Afro-descendant Peoples' Territories in Biodiversity Hotspots across Latin America and the Caribbean

BARRIERS TO INCLUSION IN CONSERVATION POLICIES

Introduction

Afro-descendant Peoples are an integral part of the history and the economic, political, and social processes of nation building and development in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to Cecchini et al. (2021), national censuses estimate that 21 percent of the region's total population—just over 134 million people—are Afro-descendants.

Despite significant legislative progress at the international and national levels recognizing cultural and ethnic diversity and the rights of Afro-descendant Peoples, social and economic conditions are still drastically unequal and there are large information and recognition gaps that affect their rights.

One of the greatest setbacks of Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean is the lack of systematic and comprehensive information on the legal recognition of their territorial rights. This information gap is a defining feature of the web of socioeconomic inequality that obscures the political, economic, and social potential of Afro-descendant Peoples, as well as their role and contributions to mitigating and adapting to climate change and protecting the biodiversity of strategic ecosystems. The lack of systematic information has been, therefore, a major obstacle to raising awareness of and resolving the injustices of ethnic-racial inequality. In view of this, Afro-descendant Peoples and their organizations have worked tirelessly for their lawsuits and land rights to be recognized, both nationally and internationally. (ECLAC and UNFPA 2020).

In the last four decades, the vindication of collective land rights has made important headway in countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Honduras. However, Afro-descendant Peoples throughout Latin America and the Caribbean continue to struggle to ensure compliance with national and international legal instruments for the protection and recognition of their land rights. They continue to demand recognition as key actors with their own unique voice in the climate change debate, in arenas such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Since 2019, several Afro-descendant Peoples' organizations have undergone a process to strengthen regional coordination, focusing on political analysis and advocacy for the right to land. A fundamental step in the journey towards coordinating and vindicating the right to territory is the need to close the systematic and comprehensive information gap regarding the legal recognition of territorial rights. In response to this need, an initial effort was made to map the territorial presence, land, and territories of Afro-descendant Peoples in the region. A crucial effort that demonstrates the territorial presence of more than 134 million Afro-descendant People in the region and shows how significant Afro-descendant territories are in terms of climate change mitigation and adaptation and biodiversity conservation.

Organizations such as the Process of Black Communities (PCN) in Colombia and the National Coordination of Articulation of Rural Black Quilombola Communities (CONAQ) in Brazil, along with strategic support from the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) and technical and cartographic support from the Universidad Javeriana's Observatory for Ethnic and Rural Territories (OTEC),

Cover photo: A member of the Palenque community of the Caribbean región of Colombia: the first free Afro-descendant village in the Americas. Photo by Wiliam Martinez, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI).

mapped the territorial presence of Afro-descendant Peoples in 16 countries in the region (Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela).[1] This was done in coordination with different Afro-descendant grassroots and research organizations.

The study on biodiversity in Afro-descendant territories

This study seeks to raise awareness of the territorial presence of Afro-descendant Peoples in the 16 countries mentioned above. The aim was to progressively identify the presence, titled and untitled lands, and territories of Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean and to advocate for the recognition of their collective tenure rights. Although Afro-descendant Peoples in the region have been fighting for a place in international climate and conservation debates, not having defined boundaries for their ancestral lands has been an obstacle to adequately establishing how important their territories are for protecting biodiversity and dealing with complex challenges such as ecosystem degradation, loss of food systems, and other environmental problems.

Among the main results are:

- Afro-descendant Peoples' territorial presence has been identified across 205 million hectares of land. Of this area, Afro-descendant Peoples have legal recognition of collective land tenure rights on only 5 percent of the mapped areas—representing a little more than 9.4 million hectares.
- Land cover with the least anthropogenic transformation occupies 77 percent of the mapped area, which indicates that the territories identified with the presence of Afro-descendant Peoples have mostly natural land cover and are part of areas considered to be biodiversity hotspots.
- The most representative ecosystems inhabited by Afro-descendant Peoples are: tropical rainforests (43 percent), savannahs (28 percent), and agricultural production areas (22 percent).
- The tropical rainforests in the mapped Afro-descendant territories account for almost 87 million hectares.[2]
- In Belize, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama, 100 percent of Afro-descendant territories are in areas considered to be biodiversity hotspots.[3] In the case of Colombia, the overlap is 96 percent, and in Chile, Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Paraguay, and Suriname, it is less than 50 percent.
- A total of 1,271 national and international protected areas were identified in proximity to or overlapping with Afro-descendant Peoples' land at different levels of legal recognition. Sixty-seven percent of these are in Brazil in certified municipalities with the presence of Quilombola communities without collective titling. The remaining 33 percent are located mainly in Colombia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Suriname in demarcated lands with the presence of Afro-descendant Peoples.
- All 16 countries have public biodiversity policies in line with the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, but not all of them consider Afro-descendant Peoples to be stakeholders in the Aichi[4] target discussions, nor do they include their territories in the national reports submitted

in recent years as a follow-up to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Only Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Suriname reported the contributions of Afro-descendant Peoples' territories.

- The ecosystems with the greatest deficit in boundary lines are floodplains and coastal-marine ecosystems. Even so, this study was able to identify 235,719.5 hectares with a presence of Afro-descendant Peoples in 13 of the 16 countries analyzed on the Pacific, Caribbean, and Atlantic coasts.

The results of the study are presented under the following scheme: i) cartographic identification of territories with an Afro-descendant territorial presence, distinguishing areas with legal recognition, areas in the titling process, and those without marked boundaries; ii) qualitative and quantitative analysis of the ecosystem coverage and areas of rural territories inhabited by Afro-descendant Peoples; iii) analysis of the degree of recognition of Afro-descendant Peoples as decisive actors in biodiversity conservation policies; iv) community conservation initiatives; v) and recommendations.

Fishermen of the Caribbean region of Colombia. Photo by Wiliam Martinez, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI).

I. Titled territories and territories awaiting recognition

This study has identified 205 million hectares of land with a significant presence of Afro-descendant Peoples in the countries analyzed. Yet Afro-descendant Peoples have full legal recognition on only 5 percent of this area. Table 1 shows three different scenarios for the analysis of the number of hectares mapped:

- Some countries report the area of titled territories and have map layers for analysis.
- In some cases, countries and social organizations report data on the area of land awaiting titles—which have been claimed by the state through administrative and legal channels—but do not always have areas with marked boundaries available.
- In a significant number of countries, the cartographic area corresponds to municipalities or other political-administrative units in which the presence of Afro-descendant Peoples has been confirmed. The most notable case is Brazil, where a database of municipalities with Quilombola communities is available for an area of more than 170 million hectares. This number of hectares can be assumed as the quantitative dimension of the Quilombola territories since neither the social organizations nor the state have marked boundaries for the lands occupied and claimed in collective titling.

