more on shared experiences. One Indigenous youth leader interviewed, Chandra Tripura, reflects,

“I don’t know how to define youth, but I know that when I hear the word, I feel energy inside me.”

According to ancestral wisdom, the water apple tree pictured here is older than the Kasepuhan Pasir Eurih Indigenous community that protects it. Urban youth learned this and much more from Indigenous elders at a 2022 Green Camp in Indonesia. Photo credit: Eki and RMI, 2022.



PART 1: YOUTH IN MOVEMENT

Indigenous and local community youth in Asia, and around the world more broadly, often straddle what seem like impossible compromises. They navigate the delicate balance between forces of “modernization” and their intergenerational connection to community. Financial security, supporting family members, and staying connected to “home” no matter where life takes them are their primary concerns.

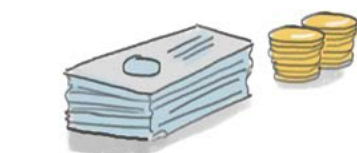
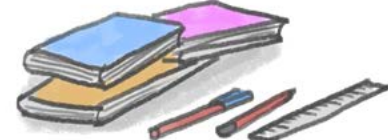
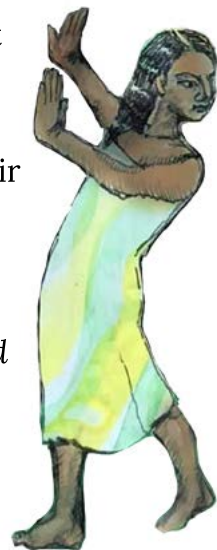
Youth organizers pinpoint mainstream education as a dominant force in the lives of young people. Families often invest in mainstream schooling to prepare children to interact with the outside world. Yet mainstream schools are not designed to prepare Indigenous and local community youth for prosperous livelihoods in relationship with their own lands based on local ecological knowledge, language, and culture. They are geared toward producing workforces for jobs available in urban areas. They rely on state curricula, not taught in mother tongues, that reinforce harmful and discriminatory ideologies. Many Indigenous and local community youth remember bullying and poor infrastructure as features of their educational experiences. As a result, children in mainstream schools may be forced to “drop out” as result of academic performance (or more accurately, be “pushed out”). Residential schools can be particularly assimilationist, physically and ideologically distancing children from their communities and culture.



[Our Forest Dreams](#) is an illustrated storybook by youth organizers at the Nilgiris Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups Federation. It describes the dialogue between a grandmother and her granddaughter, Medhi. After the grandmother tells Medhi about their Indigenous history, Medhi responds:

“O Ajji, how cruel!/ We never learn this history in school/ When you were my age, you learned from Nature. From your Amma (mother) and Ajji (grandmother) and all of your neighbors/

Ajji, nowadays we sit inside, surrounded by concrete/ Maths and History feel incomplete. We crave to know how to heal and fish/ and follow our own heart's drumbeat.”



Youth organizers observe that this entire system has consequences for communities' ability to transfer knowledge between generations, affecting their ability to exercise self-determination through collective governance.

Globally, economic opportunities for rural youth are precarious. Young people are choosing to migrate in large numbers, feeling little hope in agrarian livelihoods. Some youth aspire to a particular career path, increased disposable income, or more freedom, which pull them to relocate. Family investments in education over the course of their lives generate a sense of duty (and significant debt). Agrarian work may not be an option if their parents are still farming a small plot of family land or if they are landless. Sometimes youth are not aware of the risks of migrating to a city. Outside of their communities, they will need to carefully navigate cycles of discrimination, exploitation, and even violence. Even if they find a safety net, some will realize their skills are a mismatch for the demands of mainstream markets, or that discrimination and stigma will follow them wherever they go. This pushes youth to question their identity and aspirations.

Sobha Madhan is a Betta Kurumba youth organizer and one of the lead authors of *Our Forest Dreams*. Reflecting on where to start building youth leadership, she offers, **“Making people aware of their rights is very hard; we first need to understand who we are.”**

Culture, dignity, and healing

Archana Soreng explains, “For Indigenous youth, our elders are our window into self-knowledge as well as knowledge about the world.” Archana is a powerful youth voice in the global climate justice movement, reaching the highest bodies of youth representation on climate in the United Nations. Whatever her academic or professional mentors have to offer, she always looks to her family and Khadia Indigenous community for wisdom on how to handle life's challenges.

When youth engage with the mainstream, they sometimes start to question who they are and what they want. This builds a thirst for knowledge, pushing them to speak with their elders and reconnect with their land, community, and territories. In this

process, youth can become advocates of cultural revival. Social media initiatives like the [Smartphone movement](#) in Indonesia and [Adivaasi Drishyam](#) in India produce creative content for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences. They use innovative ways to document traditional knowledge to ensure it is accessible, helping other youth to build cultural literacy through oral stories, dances, and recipes. In Bangladesh,



Indigenous youth held events on Facebook Live showcasing traditional dances to fundraise for Covid-19 relief.

Reclaiming and accessing culture is an important step toward valuing one's own identity and community. Cultural revival and regeneration strengthen relationships between elders and young people. It also helps youth engage with the mainstream from a place of self-determination and dignity. Given the immensely challenging political environments communities face, this is crucial.

Some youth have experienced huge loss at a young age. Some have watched their parents and elders struggle for their lands for their entire lives, or seen the impacts of discrimination, stigma, and violence on their communities. Many youth organizers describe grief over the harmful ways that their own communities process the trauma of dispossession and exploitation, for example, with alcohol dependence.



Indigenous youth in Minanga, South-East Minahasa are being trained by BPAN to document their lifeways while strengthening ties with their elders through intergenerational learning. Here, the young Indigenous filmmakers document the traditional livelihood importance of dried coconut. Photo credit: Febriko Pogaga, 2023.



Some youth experience loss in a less tangible sense. Sabba Rani Maharjan, an Indigenous youth leader from Nepal, grew up amongst her Newa community in urban Kathmandu. She reflects, “I belong to ancestral farmers but have never seen my ancestral farmland or my people farming.” Now she seeks to repair this disconnect.

Jhontoni Tarihoran, the former national chair of the Indigenous Youth Front of the Archipelago in Indonesia and Tano Batak youth organizer, observes that once youth start to embrace their Indigenous identity and culture, they also reconnect with their territories. He explains, “We have a collective dream. We want to speak our own languages, dance our dances, wear our clothes, and feed ourselves from our land. And that is what we have been doing. If we lose our territories, we will lose all of this.”

“If I give up, my culture will be extinct by the next generation,” Nedine adds. This is not an overstatement given the aggressive expansion of oil palm plantations, other agribusiness, and “fortress conservation” in Indonesia, all of which often force Indigenous Peoples and local communities off their ancestral lands. Chandra Tripura, an Indigenous youth leader from Bangladesh, echoes this from her perspective as a traditional dancer. She asks, “If there is no land for jhum (shifting cultivation), what will happen to the jhum dance?” In her homelands, as across other parts of South and Southeast Asia, traditional shifting cultivation practices are forcibly eliminated despite their agroecological and cultural value.



Top Left: Archana Soreng learns intergenerational wisdom and her traditional lifeways from her grandmother. Odisha, India. Photo credit: Usha Soreng, 2022.

Bottom: BPAN Indigenous youth and children learn to play traditional games in Mollo, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The community has also developed a social enterprise based on traditional knowledge and food sovereignty. Photo credit: Michelin Sallata, 2022.

Aisah Mariano is a Kankana-ey youth leader from the Cordillera region of the Philippines. In her chapter “Carrying on the Fight” in *Global Indigenous Youth: Through Their Eyes* (2019), she tells a story about how she connected the dots between Indigenous culture, rights, and justice. In 2014, she was part of an urban theatre production about Indigenous fights against the World Bank-funded Chico Dam and illegal logging by the private sector in the Cordillera region. “The story was an eyeopener,” she writes. On the one hand, she was inspired by mothers who fought at the frontlines with their newborns and youth offered strategic inputs and information. As she portrayed one of the women, she felt both activated and proud that Indigenous Peoples had faced and stopped such a destructive project. Through that performance, she recalls, “I felt the power of collective actions of Indigenous Peoples; I also felt that these stories should be passed down to this generation of youth.”



Building a new generation of youth leaders



Across Asia, there are established social movements of Indigenous, peasant, landless, and fisherfolk communities who are fighting for justice. Movement leaders and civil society look to youth as the next generation of movement leaders. Naga leader Gam Shimray, Secretary-General of AIPP, reminds us that Indigenous communities draw their strength from youth. “We know this as part of our worldview,” he reflects. “We secure our future through youth.” Ally organizations are also supportive. “We have the power to shape a society where young people are active agents of change, molding our shared dreams for the years ahead,” Dr. David Ganz of RECOFTC shares.

Top right: Aisah Marino acts with theatrical troupe from Dap-ayan ti Kultura iti Kordilyera (DKK), or Peoples Center for Cordillera Culture. The performance was part of the Annual Peoples Cordillera Day on April 24 to honor the heroism of Indigenous communities. Photo credit: Rocky Ngalob, 2014.

Bottom: Youth Assembly of Tonkla Youth Network in Thailand. Photo credit: AIYP, 2019.

Many rightsholder organizations in the RRI Coalition have specific political education programs to build a second line of leadership. For example, Indonesian agrarian movement Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria (KPA) runs Genuine Agrarian Reform Education for youth, especially youth from peasant unions and Indigenous Peoples. They organize paralegal education for youth to empower them in carrying out advocacy in their territory. They deploy skilled young cadres from peasant unions to support local communities with mapping and community organizing. Youth internships and fellowships build youth awareness around key policy issues and the agrarian reform movement. KPA also build cross-movement alliances with student organizations.



Regional and global training programs also provide crucial learning spaces for emerging youth leaders. Asia Young Indigenous Peoples Network (AYIPN, formerly Asia Pacific Indigenous Youth Network or APIYN) is the oldest regional body for Indigenous youth in Asia, formally declared in 2007. It traces its roots to the first International Indigenous Youth Conference, convened by the Cordillera Peoples Alliance-Youth Commission in 2002. AYIPN convenes youth from across Asia to consolidate their power on critical themes, including land rights.



AIPP is a network of 46 Indigenous Peoples' movements from 14 countries. To build youth leadership at the regional level, they first initiated national-level training. They adapted a methodology from the Philippines where elders attend as teachers or mentors. Trainees spend their time immersed in community to answer the questions, "Where are we now?" and "What do we need to do in the future?" Once AIPP identified that sufficient youth leadership had been built at the national level, they convened a regional process. In 2019, Asia Indigenous Youth Platform (AIYP) was established at AIPP's Regional Youth Leadership Training and Youth Conference. AIYP's strategic work plan spans from mother-tongue based education and advocacy to land rights and sustainable livelihoods.

Peasant union members of KPA use drone technology in June 2023 to map Agrarian Reform Priority Location in Cisompet Village, Garut, West Java, Indonesia. Photo credit: KPA, 2023.



Regional bodies like AYIPN and AIYP are important leadership development spaces, helping youth see that issues faced in their villages, homelands, and communities are structural in nature. Through regional and global exposure, their commitment in their local fights is affirmed. They also build solidarity relationships with youth from further afield—such as North-South climate justice organizing. Through these relationships, they find opportunities to safely express their identities and embrace the identities of others.

Layers of training and leadership opportunities are only effective if youth are self-motivated and intellectually hungry. They often surprise elders, each other, and themselves in this regard. One youth organizer recalled a moment from a next-generation leadership training for Indigenous youth: "In one session, the youth had the floor to ask the elders questions. They suddenly began to raise deeply philosophical questions, such as, 'Where do we come from? Where do we go?' The elders were shocked!"



Top: AYIPN Council of Leaders reviewing their strategic plan. Photo credit: AYIPN, 2019.
Bottom: Asia Indigenous Youth Platform passing their strategic plan at the 2nd Annual Youth Conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Photo credit: AIPP, 2022.

Navigating decision-making spaces with the support of mentorship

When youth are looking for space to engage, they also need to find it. At the initiation of APIYN in 2007, nursing student and Indigenous youth leader Chester Mark Tuazon reminded fellow youth that *“it is important that the young people are provided the opportunities not only to participate in consultative processes, but also in fundamental decision making.”* Social movements integrate youth directly into their governance systems to varying degrees. This contrasts with widely adopted gender parity provisions ensuring women at upper levels of movement leadership. Youth also face barriers at local levels, in local chapters of social movements and in customary institutions. *“Although some communities are now giving Indigenous youth the freedom to speak, act, and decide on community matters, there remains much room for improvement,”* Aisah Mariano notes.

Navigating these complex dynamics requires mentorship. Mentors create space for youth to make mistakes and learn. Lakshmi, a Paniya Indigenous youth leader from South India, recognizes the importance of movement mentors

in her journey: *“I used to think of quitting. My ‘elder sisters’ would give me advice and I would just listen and listen.”* When youth are asked what inspires them, they often refer to their parents’ and grandparents’ legacy of challenging power structures in big and small ways. Leaders from established rightsholder organizations mentor their young community members to bring them into the fold. Indigenous and community mentors who are in positions of power outside of the community (for example, in government or academia) share their experiences fighting for the space they occupy and help youth to do the same. Mainstream mentors can also be pivotal by helping youth access spaces that exclude them.

From these intergenerational relationships, youth learn that they are not alone. They also develop a political awareness of the importance of intergenerational solidarity, particularly in building youth leadership. *“Empowerment of Indigenous and local community youth is a unified intergenerational effort,”* reflects Ned Tuguinay from Asia Indigenous Youth Platform and the Ifugao province of the Cordillera, Philippines. *“We are stronger when we are together.”*



Within a few short years, young people graduate from being participants in leadership trainings to facilitators. They transfer knowledge to one another and the next generation about the importance of living in harmony with mother nature and raise awareness of their fellow youth to issues like climate change. They help each other navigate power structures and interpersonal conflicts. They also help one another access resources, funding, and social capital. Youth entrepreneurs engage their communities in building resilient local economies. Many youth are directly involved in raising the next generation as well, as parents, siblings, and extended family. In this way, youth mentor other youth. In pockets, there are landmark opportunities for youth to engage with the mainstream from a position of empowerment that will support their leadership development. One example is the newly established Master’s in Indigenous Education and Development program at the Kathmandu School of Education.

However, not everyone has equal access to these opportunities or support systems. For youth to be genuinely empowered, institutions must fully embrace them as essential contributors. Executive leadership from AIPP, RECOFTC, and RRI spoke to this during an International Youth Day Celebration in 2023. They invited other organizations to stand beside them in providing young people with a platform where their voices are genuinely respected and heard. This instills confidence in young people, enabling them to take on leadership roles and bring about positive changes in their communities. Guided and supported by peers and mentors, they overcome challenges, increasingly influencing policies and advocating for change on various scales.