Table 1. Afro-descendant Peoples' lands with legal recognition, title requests, and without marked boundaries

Titled land		Territories claimed with requests for recognition and boundaries**		Areas identified by municipality***	
Country	Area (ha)	Country	Area (ha)	Country	Area (ha)
Colombia	5,705,247.5	Brazil	745,871.0	Brazil	173,199,644.9
Nicaragua	1,223,566.7	Colombia	678,162.5	Suriname	4,864,519.2
Brazil	2,148,713.1	Ecuador	176,143.0	Mexico	3,910,153.4
Ecuador	121,460.9	Suriname[5]	---------[1]	Panama	2,815,918.7
Bolivia	228,878.0	Chile	1,546.0	Peru	2,737,600.9
Honduras	32,000.0			Honduras	2,170,745.8
				Belize	1,499,761.0
				Costa Rica	1,159,590.0
				Venezuela	973,226.1
				Guatemala	847,685.3
	9,459,866.20		1,601,722.50		194,178,845.30

* The lands titled in Honduras to the Garífuna people are recorded in administrative documents, but there are no marked boundaries.

** Areas with marked boundaries where Afro-descendant Peoples are awaiting titles, but without significant progress in the formalization of collective tenure.

*** Corresponds to political-administrative boundaries for areas where Afro-descendant Peoples are present or have settled. These areas are overestimated because they do not necessarily occupy the entire geographic unit. In all cases, there is a significant information gap. The municipality category is used in Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Venezuela. While the data corresponds to districts in Belize, Panama, Peru, and Suriname. In Costa Rica, provinces are used.

[1] In the 2006 ruling of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the Saramaka People vs. Suriname case, the court ordered the state to mark the boundaries and grant collective land titles to the Saramaka people in accordance with their customary law, and through free, prior and informed consent. Sixteen years after the ruling was announced, official information on the boundaries and recognition of their territorial rights remains non-existent. The Amazon Conservation Team has mapped nearly 7 million hectares of Indigenous and Maroon or Cimarrón Peoples' territories, but there is no clarity on what percentage corresponds to Afro-descendant Peoples' lands awaiting collective titling.

Of the nearly 9.5 million hectares titled, 78 percent—detailed in Table 1—are forests (equivalent to 7,388,811.1 hectares). The remaining 22 percent have a diverse land cover, dominated by aquifer recharge areas such as savannahs, wetlands, mangroves, and other important ecosystems.

Landscape of Valledupar, municipality in northeastern Colombia.
Photo by Wiliam Martinez, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI).

II. Afro-descendant biodiverse territories

Throughout the 205 million hectares of land with the presence of Afro-descendant Peoples, there are ecosystems of great importance such as rainforests, dry forests, wetlands, shrublands, marine ecosystems, savannahs, secondary vegetation, agricultural production areas, and other anthropic cover.

Land cover with the least anthropogenic transformation occupies 77 percent of the mapped area, which indicates that the territories identified with the presence of Afro-descendant Peoples have mostly natural land cover and are part of areas considered to be biodiversity hotspots, as shown in Map 1.

Map 1. Afro-descendant Peoples' territories and biodiversity hotspots identified by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)

The overlap of the most representative and crucial ecosystems for biodiversity conservation is quantified in Table 2. This highlights the number of hectares of tropical rainforest, which includes the 1,006 municipalities in Brazil that are certified as having Quilombola communities but do not have marked boundaries. Once the state finalizes the boundaries of Quilombola ancestral lands in these geographic units, it will be possible to determine what percentage of the 88.7 million hectares overlap.

Table 2. Ecosystems in Afro-descendant Peoples' territories

Coverage	Hectares
Rainforests	88,797,334.86
Dry forests	515,020.39
Wetlands	5,099,311.22
Shrublands	1,764,495.86
Mangroves and marine ecosystems	235,719.50
Cultivated areas	45,623,709.79

Given the landscape diversity and biogeographic heterogeneity existing within and between the countries in the study, a set of reference ecosystems can be found in the Andean, Amazonian, and Biogeographic Chocó regions, as well as dry corridors and marine-coastal ecosystems in the territories of Afro-descendant Peoples.

Table 3 shows the most representative countries for each type of cover analyzed and the percentage of the total area mapped by ecosystem.

A spatial approximation of the land cover data can be seen in Map 2, which shows a better scale of Afro-descendant territories in Mesoamerica.

Map 2. Land cover in Afro-descendant Peoples' territories in Mesoamerica

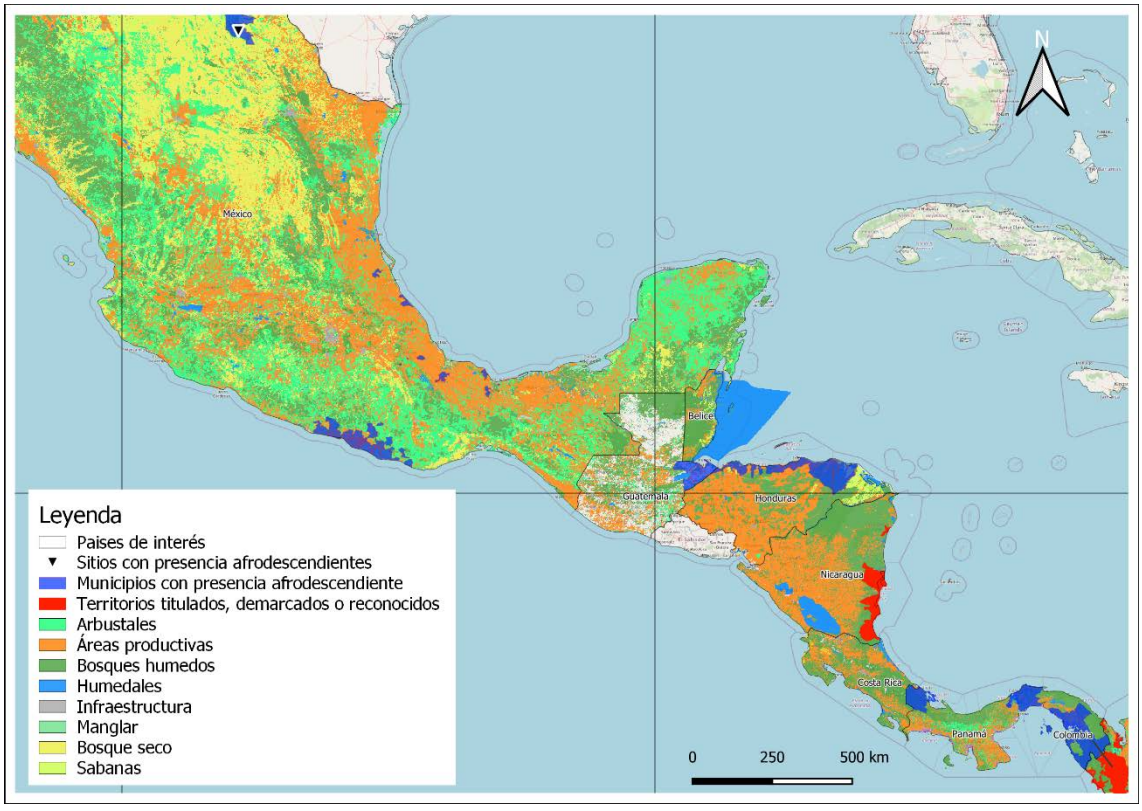


Table 3. Ecosystem representativeness in Afro-descendant territories

Shrublands	Hectares	Percentage (%)	Mangroves	Hectares	Percentage (%)
Chile	831,440.2	47.12	Belize	635,861.9	40.39
Mexico	427,684.0	24.24	Panama	1,722,084.2	38.86
Venezuela	220,316.2	12.49	Honduras	887,051.3	14.98
Peru	110,247.1	6.25	Mexico	168,193.3	5.70
Guatemala	84,983.4	4.82	Colombia	4,524,119.4	0.06

Tropical rainforest	Hectares	Percentage (%)	Wetlands	Hectares	Percentage (%)
Brazil (certified municipalities)	7,329,813.4	5.09	Brazil (certified municipalities)	4,481,712.0	87.89
Colombia	4,524,119.4	4.30	Colombia	214,574.9	4.21
Suriname	3,814,628.7	2.33	Nicaragua	85,344.0	1.67
Brazil (recognized territories)	2,067,966.4	1.94	Belize	80,757.2	1.58
Panama	1,722,084.2	1.00	Panama	39,840.9	0.78
Honduras	887,051.3	0.79	Guatemala	37,670.1	0.74
Nicaragua	703,715.6	82.55	Chile	35,133.0	0.69

Savannahs	Hectares	Percentage (%)	Tropical dry forests	Hectares	Percentage (%)
Brazil (certified municipalities)	5,821,448.8	97.81	Peru	285,914.3	55.52
Brazil (recognized territories)	607,714.1	1.02	Venezuela	165,617.4	32.16
Colombia	145,276.3	0.24	Nicaragua	55,200.1	10.72
Belize	133,119.2	0.22	Belize	6,342.8	1.23
Mexico	130,684.1	0.22	Ecuador	1,352.4	0.26
Chile	91,701.4	0.15	Mexico	593.4	0.12

Landscape of Cauca, a Department of Southwestern Colombia.
Photo by Wiliam Martinez, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI).

III. Public Policy on Biodiversity Conservation

In recent reports by the Convention on Biological Diversity, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Suriname reported the contribution of Afro-descendant Peoples' territories to the Aichi targets. In particular, the territories in question are associated with target 7 (sustainable agriculture), 11 (protected areas), 14 (restored essential ecosystem services), and 18 (integrated traditional knowledge).[6]

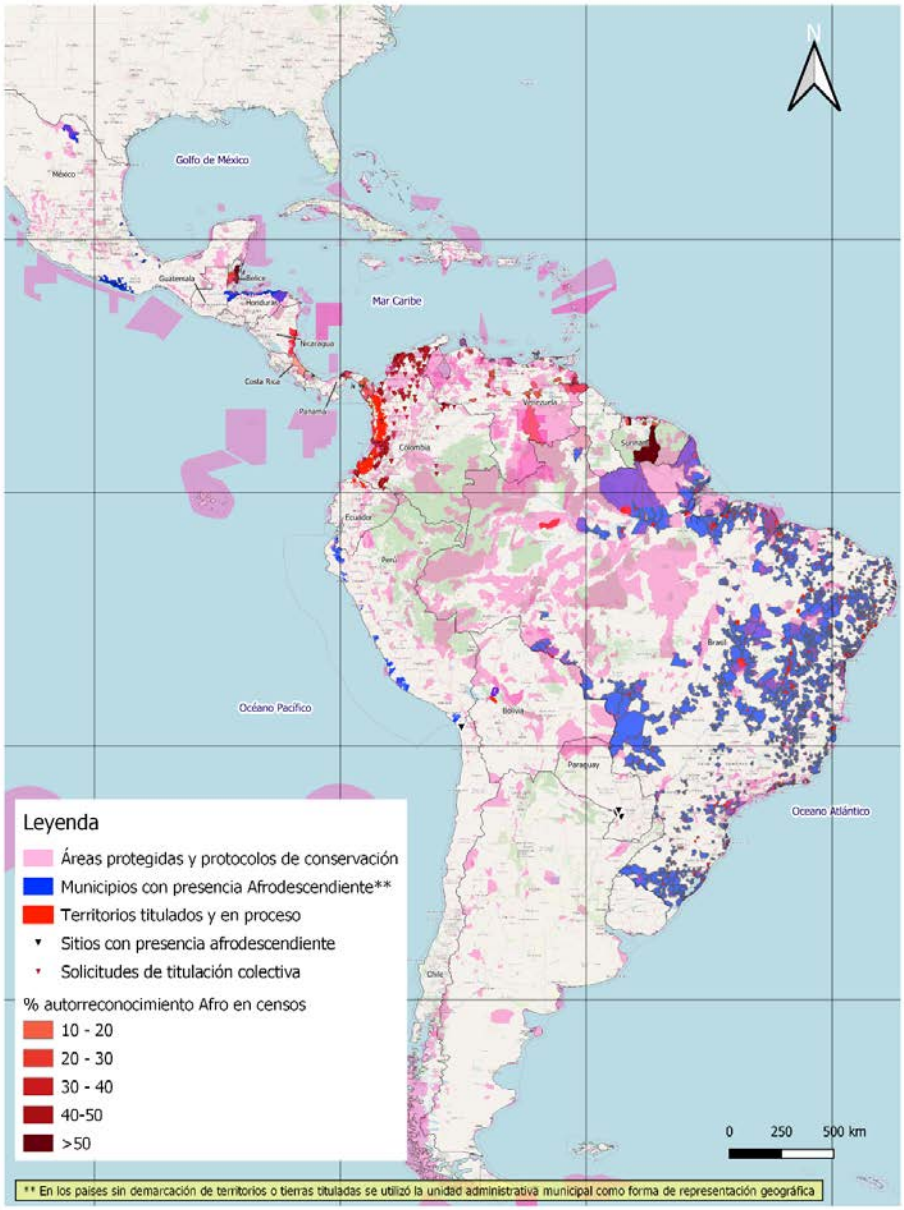
Cases such as Guatemala stand out for the importance given to Afro-descendant Peoples. For example, the Sixth National Report shows significant progress and recognizes the link that Garífuna communities and women have with mangrove ecosystems in the north of the country. In Colombia, compliance with Aichi targets 7, 11, and 18 is based on programs and strategies led by Community Councils of Black Communities in areas such as the control of deforestation, forest management, and co-management in 59 protected areas.[7] In Mexico, explicit mention is made of the inclusion of the traditional knowledge of Afro-descendant Peoples in fishing and agricultural systems. In Nicaragua, target 18 is based on biodiversity conservation strategies and involves guaranteeing the autonomy of Afro-descendant Peoples and their full participation in various conservation strategies. Brazil's progress toward target 11 has to do with viewing collective territories as a complementary conservation strategy in line with Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).

Nature conservation, by declaring protected areas in environmentally important places, is an institutionalized practice in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, within this model, significant limitations to its effectiveness are recognized due to the few spaces for local communities' participation in its establishment and management, the increase in social and economic pressures on these areas, and the complexity of its administration and management. Nevertheless, there is a clear relationship between mapped territories and protected areas, as shown in Table 4 and Map 3. A total of 1,271 national and international protected areas were identified in proximity to or overlapping with Afro-descendant Peoples' land at different levels of legal recognition. Sixty-seven percent of these are in Brazil in certified municipalities with the presence of Quilombola communities without collective titling. The remaining 33 percent are located mainly in Colombia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Suriname in demarcated lands with the presence of Afro-descendant Peoples.