Inclusive coalition-building, according to Dr. Solange Bandiaky-Badji, RRI Coordinator, is crucial for intergenerational knowledge exchange and leadership. *“We need a new generation of leaders,”* she shares. *“We need international coalitions that bring together youth who are willing to listen and learn from the elders, and elders who are ready to change and grow their own knowledge.”*



PART 2: YOUTH IN ACTION

Youth are activated when they can see the threats to their lands, forests, and resources. Each context has its own challenges. In Myanmar, Indigenous youth are affected by armed conflict and repression by the government, which pushes them off their lands. In Nepal, economic opportunities abroad pull youth to precarious foreign wage labor in droves. In India, conservation areas are expanding, separating people from the ecologies they protect.

In some contexts, Ned Tuguinay reflects, youth do not even identify as youth because they are forced to grow up so fast. In Asia, there is closing space for civil society. The environmental crisis is drastically transforming communities' relationships with their ecologies. In some cases, communities have been fragmented for so long that they are now being rebuilt from scratch.

Legal recognition of collective tenure rights is an important safeguard no matter the context, and many youth are on the frontlines of this work.



Securing collective lands

Cambodia has strong recognition of Indigenous Peoples' collective rights to land, territories, and resources. However, because these protections are not implemented, Indigenous Peoples continue to face land grabbing, rights violations, deforestation, and social stigmatization. To defend their collective tenure rights, Indigenous youth in Mondulkiri province from Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association (CIYA) assist communities to produce village maps through GIS. They prepare documents for Collective Land Titling (CLT) and engage the government together with Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Alliance (CIPA) and Mondulkiri Indigenous Peoples Network (MIPN).



In Mondulkiri, Indigenous Peoples value collective land tenure over individual land titling as it protects community unity and governance. Government land rights regimes often promote individual titles instead. In collaboration with the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and Ministry of Rural Development (MRD), rightsholder organizations educate provincial and local authorities about the procedure of

collective land registration and unlock bottlenecks. CIPA encourages Indigenous youth to think critically when assessing the legal framework introduced by the government and NGOs. Youth need to understand that their territories exist beyond the area that the government gave to them and beyond the area where their community is living now.

In Kampong Thom province, Sarem Rim, Kuy Indigenous youth and CIPA staff invited his peers to think about this when they started mapping their customary territories in 2023. At present they have only 1,000 hectares due to encroachment from rubber and cassava plantations. Sarem asked, "Where is your land? Is it only what you see now? What about 35 or 50 years ago?" They replied to him, "Well, my land is not only here...it went beyond this! The companies only came in the past 10 years. In the past, our land was bigger!"

Top: Bunong Indigenous youth from Mondulkiri, Cambodia conducted the remapping of their ancestral land for the registration of Collective Land Titling (CLT). Photo credit: CIPA, 2021.

Bottom: Mapping the Laoka community, in Senmorom Municipality in Cambodia. Photo credit: CIPA, 2021.

Reclaiming identity and knowledge systems

Let's return to Nedine, whom we met in the introduction. Nedine felt called to launch the Koha Indigenous School in North Sulawesi, Indonesia after she became involved with the Mawale movement (or the Minahasa Coming Home Movement) and attended a three-week Next Generation Leaders training. Along with two other similarly inspired young leaders, Nedine initiated her work under the umbrella of the Indigenous Youth Front of the Archipelago (BPAN) with her elders' blessing. In parallel, many other Indigenous activists initiated schools across Indonesia. There are now 90 Indigenous schools across Indonesia affiliated with the national Indigenous movement AMAN with more than 30 emerging during Covid-19. In due course, Nedine became a deputy in the AMAN National Council.

As far as funds to support youth work go, youth leaders often mobilize funds from the communities themselves through Indigenous crowdsourcing. In Nedine's village, work was funded through an in-kind, pay-as-you-wish contribution called "Rukup". Education programs are often low-cost—especially when schools are run under trees instead of in buildings. This has led senior leaders to note that the youth movement is the most cost-effective wing of AMAN's grassroots initiatives. To see their movement be sustainable, youth leaders would like to see real investment in their work to build leadership capacity.

Like Nedine, youth in India, the Philippines, and Bangladesh are setting up after-school groups, schools-without-walls, tutoring centers, and other forms of education for community members. These schools often use local pedagogies, or pedagogies produced by youth for youth, as they realize they can take inspiration from their ecological surroundings. In South India, older teens are trained to work with younger children using an Indigenous curriculum. This addresses both high drop-out rates for teens by providing them with a support system and helps improve the educational opportunities for children. Organizers from South India observed that children are great agents of change at the community level. Youth organizers can build social capital with parents that can be activated later when mobilizing for forest rights and governance. Teens involved as tutors develop critical thinking and leadership skills and go on to become leaders for land rights in their communities.



Mapping the Sreythom Community, Koh Khek district. Photo credit: CIPA, 2021.

Organizing power

Lakshmi is one such youth mobilizer, who was first engaged as a tutor in her village five years ago. Now, at 25 years old, Lakshmi travels from village to village to speak at village assemblies, working with communities to document their land rights and file claims. Her co-leaders proudly point out that if anyone in the local government has questions about forest rights, they call Lakshmi. She also [writes and sings songs](#) that educate Indigenous communities in the area about their land rights, which in turn are used in the education program to engage children.

Lakshmi reflects, “When we go to the villages, we look around and ask ourselves ‘what has happened to this community and people? Why can’t they access government services? What do they not know?’” She adds, “Many people come and go, but only some people actually do the work and stay. I am one of them.” Lakshmi comes from

the most marginalized Indigenous group in the region, who have been exploited as landless daily labors for generations. She is proud to have nearly completed her high school diploma, returning to formal education in her twenties. In 2022, Lakshmi created her own organization to build the leadership of young women from her Paniya community, working on social issues such as early marriage. She shares, “Now when I think of quitting, I think of my people. They are who I see when I close my eyes. No one else will do this work for our people but us.”

Lakshmi has lived and worked in her region for her entire life. Many Indigenous youth are no longer physically close to their communities or lands. For this reason, the Indigenous Youth Front (BPAN) in Indonesia created the Homecoming Movement in 2015. Through the Homecoming Movement, some young people, like Nedine, physically return to their ancestral lands and communities to build their strength. Other young people work on transforming their mindset regardless of location. Michelin Sallata, Chairwoman of BPAN and Mengkendek Toraya youth leader, encourages young people to empower themselves and each other by asking: “Do we remember our home? Do we remember our Indigenous communities? How do we participate in advocating



from afar?” From 2015 onwards, the Homecoming Movement expanded organically to areas of work like Indigenous schools, food sovereignty, and the Smartphone Movement. Since 2021, new emphasis has been placed on gender equality and climate justice.



Apriliska “Ika” Titahena is a Honitetu Indigenous youth activist from Maluku province in Indonesia. As a schoolgirl, she had a feeling of imminent threat as timber companies grabbed her family’s land. Ika is now actively practicing homecoming. She is a consistent advocate for the restoration of the Sasi or customary law system in her Indigenous community. She believes that youth should be at the forefront of protecting Indigenous communities, especially women given the extra burdens they bear.

Economic opportunities

By building a strong bond with Indigenous territory and ancestral domain, youth understand that it is through land that they can survive in the long term. One youth leader observed that while educated youth may previously have sought the security of a government job—and would wait until offered one—lately they are more open and interested in entrepreneurship. This marks a new chapter of opportunities for youth, particularly for those who want to bridge their communities and the mainstream. Some youth are able to link their cultural work with opportunities from the market, such as ecotourism and social businesses based on local products.

Many youth initiatives also link with food sovereignty. AIYP would like to see platforms, knowledge sharing, social innovation competitions and skill building for Indigenous entrepreneurs. Social enterprises should be based in appropriate use of natural resources as per Indigenous culture and knowledge.

The expanding development sector could be an important space for Indigenous and local community youth to find employment opportunities that allow them to give back to their communities. However, youth often report that these jobs are not well paid, reflective of their aspirations, or in “promotable” roles.



Top left: After-school session in a village in Nilgiris, South India led by youth for children from their village. Photo credit: Nilgiris PVTG Federation, 2019.

Bottom: BPAN youth break ground in Sintang, West Kalimantan for forest restoration on Indigenous territories. Photo credit: BPAN Sintang, 2021.

Top: Photo credit: BPAN, 2016.

Centre: Tsumba youth attend Tsum Centennial Festival in Tsum Nubri Valley, Gorkha, Nepal.

Bottom: The Centennial Festival celebrated Indigenous knowledge systems, in particular the shagya institution. Photo credit: Angnima Lama, 2023.

They are an “insider” with community but an “outsider” with their privileged colleagues, with few pathways to leadership or proper compensation. Because of this, educated youth are more likely to pick a mainstream job to contribute financially to their communities (or to pay off educational loans). Some young people start their own NGOs so that the opportunity to meaningfully integrate their knowledge, skills, and contributions into formal civil society processes is not lost. In any of these contexts, their enthusiasm to contribute should not be exploited. This can affect their mental and physical well-being. On this topic, Archana Soreng reflects, “It is important to create safe and enabling spaces for youth, so they can speak up.”

Feeling at home

As youth grow more embedded in their communities as activists, educators, organizers, and advocates, it is important that they feel accepted. Not all elders and parents are receptive to youth initiative-taking, especially when so much effort and finances are invested in helping youth be upwardly mobile. Challenges like inter-community marriages or personal aspirations can cause conflict. What often remains is a feeling of solitude: “I wish I had more thought-partners and friends to brainstorm with,” Nedine reflects, echoing a common experience amongst youth leaders who have returned home. Youth can also feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they receive and multiple commitments. Youth human rights defenders face a particular set of conditions that need strategies for physical, legal, and digital security and mental health support.

Coalition-building and cross-identity solidarity can create new opportunities for youth to feel connected and build resilience. The Indonesian Institute for the Environment (RMI) organizes urban-rural immersion programs. Wahyu Fernandez, Executive Director of RMI, observes, “When provided a space to come together, youth connect quickly with peers in both rural and urban areas. They are eager to organize to help each other. Rural youth can learn about different challenges in the context of urban life, which is often their dream; meanwhile urban youth—who have greater access and opportunities to occupy strategic decision-making positions in the future—can better understand contexts that are alien to their urban existence and develop their social and environmental sensitivity.”



Green Camp is a forum for the exchange of socio-environmental knowledge between rural and urban youth that aims to increase solidarity, raise awareness of diversity, and ignite the critical consciousness of the younger generation. Organized by RMI, KATA, Relawan4life, and Indigenous youth from five Kasepuhan communities. Photo credit: Eki and RMI, 2022.

Building youth coalitions

Siti “Sifu” Marfuah is part of Kaum Muda Tanah Air (KATA) Indonesia. Sifu grew up in the city without hearing about the concept of a land movement. She got involved in environmental work in high school and became more political when she was invited to participate in a campaign with RMI about rights-based conservation. At age 18, she was the youngest participant in RMI’s short course on social justice and political ecology. She wants to see stronger solidarity between urban youth and rural youth.



“Urban people feel distant from these issues,” she reflects. “Therefore, Indigenous youth, local and urban youth must connect with each other to know what are the issues faced by the groups and how these are affecting each of them. Furthermore, rural-urban youth can take collective action to respond to various issues.”

Kaum Muda Tanah Air (KATA) Indonesia is a coalition of 19 organizations focusing on youth issues. Inclusion is present even in their name—“Tanah” meaning *land* and “Air” meaning *sea*. As an acronym, KATA means *voice*. This name implies the purpose of the network itself—to deliver the voice of youth and ensure it is considered in decision-making processes. Organizations including BPAN, Friends of the Earth Indonesia (WALHI), Teens Go Green Indonesia, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and many others are members of the KATA network. Their focus is amplifying collaborators’ messages and activities, youth capacity building, youth-related policy advocacy, and volunteer networking. This year, they set up governance systems and held regular online events.

Often the only Indigenous young woman from India in climate governance spaces, Archana Soreng also reflects on the importance of allyship: “Ally youth are not different than us. We are accessing spaces and know how they function to some extent, but if we work together we can reclaim the space.”



Top: At Indonesia’s mobilization for the Global Climate Strike, BPAN youth leaders came from their territories to address environmental youth groups and promote coalition-building. Photo credit: BPAN Sorong Raya, 2023. Bottom: Urban youth (KATA Interns and members of Teens Go Green) learning from Siti Sopariah about her Indigenous territory in the 2022 Green Camp. Photo credit: Eki and RMI, 2022.

PART 3: YOUTH IN LEADERSHIP

In this section, we propose five key principles for building Indigenous and local community youth leadership. These principles were drafted primarily by the youth co-authors of this report to provoke conversation, accountability, and ambition amongst youth groups and their allies. By “allies,” we refer to rightsholder organizations, international/research organizations, funding agencies, governments, and anyone who values youth leadership in collective governance of land, forests, and resources as well as the collective and inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Youth co-authors focus on the theme of youth leadership because through leadership, youth can build effective organizations, strategies, and campaigns and revitalize their culture and intergenerational relationships. These principles add to existing guidelines (such as RRI’s Land Rights Standard—see Recommended Reading in Annex 2) by offering clear direction from Indigenous and local community youth about how they want to be supported. These principles also form a common point of departure for effective and just partnerships between youth and their allies that build youth leadership both in process and in outcome.

We see this as a living text and welcome feedback.

Principle 1: Youth organizing is always intergenerational

Indigenous and communitarian worldviews teach that the relationship between elders and youth is sacred. In external spaces, such as in civil society, government, academia, and multilateral governance, there is also a stated commitment to intergenerational collaboration. In practice, intergenerational power sharing is not easy. While youth receive active support and motivation from individual mentors and elders, they often feel that they are not respected or valued in collective decision-making spaces. Elders and youth alike can build their capacities for effective intergenerational governance.

To strengthen intergenerational leadership:

- Youth priorities should be integrated into allies' organizational strategies and agendas and acted upon. Decision-makers must meaningfully include youth representatives in decision-making spaces that affect them, from local to global. Mentors should support youth to effectively exercise their leadership in these spaces.
- Rightsholder organizations should engage with youth groups from a perspective of power-sharing and mutual learning. Intergenerational conflicts around power sharing should be mediated.
- Youth organizations should support youth leaders to occupy and reclaim decision-making spaces. They should help youth prioritize their efforts and visibilize their contributions (for example through effective documentation and storytelling). They should build power with other youth groups to jointly access and exercise decision-making power.
- Ally and support organizations should support evidence and narrative-building work that helps make the case for intergenerational leadership. They should integrate youth agendas and priorities into their broader institutional frameworks and consider the implications of intergenerational leadership within their own institutions.



Principle 2: Leaders create more leaders

Experienced youth leaders look to further generations of youth leaders to bear the torch of struggle and be knowledge holders in their communities. In theory, youth leadership in organizations should have a relatively high turnover because youth leaders should “age out.” Effective youth leaders avoid being elevated as individuals and instead emphasize collective and organizational resilience.