Table 4. Protected areas near and overlapping with Afro-descendant Peoples' land

Country	Number of protected areas
Brazil	858
Belize	91
Mexico	58
Panama	44
Colombia	43
Costa Rica	36
Guatemala	33
Venezuela	31
Honduras	28
Nicaragua	13
Peru	13
Chile	9
Ecuador	5
Suriname	5
Bolivia	3
Paraguay	1

Map 3. Protected areas and Afro-descendant Peoples' territories



Based on the public policies, strategies, and action plans for biodiversity conservation in each of the countries studied, it is possible to identify gaps in the effective involvement of Afro-descendant Peoples in the implementation of these measures. This study suggests four categories considering the countries analyzed with the available information.

High level of protection, high level of involvement: This category includes countries with a high level of recognition of Afro-descendant Peoples' rights and a high level of involvement in the implementation of public policy on biodiversity. Ecuador and Nicaragua have robust frameworks for protecting and recognizing differentiated rights, including collective tenure rights. The level of recognition is also developed in the implementation of public biodiversity policy and related instruments. In the case of Ecuador, the implementation of the 2015–2030 National Biodiversity

Strategy includes the need to strengthen and enforce the rights acquired by Afro-descendant Peoples regarding access to collective lands and natural resource management. Nicaragua implemented its public biodiversity policy based on working groups involving the environmental authorities in charge of managing the country's 74 protected areas, as well as the people living near or within the protected area's boundaries. Beyond information gaps, some legal frameworks, such as Law No. 807 of 2012 in Nicaragua, recognize that biological diversity should be managed in conjunction with Afro-descendant and Indigenous Peoples' customary law.

High level of protection, low level of involvement: This category includes countries with high levels of recognition of Afro-descendant Peoples and little scope for involving them in the implementation of public policy on biodiversity. Even though Colombia and Brazil have solid legal frameworks that recognize Afro-descendant Peoples' collective tenure rights, their level of involvement in public policy on biodiversity conservation remains scarce. In Colombia, the Diversity Policy's 2016–2030 Action Plan marginally recognizes Afro-descendant Peoples' involvement in and contribution to conservation. In Brazil, the public policy for the protection of biodiversity (Law No. 13123 of 2015 and its Regulatory Decree No. 8772 of 2016) does not effectively include Quilombola or Indigenous Peoples. Even though the need to protect and guarantee local knowledge for the care of biodiversity is mentioned, no role is assigned to them in decision making and their contributions are not formally recognized.

Medium and low level of recognition, high level of involvement: This category includes countries with a medium or low level of recognition of Afro-descendant Peoples' rights and a high degree of involvement in the implementation of public policy on biodiversity. In Bolivia, despite the limited development of collective tenure rights, the involvement of Afro-Bolivian peoples in the implementation of the country's biodiversity policy is pivotal. The country's 2019–2030 Action Plan specifies that forestry projects must respect the autonomy and self-determination of ethnic peoples. In Mexico, its 2016–2030 National Biodiversity Strategy enables meaningful participation scenarios for Afro-descendant Peoples despite the fact that it does not recognize their collective tenure and political rights.

Medium and low level of recognition, no level of involvement: This category groups together countries with a medium or low level of recognition and no involvement in the implementation of biodiversity policy. In the case of Peru, Chile, Paraguay, Panama, and Costa Rica, the recognition achieved has not yet resulted in participation standards or in the meaningful inclusion of Afro-descendant Peoples in national environmental conversations. In these countries, there is an urgent need to promote effective participation.

REDD+ projects in Afro-descendant territories

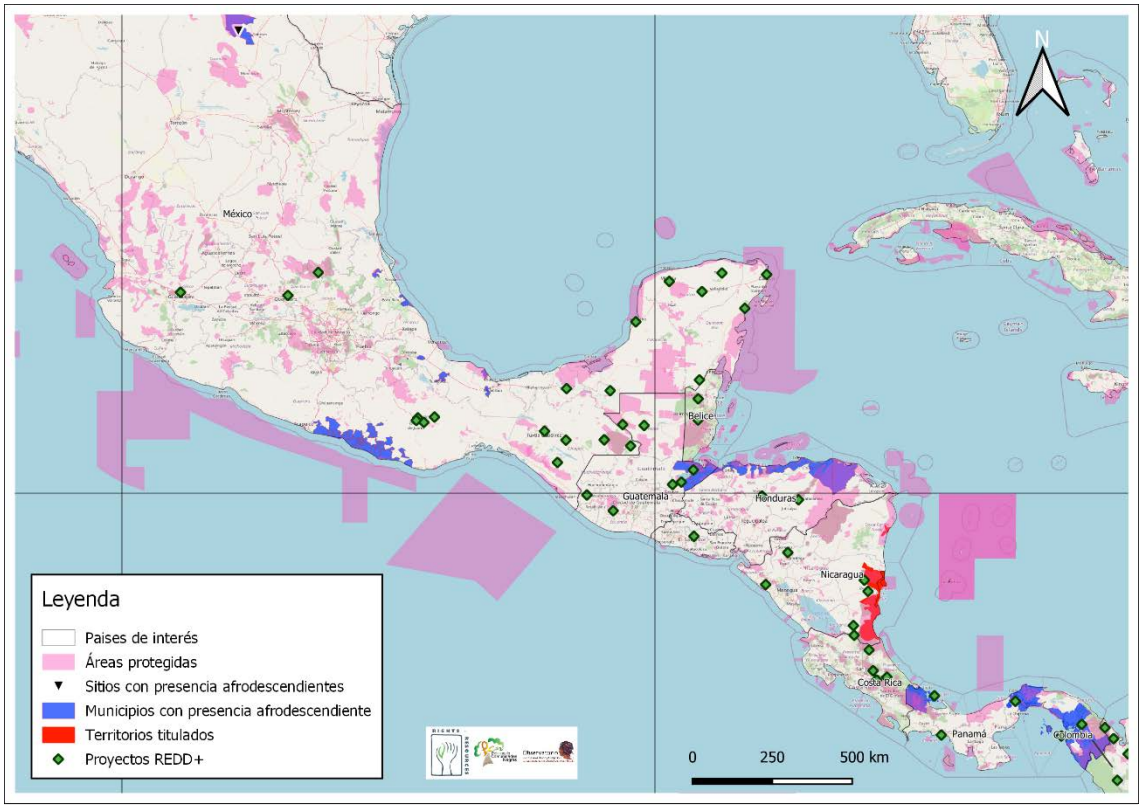
When reviewing secondary information, two types of REDD+ initiatives can be identified. On the one hand, REDD+ programs that are national or subnational initiatives covering a large area of the nation's land including several biomes or areas of natural forest, are the exclusive domain of public entities such as the ministries of environment or agriculture, or other similar entities (Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development 2021). On the other hand, there are subnational REDD+ projects that have a more limited scope given that they can only be developed at the

subnational level but executed by both public and private entities (Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development 2021).