Young people's access to youth leadership development is often linked to their existing power and privilege amongst their peers, so bringing diverse leadership requires sensitivity and intention. For example, when young women marry or become

mothers, they may be socially encouraged to go into early “retirement”. Youth leaders also note a drastic information gap between organized Indigenous and local community youth and unorganized youth, which motivates them to focus extensively on awareness raising.

For all these reasons, effective youth leaders see leadership development as ongoing and adaptive. They use a variety of tactics to engage youth, including creative and cultural organizing. Mentors and elders play a crucial role in developing the leadership of new leaders and convening learning opportunities for them.



To support the continuous regeneration of youth leadership:

- Youth organizations should integrate leadership development strategies within all lines of work. They should develop creative means of base-building and awareness-raising, with a specific focus on engaging youth from diverse identities. Youth organizations should also develop internal policies that support renewal and diversity of leadership within their organizations.
- Rightsholder organizations and their allies should continue efforts to develop new leadership through political education, mentorship, training, internships, foundational leadership courses and other opportunities. They should identify opportunities for youth to build leadership across their different lines of work, from campaigns to programs to administration. Elders, mentors, and youth leaders should continue to encourage youth to act outside of their comfort zone and take on new responsibilities.

- Allies and support agencies should be mindful of the tendency to over-solicit individual youth leaders. They are invited to refocus on broader organizational resilience. In addition to general support for leadership development, they should provide support that specifically enables youth organizations to develop diverse leadership (for example, resources for multilingual organizing or childcare during trainings).

Principle 3: Youth learn by leading and allies lead by trusting them

Youth leadership grows when youth have space and support to follow their passion or inspiration and contribute to their communities. Youth strategies are often holistic. They connect culture and advocacy with cross-cutting issues like climate change, gender, and livelihoods. They balance long-term resilience work with meeting urgent community needs, as seen through many youth-led responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. Sometimes these strategies diverge from what elders or allies are accustomed to (or do not fit into the rubric for projectized funding). But youth feel empowered when they know that they have the trust and blessing of others—and space to take risks and make mistakes.

It is important that youth work be led by and for youth because when youth are supported in their leadership across scales and issues, system-wide change can occur. For example, the youth-led and initiated Youth Climate Justice Fund opened its first round of funding in 2023. Their funding will in turn reinforce grassroots youth-led processes. Youth organizations and allies play a crucial role of building a shared strategy amongst dispersed youth initiatives, resource mobilization, and identifying opportunities for consolidation and collaboration.

To ensure that youth have space to learn by leading:

- Elders and mentors should encourage youth to trust themselves, take calculated risks and test innovative ideas. In return, youth should remain open and curious for input from their elders and mentors.
- Youth organizations should use their convening power to mobilize, consolidate, and deepen youth strategy. They should offer youth leaders a ‘home’ where they can be supported to identify context-specific opportunities and tactics, map resources, and network. They should connect youth with resources, technical expertise, and platforms to amplify their work.



- Allies and support agencies should make seed funding and technical assistance available to youth for strategy development. They should welcome proposals that have holistic strategies so that youth leaders are not forced into a projectized mindset. More broadly, they should follow fit-for-purpose guidance that lowers barriers to accessing funds for youth organizations. They should directly fund youth organizations and build their capacity for financial management.

Principle 4: Youth safety is a shared duty

Indigenous Peoples and local communities experience degrees of discrimination, exploitation, and violence, which is passed on to youth through intergenerational trauma. Intersecting identities (for example, gender, ability, or sexuality) also affects how youth are treated both within and outside their communities. These experiences politicize youth and motivate their fight for justice, sometimes inviting even more criminalization and violence. For this reason, youth safety is a crucial principle for any initiative organizing Indigenous or local community youth.



How youth define “safety” will always be context specific. However, a few key themes are clear. First, protecting youth human rights defenders (and their communities) is a priority. Rightsholder organizations already mobilize support in the form of emergency funding and legal support, and youth want to see these expanded. They also want to see mental health support and trauma-informed practices. Second, some youth experience poor interpersonal

treatment within organizations, both as volunteers and as employees. They are expected to make unhealthy sacrifices that put them at risk of burnout or financial insecurity. Their self-esteem and motivation are eroded when they are put into competition with other youth, or their credibility is repeatedly challenged. Youth want their tireless contributions to be valued. They expect respect and justice to be modeled within organizations, just as they are being fought for outside.

To promote youth safety:

- Youth organizations and their allies should regularly assess risks to youth and allocate resources for mitigation and response. Youth should be able to engage in organizing work at the level of risk they are comfortable with. Youth should have access to means to address risks they face, such as digital security training or legal support.

- Youth organizations and their allies should have structural safeguards in place that ensure respect, fair treatment, and healthy interpersonal relationships. These structural safeguards should also translate into cultures of transparency and inclusion within organizations.
- When conflicts occur, youth organizations and their allies should find methods for mediation and conflict resolution. These methods should emphasize repair of relationships and regeneration of trust. Abuse of power should not be tolerated.
- Youth compensation should be integrated into all youth organizing projects to ensure that youth of all class backgrounds can grow in leadership.
- Healthy balance and boundary setting should be modelled and encouraged. Overworking and burnout should not be normalized. This will encourage youth who are caretakers, parents, or otherwise time or resource limited to engage more fully.

Principle 5: Solidarity is sacred

Youth work at different scales (for example, local, national, global) and on cross-cutting issues such as climate, gender, and livelihoods. They are keen to connect with youth of differing backgrounds to build collective power. This can look like urban-rural exchange, North-South alliances, and Indigenous-non-Indigenous solidarity. Relationships built through these processes can be medicine for the isolation that youth leaders can feel at times, even across class, region, language, or power differences. Moments of connection can produce friendships and collaborations that have ripple effects for years to come. This report is one such example.

For youth, transforming power relations through these solidarities is a critical part of their fight. Cross-class, cross-community, and multistakeholder solidarity particularly help youth grow. They teach both parties that while differences exist, they do not have to define us. Resource redistribution, joint campaigns, and learning and accountability across groups are all examples of solidarity. Youth observe that groups often resort to ‘us and them’ thinking as a self-defense mechanism, leading to fragmentation between groups.

Youth seek to operate differently, both because it is strategic and because it is fulfilling. Youth leaders’ commitment to solidarity and inclusion comes from their own lived experiences. They have found support from unlikely corners throughout their lives and want to give back. They feel that the only way to win is to win together. This aligns with Indigenous and communitarian worldviews that teach that all of nature is interconnected in reciprocity.



What can abundant solidarity look like?

- Youth and their allies should consider what they have to offer, no matter how “small” it may feel. They should recognize that every contribution builds our collective power and strengthens our relationships. Sometimes all that is required is embracing someone’s identities and acknowledging their value.
- Youth organizations should continue to explore connections between their work and broader fights (for example, climate justice, gender justice, labor rights) and showing up for others when they have capacity. Allies should help connect youth to one another so they can amplify their impact across scales, issues, and identities.
- When entering solidarity relationships, roles should be clear and youth should be careful that their counterparts are acting with good intentions. When harm is done, it should be acknowledged, and repair should be sought.
- Youth and allies with relative power and privilege should hold themselves and their peers accountable to ambitious and material redistribution of power and resources. They should be able to process discomfort and engage in continuous learning. They should actively leverage their social capital and networks in solidarity.
- Funding agencies should build just and meaningful relationships with their youth counterparts. They should fulfill their promises to support collective tenure rights and organize their peers to raise their collective ambition. They should contribute beyond-the-check (for example, time, knowledge, skills, access). They should be transparent about their grantmaking ethics and values (for example, whose land, labor, and resources generated the wealth that is used for grantmaking and how this informs their strategies) so that youth can assess their alignment.