Considering this, and after reviewing REDD+ databases and web portals, it is evident that the participation of Afro-descendant Peoples in the design, implementation, and evaluation of REDD+ initiatives in the 16 countries studied takes different approaches, differentiated in some cases by the type of initiative.[8]

In the Mesoamerican region (Map 4), in countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, the participation of Afro-descendant Peoples—in the case of Guatemala, Garífuna communities—is explicitly recognized in the framework of REDD+ programs or National REDD+ Strategies (ENREDD+). Participation in these cases was encouraged through multi-stakeholder participation in the strategy design as well when drafting social and environmental safeguards that seek to support communities in the process of implementing the strategy's lines of action. An evaluation of REDD+ projects and programs is presented in Annex 2.

Map 4. REDD+ projects in Afro-descendant Peoples' territories in Mesoamerica[9]



In addition to this, Mexico's ENREDD+ approach adds to the participation of Afro-Mexican populations the recognition of communities' autonomy in managing their natural resources and/or productive systems, their forms of organization, and their property and tenure rights (CONAFOR 2017), and together with Guatemala and Nicaragua's proposals, reinforces the valuation of community knowledge to promote and strengthen forest governance (GCI 2020).

In the same region, the case of Panama stands out. Afro-Panamanian communities have been identified in their National REDD+ Strategy in the context of equitable benefit-sharing scenarios and spaces for "Active Listening" (Reyes 2015). Additionally, there is a project at the subnational level that aims to share more knowledge and tools with environmental NGOs on the topic of forest management and/or work with local communities in the provinces of Colón and Bocas del Toro, Panama, for their empowerment and participation in the REDD+ Strategy (ACICAFOC 2022).

In the case of Costa Rica, which has a REDD+ Strategy, the explicit participation of Afro-descendant Peoples is not considered; instead, the program's objectives identify the improvement of Indigenous Peoples' and rural communities' livelihoods as part of the national sustainable development priorities (Ministry of Environment and Energy–MINAE 2016). In Belize, progress regarding the implementation of REDD+ initiatives have focused on putting together technical reports with information provided by experts in the Land Use, Land Use Change, and Forestry (LULUCF) sector on changes in land cover and estimates of their carbon stock changes (UNFCCC 2022).

Map 5 shows the REDD+ projects identified in South America and shows that out of 238 projects,[10] at least 21 refer to Afro-descendant Peoples in the countries studied. Colombia's experience implementing REDD+ initiatives is noteworthy, having implemented nine projects with 19 community councils and the Cabildo Mayor Indígena de Mutatá. Colombia is the country with the largest number of projects in the implementation stage in the region. Afro-descendant Peoples have participated in these initiatives through the Process of Black Communities (PCN) by defining roadmaps to develop environmental and social safeguards for the REDD+ mechanism, which include their criteria and protect their territories and ancestral rights (REDD+ Portfolio 2022).

In Ecuador and Suriname, the participation of Afro-Ecuadorian and tribal peoples (in the case of Suriname) in building the strategic lines of the REDD+ Action Plan is proposed within ENREDD+ (Ministry of the Environment of Ecuador 2016). There are two distinguishing elements for these countries:

1. A consultation guide is proposed for consultation processes in Ecuador for local communities, Indigenous Peoples and nationalities, Afro-Ecuadorian Peoples, and Montubio peoples and communities to give or withhold consent prior to the implementation of REDD+ actions in their lands or territories.
2. In Suriname, considering the tenure rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples is recognized as a step prior to the implementation of REDD+ initiatives (Government of Suriname 2019).

Including and emphasizing these aspects can provide legal backing to Afro-descendant communities. Who can enter in dialogue with their REDD+ Environmental and Social Safeguards with the idea of minimizing the risk of negative impacts from the implementation of those REDD+ initiatives.

Map 5. REDD+ projects in Afro-descendant territories in Latin America

The participation of Afro-descendant Peoples in Paraguay and Chile have something in common, which is the absence of an ethnic differentiation process for the communities. The countries' national strategies highlight the role of local communities and Indigenous Peoples and—in the case of Paraguay—in the sustainable management of forests (Ministry of the Environment and Development of Paraguay 2019). The Chilean case highlights inclusion within the strategy of potential risks with the implementation of REDD+ initiatives and the socio-environmental impacts that these risks may trigger (National Ministry of Agriculture 2017).

Finally, Venezuela and Bolivia's political position, interests, and expectations differ from REDD+ objectives. In Bolivia, during the presidency of Evo Morales, it was considered that "REDD was one more market mechanism and it was considered necessary to move towards integrated mitigation and adaptation processes that do not include the market" (González 2017).

In the case of Venezuela, the Forest Policy is aimed at ensuring forest conservation and development through sustainable management and multiple use in relation to issues such as food security, rural development, and poverty eradication. However, the proposals and policy positions for addressing climate change diverge markedly from those put forward by the rest of the region.

Among Venezuela's case studies is the experience of forest conservation in the Aripao region, which is heavily populated by Afro-descendant Peoples. Conservation agreements between Conservation International, Givaudan—a private French company—and the Afro-Venezuelan people's organization have worked to conserve 116,000 hectares of Aripao's community forest. This and other similar initiatives in the region are not aligned with those proposed by REDD+ (Movimiento Regional Por la Tierra y Territorio 2017).

Arid tropical zone of Valledupar, Colombia. Photo by Wiliam Martinez, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI).

IV. Afro-descendant Peoples' ways of living and livelihoods as a conservation practice

In Afro-descendant territories, there are diverse conservation strategies. For this study, based on secondary sources, we documented conservation experiences in Mexico, Honduras, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador related to ethno-ornithology, community forestry, forest restoration, participation in climate action projects, construction of ethno-development plans, and management plans for protected areas, as detailed in Map 6. In all cases, complex knowledge systems built historically from the use of biodiversity are integrated. Community-based conservation initiatives contribute to the conservation of strategic ecosystems through their own knowledge and governance systems (Kothari et al. 2013). This form of conservation, without going against conventional strategies such as the declaration of protected areas or national natural parks, has proven to be efficient in different parts of the world.

Table 5. Afro-descendant Peoples' conservation experiences

Ecosystem	Country	Experience
Dry forests	Mexico: Conservation through use	In the communities of El Sanjón, La Jabalina, El Limón, and Petatengo on the Oaxaca coast examples of the conservation through use strategy demonstrates the effectiveness of collective control mechanisms over the use and management of natural resources, despite the communities' diverse organizational structures and influence on expected results. The dry forest in this area of the country is under intense pressure, mainly from extensive agriculture, cattle ranching, and selective logging. Communities have responded to these pressures by identifying the diversity of useful plants in their territories and planning their uses. A total of 448 species of economic and cultural importance were identified, many of which are used to market handicrafts, furniture, and other products derived from wood; other species have medicinal purposes, and some are used to create fire. Additionally, the economic and hydrological benefits associated with trees in the region act as incentives for local conservation initiatives. Many of the conservation agreements are not written but are based on verbal rules and oral tradition. However, there is formal control at the community level focused mainly on logging restrictions for overexploited species, such as cedar (*Cedrela odorata*), cuachalalá (*Amphyteringium adstringens*), guanacaste (*Enterolobium cyclocarpum*), and the rosy trumpet tree *(Tabebuia rosea*).
	Brazil: Conservation based on local ecological knowledge: Ethno-ornithology[11]	The Quilombola communities have contributed to bird conservation in Caatinga based on their local knowledge of the biodiversity and behavior of the species present in the dry forest of the Leitão da Carapuca and Brejo Quilombos, within the Serra do Giz Wildlife Refuge protected area. This knowledge is mainly related to nesting times and areas and has been developed by observing nest construction, bird songs, and rainy seasons. Knowledge of the ecological relationships between birds, plants, and other animal species are key factors when planning conservation strategies and monitoring efforts for species during the reproductive and migratory seasons. The communities recognize the contribution of birdlife in pollination, seed dispersal, and insect and pest control. Similarly, bird conservation is also related to the symbolic and spiritual values some species have for the communities. In these cases, oral tradition has played an important role in transmitting values. As part of their local conservation strategies, risks and factors that have led to the decline of bird population in the territories have also been identified. The protected area adjacent to the Quilombos does not have an established management plan. The recognition of Afro-descendant communities' contributions to bird conservation will be key to the integrated management of the Caatinga forests.

Ecosystem	Country	Experience
Rainforest	Colombia: Community forestry in collectively titled land[12]	The community forestry system, in the case of the Yurumanguí Community Council in Buenaventura, in addition to forest conservation, aims to generate income through timber resource extraction. This forest management plan reduces deforestation rates and improves the quality of life of the families that depend on this activity. To establish the productive system, agreements and policies regulating extraction must be created. For this, self-governance and local knowledge systems must be included in forest management plans. The economic potential for legal timber extraction in the context of sustainable forest use is an incentive for the conservation and planting of forest species that, in turn, are related to other ecologically important species in rainforests. There is a need to increase the participation of the local and ethnic populations in spaces dedicated to the creation of public policy on forestry matters and for more effective coordination between national environmental authorities and ethnic authorities.
Mangroves	Ecuador: Cooperation for capacity building for adaptation to climate change through conservation[13]	Experience based on the implementation of a project executed by the *Norte de Esmeraldas Afro-Ecuadorian Confederation* (CANE), the Federation of Awá Centers of Ecuador (FCAE): Cipap, Unipa, Camawari, and Ecompas, the Ministry of Environment of Ecuador, and its counterpart in Colombia. The project includes a mangrove forest reforestation component for the re-establishment of traditional hunting and fishing practices. It also seeks to integrate local and scientific knowledge to develop strategies for adapting to climate change scenarios and improve food security through the conservation of mangrove forests.
	Colombia: Construction of conservation management plans[14]	The mangroves in the Gulf of Tribugá cover approximately 2,500 hectares. Many Afro-descendant communities use this territory to obtain food such as fish, crustaceans, mollusks, reptiles, and some mammals, and to extract firewood and construction materials. They also recognize other ecosystem services the mangroves provide, including as a habitat for diverse species, having medicinal properties, protecting coasts from erosion, and being home to various cultural and spiritual symbols. As part of various cooperative projects and national and local initiatives, the Ethno-Development Plan of the Los Riscales Community Council, which includes the Mangrove Management Plan created between June 2010 and November 2011. Its creation was a participatory process and resulted in a set of agreed-upon rules to regulate extraction, encourage the full utilization of trees cut down, require people outside the community to apply for use permits, protect trees with seeds, and restrict logging along the coast and the hunting of female mammals during the reproductive season. Local

Ecosystem	Country	Experience
		users are now involved in monitoring the mangroves and implementing the management plan as forest rangers and beneficiaries of various productive and technical improvement projects. The integration of knowledge was the basis for the construction of the plan and decision-making processes.
Marine	Honduras: Adoption of local use systems in conservation strategies for protected areas	Initially, the construction of this Management Plan was intended to protect the livelihoods of Garífuna communities associated with the resources of the Cayos Cochinos archipelago. The ecosystems included are coral reefs, seagrasses, octocorals, coral rocks, sands, algae, and mangroves. The traditional use systems and the ecological knowledge associated with them were the basis for negotiations in the construction of the archipelago's Management Plan. For the communities, the conservation of fish species such as bass, horse mackerel, red snapper, grouper, sea bass, mackerel, tarpon, mullet, catfish, and striped mojarra is fundamental to maintaining a diversity in their diet. The communities have defined closed seasons for certain species; however, there are closed seasons imposed by state institutions that are not accepted by artisanal fishermen and women, which can lead to land-use conflicts. The Garífuna people's traditional ways of use have contributed to achieving the Management Plan's objectives, which include the protection of terrestrial biodiversity and fisheries management.

In these cases, it is evident that Afro-descendant Peoples and communities are establishing their own management models in institutional terms, mostly with regard to defining exclusive conservation areas, promoting productive alternatives in accordance with existing ecosystem services, protecting traditional productive practices by also protecting ecosystems and strategic resources, as well as recovering ecological connectivity and strengthening ecosystems to mitigate impacts related to climate variability and change. Local knowledge related to reproductive and spatiotemporal dynamics of ecologically and culturally important species is one way to integrate both traditional and scientific knowledge in conservation strategies. In Brazil, ethno-ornithology has been the basis for monitoring bird species in Caatinga (a type of dry forest), a specially protected ecosystem due to current threats.

Map 6. Conservation experiences in Afro-descendant Peoples' territories

V. Recommendations

A successful biodiversity conservation management policy cannot be disassociated from processes that wholly guarantee Afro-descendant Peoples' territorial rights, and vice versa. Thus, governments must move towards creating or implementing legal frameworks that recognize Afro-descendant Peoples' territorial rights as an effective way to properly manage common goods. Concurrently, the inclusion of Afro-descendant Peoples in the design and monitoring of public biodiversity policies is crucial.

The inclusion of Afro-descendant Peoples in dialogues and decision-making on biodiversity use and management policies should be based on the different connections they have with the territories they live in and not only their role as users of biodiversity. Different countries with varying degrees of recognition in use and management policies accept that these peoples' livelihoods and ways of life are connected to the use of biodiversity. However, this is only one of multiple dimensions. The recognition of Afro-descendant Peoples' rights must include their role as protectors and conservers of biodiversity as well as managers of knowledge.

In countries with a high level of recognition but a low level of involvement in the implementation of public biodiversity policies, the main challenge is that, despite having an adequate legal and institutional infrastructure, the policy approach prioritizes other types of strategies. The challenge in this regard lies in being able to reconstruct the link between biodiversity conservation policies and securing tenure rights, especially since, despite the lack of inclusion, countries include them in their reports in compliance with the Aichi targets. There is undoubtedly a window of opportunity which is to supplement protected areas with ethnic governance schemes in ecologically important areas. This would create a double push for policies to recognize rights and environmental conservation. This is the case of Colombia during the first implementation periods of Law 70 of 1993 which granted territorial rights to Afro-descendant Peoples. Biodiversity management and protection is strengthened by the effective participation, through appropriate institutional channels, of strategic stakeholders such as local communities and Afro-descendant Peoples.

Tenure rights and, above all, autonomy in the use of natural resources, is fundamental in establishing conservation strategies led by Afro-descendant and local communities.

Various trends involving the implications and effects that REDD and REDD+ projects may have on Afro-descendant Peoples were identified. This necessarily depends on the level of legal recognition and differentiated protection instruments available in each country. Brazil and Colombia are examples of situations where a high level of recognition leads to a higher degree of community inclusion in the implementation of these types of projects. Organizations such as PCN in Colombia have seen projects successfully increase the number of hectares secured, recognizing, at least in their intentionality, the possibility of linking implementation to the promotion of fundamental human rights, such as the right to territory enjoyed by ethnic peoples (Lyster 2010; Savaresi 2013; and Loft et al. 2021).