CONCLUSION

“Grassroots organizers will always say, ‘I am only protecting my land and people.’ Is there something wrong with not allowing a mining project to enter the community since it will only destroy the environment and the people?” asks AYIPN coordinator, Aisah Mariano. “As an Indigenous youth, our struggle for self-determination and protection of ancestral land is right and just.”

Twelve time-zones away, Ayisha Siddiqa is a member of the UN Secretary-General’s Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change. She became a climate activist because *“when your land and resources are taken from you... when there are health crises because of land grabbing and resulting poverty, it politicizes you.”*

Aisah and Ayisha work in different contexts and organize different bases. Both teach their fellow youth that action is a spiritual responsibility from their ancestors. Ayisha reflects, *“When you consider the river and all the species around you as extensions of your family, protecting them is as important as protecting your mother and father.”* For Aisah in the Philippines, this framing is poignant. Aisah’s mother and community health activist Rachel Mariano was imprisoned on trumped up charges, including murder. She was finally acquitted of all charges and released after more than a year in prison. Now, Indigenous groups are being labeled as terrorist organizations and their bank accounts closed. This in turn would be poignant for Ayisha, who witnessed the United States’ War on Terror bring terror to the doorstep of her Pakistani community.

Aisah and Ayisha’s stories demonstrate that young people understand the stakes, often because they have experienced them. They understand that issues are interconnected and deeply rooted because they have fought to untangle and address them. Their fights connect them to their communities, to their lands, and to one another. But most importantly, they see their fight and the fight of their elders, mentors, allies, and peers as one. They are ready to consolidate the courage, commitment, and wisdom it takes to win together.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like the youth journeys documented in this report, the story of this document is one of twisting routes, patient collaboration, and transformative mentorship. We are immensely grateful to all co-authors for believing in this project and taking on the challenge of developing a shared message about intergenerational governance of collective resources.

In 2019, AMAN leaders Nedine Sulu, Mina Setra, Jhontoni Tarihoran, and Eny Setyaningsih from LifeMosaic, planted the seeds of this report over coffee with Laura Valencia (RRI) at the Southeast Asia Regional Forum on The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Rights-based Sustainable Development. They sprouted in 2020 when Laura and OCA intern Christian Phomsouvanh kicked-off a youth mapping process within the RRI Asia program. We are very grateful to Aisah Czarriane Mariano, Angnima Lama, Archana Soreng, Chandra Tripura, Charu Bikash Tripura, Detty Saluling, Ferry Widodo, Florence Daguitan, Jakob Siringoringo, Josua Situmorang, Kalfein Wuisa, Pravin Mote, Preity Gurung, Sobha Madhan, Soumitra Ghosh, and Tshering Ongmu Sherpa for participating in an initial round of mapping youth activities and strategies. In this process, more seeds of ideas were added to our plot, laying the foundation for an expanded vision.

In December 2020, RRI presented preliminary findings to youth groups based on an initial report. Initial report drafting was led by Laura Valencia, with inputs from Anne-Sophie Gindroz, Thomas Worsdell, and Kundan Kumar. Archana Soreng, Jakob Siringoringo, Josua Situmorang, Wahyubinatar Fernandez, and Sobha Madhan invested time in early drafts of the paper. Anne-Sophie Gindroz reviewed an early translation into Bahasa Indonesia.

Efforts to reinstate the process took root in 2023 when RECOFTC, AIPP, and AIYP formally joined RRI in the process of developing a regional youth program. Our first collaboration was to celebrate International Youth Day. Archana Soreng, Kim Falyao, Ned Tuguinay, Sabba Maharjan, Siti Marfuah, Michelin Sallata, Deepak Minz and many more Indigenous and local community youth showed inspiring leadership during this process, which reinforced and shaped this report’s messages. Mayan Mojado, Janalezza Esteban, Mary Ann Llanza, Nipuna Kumbalathara, Ke Jung, Charu Bikash, Edith Philip and Laura Valencia—and many others from RECOFTC, RRI, and AIYP—helped irrigate and fertilize the collaboration.

AIYP, AYIPN, BPAN, and KATA tended to this report throughout its growth. We are particularly grateful to Sabba Maharjan and Michelin Sallata for their attention and care throughout the review process. The finalization process was housed at RRI, including communications support by Nicole Harris and research support by OCA intern Edith Philip. Laura Valencia and Archana Soreng were the lead editors of the report, harvesting insights from conversation upon conversation with youth leaders and allies, as well as

their own experiences as youth organizers in their respective contexts. Kris Ayu Madina joined in to glean the final fruits, organizing information for annexes, case studies, and photos. Mayan Mojado, Mary Ann Llanza, and Peach Kanpakdee at RECOFTC partnered with RRI to provide communications and administration support to the process. Rose Nierras, Kamala Thapa, Dewi Sutejo provided moral support to get us across the finish line. Alain Frechette, Michelle Sonkoue, David Kroeker-Maus, and Nicole Harris at RRI provided valuable feedback on drafts. Solange Bandiaky-Badji, Gam Shimray, Ke Jung, and David Ganz were instrumental in providing institutional support, and we are grateful for their commitment to intergenerational leadership.

Designer Supriya Tirkey turned our harvest into a feast through her illustration and design. She accompanied our collaborative process with care and openness, for which we are very grateful.

Translation into Bahasa Indonesia, Hindi and Nepali would not be possible without our team of seasoned translators including Ayu Septiari, Khim Ghale, and Hridayesh Joshi and translation reviewers Kris Ayu Madina, Kamala Thapa, and Gunjal Ikir Munda. Nicole Harris coordinated this complex multilingual buffet.

But before we eat, we must take a pause to acknowledge the generations of grassroots leaders who have transitioned from youth to elder to ancestor. Your wisdom is the sunshine from which all things grow, including the multitude of stories that are yet to be written.



A forest mapping trainer works with Michelin Sallata to review a map of tree species. With the use of spatial mapping technology, Indigenous youth can monitor tree health on their territories. Photo credit: Tri Nepa Fay, 2023.