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On behalf of the Afro-descendant movement:

Bolivia: National Afro-Bolivian Council (CONAFRO): Juan Angola Maconde; Sembrando Valores Cultural Association, Dorado Chico Community. **Brazil**: National Coordination of Articulation of the Black Rural Quilombola Communities (CONAQ): Katia Penha, Denildo Rodriguez, Biko Rodriguez, Antonio Crioulo, Francisco das Chagas, Cleiton Do Purificação. **Chile**: Lumbanga: Cristian Báez, Mabel López. **Colombia**: Process of Black Communities (PCN): Jose Luis Rengifo, Eny Cerón, Mario Banguero. **Ecuador**: Rio Santiago Cayapas Commune - Pro-circumscription and Territorial Development Committee - African Drums Association; Confederation of Afro-Ecuadorian Shire of Northern Esmeraldas (CANE): Inés Morales, Darwin Valencia; Institute of Higher National Studies (IAEN): John Antón Sanchez; Afro-Ecuadorian Social Development Foundation AZUCAR: Sonia Viveros; Youth Network of the Chota Valley; Union of Black Organizations of Northern Esmeraldas (UONNE): Willer Tenorio; Third Unitary Congress of the Afro-Ecuadorian People (CUPAIII): David Quiñónez; Federation of Black Communities and Organizations of Imbabura and Carchi (FECONIC): Auximaro Espinoza, Renán Tadeo and Salomón Acosta; Coordinating Committee of Black Women Carchi (CONAMUNE): Barbarita Lara; Black Family Research Center (CIFANE): José Chalá, Katherine Chalá Mosquera; Afro communications: Jaqueline Gallegos. **Guatemala**: Black Guatemalan Organization (ONEGUA): Mario Ellington Lambe. **Honduras**: Ethnic Community Development Organization (ODECO): Gregoria Jiménez. **Mexico**: México Negro A. C.: Abel Hernández, Lucila Laredo. **Nicaragua**: Nicaraguan Afro-Garifuna Association (AAGANIC): Glenda Godfrey. **Paraguay**: Paraguayan Network of Afro-descendants; CAMBACUAC: Jose Carlos Medina. **Peru**: Center for Ethnic Development (CEDET): Oswaldo Bilbao Lobatón; Saul Hernández Rosales, Luis Tacuche Moreno, Sandro Bilbao Mayorga. **Venezuela**: Jesús García, KUMbe Afrovenezolano: Jessica Cueto.

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Annex 1: Systematization and analysis of spatial information

To analyze the information, a spatial database was consolidated in the ArcGis Pro software and divided into five components: baseline, census, land cover, climate change, and extractive activities for the 16 countries included in the study. Secondary information was collected from different portals and geo-visors from non-state and official sources, as detailed in the following table:

Country	Layer	Source
Belize	Boundaries and districts	Biodiversity and Environmental Resources Data System for Belize
Bolivia	Bolivia provinces	Military Geographic Institute of Bolivia
	Afro-descendant Peoples' territories in Bolivia	Military Geographic Institute of Bolivia
		Interviews to expand information from the FUNDAFROS Foundation mapping exercise (2018)
		Digitization of FUNDAFRO archive plans (topography agrarian reform 1953)
		Foundation TIERRA
Brazil	Political-administrative	Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics
	Afro Territories	CONAQ, Pro Indio Sao Paulo Foundation, Nova Cartografía Social Project, interviews
Chile	Chile regions	Military Geographic Institute of Chile
	Afro-descendant Peoples' Territories	Fundamental Heritage—Titled Territories Quilombola promoter survey
Colombia	Political-administrative	Agustín Codazzi Geographic Institute
	Afro-descendant Peoples' Territories	Collective titling project, ANT, Hileros, OTEC
Costa Rica	Political-administrative	National Geographic Institute, SNIT
Ecuador	Ecuador provinces	National Institute of Census and Statistics of Ecuador
Guatemala	Guatemala municipalities	National Geographic Institute of Guatemala
	Guatemala departments	National Geographic Institute of Guatemala
Honduras	Honduras municipalities	National Institute of Forest Conservation and Development, Protected Areas, and Wildlife
	Honduras departments	National Institute of Forest Conservation and Development, Protected Areas, and Wildlife
	Places in Honduras where Afro-Honduran peoples are present	Honduran Black Fraternal Organization of the Garífuna People

Country	Layer	Source
Mexico	Mexico municipalities	INEGI intercensal survey 2015 INEGI Baseline Mexico
	Mexico states	INEGI intercensal survey 2015 INEGI Baseline Mexico
	Places in Mexico where Afro-descendant Peoples are present	INEGI intercensal survey 2015 and interviews
Nicaragua	Nicaragua departments	Nicaraguan Institute of Territorial Studies, INETER
	Afro-mixed territories in Nicaragua	Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples of Nicaragua Ethnography, Natural Ecosystems, and Protected Areas
Panama	Political-administrative	Tommy Guardia National Geographic Institute, IGNTG
Paraguay	Paraguay departments	National Institute of Statistics of Paraguay
	Places in Paraguay where there are Afro-descendant Peoples' territories	Community plans and topographic surveys
Peru	Peru municipalities CEDET	Geo-ethnic map CEDET, 2017 population census
	Peru departments	National Geographic Institute of Peru
	Peru Afro-descendant municipalities	Geo-ethnic map CEDET, 2017 population census
Suriname	Suriname Complexes	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
	Maroon Territories	Amazon Conservation Team public geo-viewer
Venezuela	Municipal boundaries of Venezuela	Provita

The data were systematized in GeoDatabase format to work with standardized coordinate systems and topological corrections were made to prevent geometric errors and data overestimation. The data underwent a vector overlap analysis to calculate estimated areas, overlap percentages, and establish which geographic entities shared the location.

Availability of geographic information

The main results and corrected layers were arranged in vector and raster formats to facilitate their use on geographic web platforms. A spatial database was consolidated and can be used to consult, download, and edit the information.

ESRI tools were used to analyze, systematize, and arrange geographic data. For the robust information analysis and creation of the geodatabase, ArcGis Pro was used and the geographic

layers were arranged in ArcGis Online. Additionally, a geographic online form was created in the ESRI Survey 123 tool so that Afro-descendant Peoples' organizations can interact and provide feedback on the information available on the platform. Online forms allow for the construction of geographic and alphanumeric information with a predefined structure. This makes it possible to create specific fields for each of the information components proposed by this project and, additionally, to centralize the strategic documents that facilitate the characterization of the status of collective tenure rights recognition by country. The geographic online platform is built under ESRI's WebAppBuilder model that allows users to consult the systematized data of this research exercise and interact with tools that facilitate the creation of maps, data filtering, and drawing tools, among others.

Annex 2: Balance of REDD+ projects and programs and their relationship with Afro-descendant Peoples' territories

Country	Type of project or program	Project name	Financing	Participation of Afro-descendant Peoples
Belize	National Strategy	REDD+ Belize	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF)	Afro-descendant Peoples are not involved
Bolivia	No initiatives reported			
Brazil	National Strategy	National REDD+ Strategy	Amazon Fund and GEF	Indigenous Peoples and Quilombolas are included
Chile	Sector program	Emission Reduction Program (ERP) and results-based payments within the framework of the National Strategy for Climate Change and Vegetation Resources (ENCCRV)	World Bank	Afro-descendant Peoples are not directly involved
Colombia	National Framework	Proposal for a reference level of forest emissions from deforestation in Colombia for payment for REDD+ results under the UNFCCC	Government of Colombia	Afro-descendant Peoples were involved through safeguarding and participation scenarios
	Projects	Community REDD+ Portfolio	Portfolio financed by USAID, the IDB, and the Norwegian, Swedish, and Swiss embassies	Afro-descendant Peoples were involved through safeguarding and participation scenarios

Country	Type of project or program	Project name	Financing	Participation of Afro-descendant Peoples
Costa Rica	National Strategy	National REDD+ Strategy Costa Rica	UNEP, UN-REDD	Afro-descendant Peoples are not involved
	Sub-project	Programmatic PES project to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions from avoided deforestation of privately owned tropical rainforests in highly valued conservation areas in the Central Volcanic Mountain Range of Costa Rica	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF)	Afro-descendant peoples are not involved
Ecuador	National Strategy	REDD+ Ecuador Forests for Good Living	Government of Ecuador	Afro-descendant Peoples were involved through safeguarding and participation scenarios for decision-making
Guatemala	National Strategy	National REDD+ Strategy Guatemala 2020–2050 (ENREDD+)	Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF)	The Garífuna peoples were included in the framework for prior consultation and safeguarding
	Sub-project	REDD+ in the Multiple Use Zone of the Mayan Biosphere Reserve 2012–2040 (GuateCarbon)	USAID, IDB, and Rainforest Alliance	The Garífuna peoples were included in the framework for consultation and safeguarding
	Sub-project	REDD+ Project for the Caribbean of Guatemala: The Conservation Coast	Private sector	The Garífuna peoples were included in the framework for consultation and safeguarding
Honduras	National Scheme	National Safeguards Approach and Safeguarding Information System of Honduras in the Framework of ENREDD+	USAID	Afro-descendant Peoples were involved through safeguarding and participation schemes for decision-making

Country	Type of project or program	Project name	Financing	Participation of Afro-descendant Peoples
Mexico	National strategy	National REDD+ Strategy Mexico (2017–2030)	Government of Mexico; the stage prior to drafting was financed by UNDP, FAO, and the Government of Norway	Afro-descendant Peoples were involved through safeguarding and consultations
	Pilot sub-project	Community Forestry Development Project in the Southern States (Campeche, Chiapas, and Oaxaca), Improved Forest Management (IFM), Afforestation, Reforestation, and Revegetation (ARR), REDD+	Funded by GEF, IFAD, and managed by CONAFOR	Afro-descendant Peoples were not involved
Nicaragua	National Program	National Avoided Deforestation Program (ENDE-REDD+)	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF)	Afro-descendant Peoples were involved through safeguarding and participatory socialization schemes
Panama	National Strategy	National REDD+ Strategy Panama	The draft strategy was funded by FAO, UNDP, UNEP, and UN-REDD	Afro-descendant Peoples were involved through safeguarding and participation schemes for decision-making
	Sub-project	Empowerment of Afro-descendant and Indigenous Communities for their participation in the REDD+ Strategy Project, Panama, Sustainable Panama Foundation (PASOS), Association of Professionals of Darien (APRODISO)	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF)	Afro-descendant Peoples are central to this project
	Program	National Forest Restoration Program	GIZ, German Cooperation	Recognition of Afro-descendant Peoples'

Country	Type of project or program	Project name	Financing	Participation of Afro-descendant Peoples
		Regional REDD Program		contribution, but without specifying how they participate in the program
Paraguay	National Strategy	National Forest Strategy for Sustainable Growth (ENBCS)	Government of Paraguay	Afro-descendant Peoples are not directly involved
Peru	National Strategy	National Strategy on Forests and Climate Change (NBSCC)	Climate Investment Funds, World Bank, and IDB	Afro-descendant Peoples are not directly involved
Suriname	National Strategy	National REDD+ Strategy, Suriname	Government of Suriname	Afro-descendant Peoples are not directly involved
Venezuela	No initiatives reported			

Endnotes

[1] This mapping also included publishing a brief titled, *Mapping the Presence, Lands, and Territories of Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean: Findings and Challenges for the Climate Debate and Collective Tenure Right*s, published in October 2022. doi: 10.53892/ANVH3601.

[2] All Brazilian municipalities certified with a presence of Quilombola communities are included. In these geographic units, there are no boundary lines marking the land occupied by Quilombola communities.

[3] Based on the Critical Ecosystem Partership Fund's (2022) spatial data system.

[4] The Aichi Biodiversity Targets are part of the Convention on Biological Diversity's strategic plan for 2011–2020, adopted at the CBD COP10 in 2010. They contain five strategic goals and 20 targets for biodiversity management and policymaking. Available at: https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/.

[5] The Cimarrón peoples of Suriname continue to have no legal guarantees for collective land tenure over their territory, although significant changes in the legal regulation on collective tenure for Afro-descendant Peoples are expected. Research by the Amazon Conservation Team has estimated a total of 7.3 million hectares amongst the territories of Afro-descendant Peoples in the center of the country and Trio and Wayana Indigenous Peoples in the south. The

percentage of the 7.3 million hectares with marked boundaries that corresponds to Maroon or Cimarrón peoples' lands is not available. See: https://amazoniadospuntocero.com/index.php/es/socios-es-mov/surinam-mov.

[6] Detailed country reports can be accessed on the Convention's website, in the *Information from the Sixth National Report* section. See: https://www.cbd.int/reports/search/.

[7] Reports submitted by the Government of Colombia are available at: https://www.cbd.int/kb/Results?q=colombia.

[8] Databases are from the *International Database on REDD+ Projects and Programs: Linking Economics, Carbon and Communities*. Version 4.2. Available at: https://www.reddprojectsdatabase.org.

[9] Information from the REDD+ Program Monitoring Coalition (IDRECCO) in the *International Database on REDD+ Projects and Programs: Linking Economics, Carbon and Community*, which, since 2014, monitors the objectives, instruments, and progress of these projects compared to the areas identified with Afro-descendant settlements.

[10] Databases are from the *International Database on REDD+ Projects and Programs: Linking Economics, Carbon and Communities*. Version 4.2. Available at: https://www.reddprojectsdatabase.org.

[11] See: Bezerra Barbosa Versa, Aurea Palloma, Cauê Guion de Almeida, Lorena Lima de Moraes, and Alexandre M. Fernandes (2022).

[12] See: FAO (2019).

[13] See: Platform on Adaptation to Climate Change in Ecuador, and Ministry of Environment, Water, and Ecological Transition, Gender and Adaptation. n.d. Available at: https://adaptacioncc.com/node/133.

[14] See: García, Carolina, Héctor Tavera-Escobar, Carlos Vieira, Carolina Rincón, and Elmer Rentería (2014).