ANNEX 1: RECOMMENDED READING

Indigenous and Local Community Youth in Asia

- The comic book “[Let’s Go Back Home](#)” was co-produced by the Mae Yod village, Pgakenyaw Association for Sustainable Development (PASD) and Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), with the aim of creating love, respect, and pride among the Indigenous youth for their origin and cultural identity and generating a deeper understanding of Indigenous Peoples’ lives and livelihoods among the public. Their traditional way of life and culture which is closely intertwined with nature, is illustrated by the Pgakenyaw Indigenous Peoples who have their own language, culture, traditions, and rich knowledge to manage their own community and natural resources sustainably.
- The [report](#) of the founding conference of the 2007 Asia-Pacific Indigenous Youth Network (APIYN), offers rich storytelling and narrative from an event with more than 100 participants from 17 countries in Asia-Pacific. Aiming to harness the dynamism and idealism of Indigenous youth for international environmental campaigns and their greater participation in activities of the United Nations, the conference consisted of three major parts: forest and convention on biodiversity, leadership training, and preparatory meetings for the UNPFII07 and the APIYN assembly proper. The report covers each of these sections in detail, with an additional focus on gender.
- “[Back to the Village: Indigenous Education in Indonesia](#)” is a documentary film of Indigenous educators gathering from across Indonesia and the Philippines in Kasepuhan Ciptegalar, West Java. They discuss the problems of the existing education system and develop a vision of the future how it is important for Indigenous Peoples to start their own education—their Indigenous education which methods and contents are self-determined.
- The book chapter “[Carrying on the Fight](#)” portrays the four issues Indigenous Peoples in Asia are facing from the perspective of Aisah, Indigenous youth, who has been a part of the Indigenous Peoples’ struggle in the Philippines and engaging with other Indigenous youth organizations in Asia as part of the Asia Young Indigenous Peoples Network (AYIPN). She elaborates the answers from questions of “why” and “how” Indigenous youth can better the situation of Indigenous Peoples and become present and future leaders. Questions are later elaborated by presenting good practices that have been done by various youth groups, including members of AYIPN, in local, national, regional, and international contexts.
- “[Empowering Indigenous and Local Community Youth for a Sustainable World](#)” is the recording of International Youth Day Celebration that was conducted on August 11, 2023, led by youth organizations from Indonesia, Nepal, and India (KATA, BPAN, YFIN, and NPVTGF) and regional group Asia Indigenous Youth Platform (AIYP), with technical support from RECOFTC, RRI, and AIPP. For 2.5 hours, Indigenous and local communities across the Asia region shared their perspectives, experiences, and expertise on activism, land rights, and sustainable land management highlighting the importance of intergenerational knowledge passed down from elders to youth, enabling Indigenous Peoples and local communities to live sustainably and harmoniously with nature.

Collective Land Rights in Asia

- The report “[Reconciling Conservation and Biodiversity Goals with Community Land Rights in Asia](#)” was co-authored by 20+ Indigenous and local community organizations in South and Southeast Asia. It frames conservation beyond being an issue of natural resource management and highlights the question of governance, autonomy, and sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to achieve their self-determined development aspirations. It brings together data and stories from communities on the ground to re-position global human rights and conservation discourses at the center of Asia’s unique political realities.

- The brief [“UNDER THE COVER OF COVID: New Laws in Asia Favor Business at the cost of Indigenous Peoples’ and Local Communities’ Land and Territorial Rights”](#) examines legislative developments in India, Indonesia, and the Philippines during Covid-19, highlighting the undermining of sustainable human-environment interactions and the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities over their customary territories. It summarizes the legislative developments through three themes: opportunistic advancements, corporate stimulus and compensation, and top-down pandemic solutions that undermine Indigenous Peoples’ and local communities’ rights.

Global Analysis

- The [Land Rights Standard](#) was developed by the Indigenous Peoples Major Group for Sustainable Development (IPMG) and Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), with the support of Forest Peoples Programme (FPP) and Global Landscapes Forum (GLF). It has been endorsed by 73 institutions, organizations, companies, and investors. It is a set of best practice principles for recognizing and respecting the land and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and Afro-descendant Peoples in landscape restoration and management, conservation, climate action, and development projects and programs.
- The second edition of [“Who Owns the World’s Land?”](#) reports on progress over the first five years (2015–2020) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement, and the Land Rights Now target to double the area of community-owned land by providing updated data on the extent of lands legally recognized as designed for and owned by Indigenous Peoples and local communities in 73 countries covering 85 percent of global lands. It also revisits and expands upon estimates of the land area that Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities traditionally hold and use, but to which their rights are not yet legally recognized by national governments.
- The [“Next Generation Leadership Project”](#) by LifeMosaic features projects that are creating and hosting unique trainings for Indigenous youth, focused on awakening their calling to defend their territories and providing them with the skills to facilitate participatory processes grounded in their own cultures. This work supports the emergence of a new generation of grassroots community leaders, movement-builders, and agents of change and supports communities to put into practice their self-determined development using over 75 methods for participation, many of which are from Indigenous Peoples themselves.
- The [Youth Climate Justice Study](#) has a reading list of articles, analyses, and reports from 1999 to 2022 that have been written on the evolution and impact of youth-led climate justice movements. It aims to serve as a useful resource for people working within the movement or its funders. A hyperlink is provided for each article, although some of the academic papers are behind paywalls or require a request to be made to the author, but many of them are easy to download. Most of the academic research and grey literature cited here dates to 2019 or later, reflecting the upsurge in global youth climate organizing during this time.

ANNEX 2: ABOUT THE CO-AUTHORS



[The Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago, or Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara \(AMAN\)](#), was established on March 17, 1999, as a forum for Indigenous Peoples to fight for their customary rights to channel the aspirations and interests of Indigenous Peoples in all aspects of life, for the realization of a just and prosperous life of Indigenous Peoples. AMAN’s mission is to empower, mobilize and protect the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples, preserve culture and the environment for present and future generations. And provide innovative solutions by utilizing indigenous values, knowledge, and solidarity to advance social justice, ecological sustainability, and human well-being. Currently, AMAN consists of 2,565 Indigenous Peoples communities with a population of ± 21 million, 21 Regional Managers, 110 Regional Managers, 3 Wing Organizations, 2 Autonomous Bodies, and 2 Economic institutions. AMAN members and administrators are spread across 33 provinces in Indonesia, 7 regions: Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Bali-Nusra Tenggara, Maluku, and Papua. Indigenous Peoples.



[Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact \(AIPP\)](#) is a regional organization founded in 1992 by Indigenous Peoples’ movements. AIPP is committed to the cause of promoting and defending Indigenous Peoples’ rights and human rights and articulating issues of relevance to Indigenous Peoples. It aims to secure the rights of and enable the progressive growth of Indigenous Peoples in Asia through effective engagements, innovative partnerships, and inclusive actions to empower, uplift, and secure the rights, dignity, and adaptive capacities of communities. At present, AIPP has 46 members from 14 countries in Asia, four of which are Indigenous youth organization members. AIPP is based in Chiang Mai, Thailand.



[Asia Indigenous Youth Platform \(AIYP\)](#) was established in 2019 with the vision of creating a sustainable world where Indigenous youth play a leading role in achieving respect and equality for Indigenous Peoples through the full recognition of their inherent rights. In working toward this vision, AIYP, with the support of Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP), UNESCO Bangkok, and UNDP, has served as a network for young Indigenous leaders from 12 countries in South and Southeast Asia to address the most pressing issues facing Indigenous youth and their communities. Since its inception, AIYP has hosted an array of activities designed to empower Indigenous youth voices and take action.



[Asia Young Indigenous Peoples Network \(AYIPN\), formerly Asia Pacific Indigenous Youth Network \(APIYN\)](#), was established in 2002 as a result of the first International Indigenous Youth Conference (IIYC). AYIPN is committed to promoting and facilitating the friendship, unity, solidarity, and cooperation among Indigenous youths of Asia and other parts of the world in the struggle for self-determination, food sovereignty, security and national patrimony, cultural integrity, and pride of heritage. The network is especially committed to advancing the rights of Indigenous youth to self-determination, education, and employment directed toward the improvement of their life as individuals and as part of the community. AYIPN is based in Baguio City, Philippines.



Barisan Pemuda Adat Nusantara (BPAN), or the Indigenous Youth Front of the Archipelago was founded in 2012. It is the autonomous Indigenous youth organization in Indonesia that acts as a forum for Indigenous youth for promoting unity, regeneration, and capacity building. At present, BPAN has over 8,000 members who are between 15–30 years old. With its members, BPAN promotes solidarity and aspirations at various levels, encourages creative and economic independence, and develops Indigenous schools and curricula based on traditional wisdoms, and values. In addition, BPAN has been actively contributing to the Indigenous movement in Indonesia as well as at regional and international level through documenting, promoting, and reviving Indigenous knowledge and practices.

Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Alliance (CIPA)



Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Alliance (CIPA) is an alliance of Indigenous communities and peoples' organizations, associations, and networks established in 2011. Formalized in late 2015, it serves as the first Indigenous Peoples network and platform for solidarity, cooperation, and coordination of actions for the promotion and assertion of the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples in Cambodia. It has six Indigenous People Organizations (IPO) as members which have a shared vision and strategy to address issues Indigenous Peoples face in the country. CIPA is committed to strengthening the stewardship and organizational development of each of the IPOs while also advocating for Indigenous Peoples' rights nationally and internationally.

Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association (CIYA) was established by a group of Cambodian Indigenous students in Phnom Penh in 2005. CIYA works on building capacity of Indigenous youth regarding the relevant international and national laws, human rights documentation and advocacy, peacebuilding, accountability, transparency, and integrity. It has members from eight provinces of Cambodia. All have been actively contributing to the Indigenous communities' struggles on land rights, particularly to agribusiness companies and hydropower projects. It has around 750 members, approximately 300 of which are involved in all CIYA activities and the remainders are based and work in eight provinces of Cambodia.



Center for Indigenous Peoples' Research Education and Development (CIPRED) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization established in 2011 in Kathmandu, Nepal. It is devoted to serve the needs of the Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth of Nepal for the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' customary institutions and self-governance systems that contribute to the sustainable management of the natural resources, ecosystems, biodiversity, and climate change resilience. CIPRED also advocates for Indigenous Peoples' Sustainable Self Determined Development (IPSSDD) through research, education, and development initiatives in Nepal. In 2023, CIPRED was instrumental in ensuring the establishment of a Master in Indigenous Education and Development Program at Kathmandu University.



Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) emerged from the idea that forest users from all parts of Nepal should be linked to strengthen the role of users in policy making processes. Since its inception in 1995, FECOFUN has grown into a social movement organization with about 14 million people represented across 77 districts, all of whom are forest users. As of now, 22,415 Community Forestry Users Groups (CFUGs) covering 2.9 million households have been federated into FECOFUN and are protecting more than 2.3 million hectares of forest. Apart from this, other Community Based Forest Management Groups (such as leasehold forestry groups, religious forestry groups, buffer zone and traditional forest management groups) are also affiliated with FECOFUN.



Kaum Muda Tanah Air (KATA) Indonesia was formed in 2021 by 19 organizations focusing on youth issues to consolidate youth movements related to social, political, environmental, and agrarian issues. It aims so that the aspirations, participation, and role of youth can influence various decision-making and public policies by creating comfortable and safe spaces to express opinions, exchange knowledge and skills, and build solidarity; providing an information platform for youth initiatives/actions that become a reference for various parties; and opening sustainable economic empowerment opportunities. In a biannual cycle, Kaum Muda Tanah Air (KATA) Indonesia holds youth voice surveys, youth consultations and congress activities which, in 2021, successfully reached 1,083 youth and engaged 561 youth from various regions.



Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria (KPA), or Consortium for Agrarian Reform, is an Indonesian agrarian reform movement founded in 1994. It comprises 135 people's organizations and NGOs across 23 provinces. The majority are peasant unions, fisherfolk unions, and Indigenous Peoples' organizations aiming to fight for agrarian justice and welfare through the implementation of genuine agrarian reform. KPA's main aims include strengthening peoples' organizations, national policy advocacy, conflict resolution, and research campaigns. Over the past 28 years, KPA has become a pioneer in the struggle for agrarian reform. It has established relations with other social movements to establish an agrarian emergency response system in which young cadres are trained as paralegals. KPA is based in Jakarta, Indonesia.



Nilgiris Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups' Federation (NPVTGF) is a right-based initiative established in 2014 by community leaders from nine Adivasi (Indigenous Peoples) that are living in Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, India. It is a mountain area with a pocket of reserved forest, timber industry, tea plantations, and tourism which all play a role on Indigenous land. NPVTGF is committed to fighting for vulnerable tribal groups' rights to land and forests by focusing on the implementation of the Forest Rights Act; the right to representation in government, especially in district-level Tribal Development Council spaces; the right to education in Adivasi language; and also collect information about alienated land in the Nilgiris.



RECOFTC is an international non-profit organization working toward a future where resilient communities with respected rights thrive in forest landscapes that they manage sustainably and equitably. They take a long-term, landscape-based, and inclusive approach to supporting local communities to secure their land and resource rights, stop deforestation, find alternative livelihoods, and foster gender equality. With more than 36 years of experience working with people and forests, RECOFTC has built trusting relationships with partners at all levels, from multilateral institutions and governments to local communities and the private sector. Their innovations, knowledge, and initiatives are enabling countries to improve forest governance, mitigate and adapt to climate change, achieve the UN Global Goals, and implement the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework. RECOFTC operates in the Asia-Pacific region, having country program offices in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand, and Viet Nam.



Rights and Resources Initiative is a global Coalition of more than 150 organizations dedicated to advancing the forestland and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, local communities, and the women within these communities. Members capitalize on each other's strengths, expertise, and geographic reach to achieve solutions more effectively and efficiently. RRI leverages the power of its global Coalition to amplify the voices of local peoples and proactively engage governments, multilateral institutions, and private sector actors to adopt institutional and market reforms that support the realization of rights. By advancing a strategic understanding of the global threats and opportunities resulting from insecure land and resource rights, RRI develops and promotes rights-based approaches to business and development and catalyzes effective solutions to scale rural tenure reform and enhance sustainable resource governance. RRI is coordinated by the Rights and Resources Group, a non-profit organization based in Washington, DC.



The Indonesian Institute for Forest and Environment (RMI) is a non-profit focusing on community-based sustainable management of natural assets. It aims to realize people's sovereignty, women and men, over land and natural assets for sustainable livelihood. Since its establishment in 1992, RMI has been working through community organizing, action research, public campaigns, policy advocacy, and agrarian entrepreneurship development based on local biodiversity and culture. RMI joins various coalitions and actively networks with institutions at the local, national, and international levels in supporting their priority issues that include Indigenous Peoples, youth and land, women and natural assets management, community leadership, critical education, and local economy development.



Youth Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (YFIN) is the national level umbrella organization of Indigenous Youth in Nepal. YFIN has network members in 50 district chapters and 30 independent ethnic youth organizations are affiliated in this federation. YFIN mostly work on Indigenous youth issues such as inclusion, Indigenous rights, land rights, climate change and adaptation, and sustainable development. They also advocate to Government of Nepal for an Indigenous-friendly national youth policy and strategy. While aiming for their goals, YFIN are continuously strengthening member organizations and district branches through training and capacity building programs. YFIN is based in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Recommended Citation

Asia Indigenous Youth Platform, Asia Young Indigenous Peoples Network, Barisan Pemuda Adat Nusantara, Kaum Muda Tanah Air (KATA) Indonesia, Rights and Resources Initiative, Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Alliance, Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association, Center for Indigenous Peoples' Research and Development, Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal, Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria, Nilgiris Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups Federation, RECOFTC, RMI-The Indonesian Institute for Forest and Environment, Youth Federation of Indigenous Nationalities. 2023. Learning and Living our Elders' Wisdom: Youth Power for Land, Forests, and Territories in Asia. Rights and Resources Initiative, Washington, DC. doi: 10.53892/QFBW3755.

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