

Enabling Pathways

for Rights-based Community-led Conservation

SEPTEMBER 2025



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Customary territory of the Ogiek of Mt. Elgon in Kenya. Photo by Nicole Harris for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2022.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADP	Afro-descendant People
AfCHPR	African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights
CBTR	Community-based tenure regime
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
COP16	16 th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FPIC	Free, prior, and informed consent
GBF	Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework
ICCA	Territories and areas governed, managed and conserved by Indigenous Peoples and local communities
IIFB	International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity
ILO	International Labour Organization
IP	Indigenous People
IPBES	Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
ITT	Indigenous and Traditional Territories
LC	Local community
Mha	Million hectares
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans
PA	Protected area
OECM	Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures
RRI	Rights and Resources Initiative
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNDROP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas

Enabling Pathways

for Rights-based Community-led Conservation

Executive Summary



Landscape of rice fields along the road heading to Tebat Pulau, Sumatra, Indonesia. Photo by Jacob Maentz for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2022.

The Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) recognizes that durable conservation outcomes cannot be achieved without the rights, leadership, and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities (IPs, ADPs, and LCs). This report assesses the legal frameworks and biodiversity strategies of 30 high-biodiversity countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America to evaluate progress toward rights-based, community-led conservation. The findings show both notable opportunities and persistent gaps that will either need to be seized or addressed if countries are to deliver on the GBF's promise. The report's five key findings are:

1 Legal pathways for legally recognized community-led conservation exist but remain underused and insufficient.

Twenty-six out of 30 countries have at least one legal pathway that could allow communities to pursue formally recognized community-led conservation under protected areas (PAs). While 29 out of 30 countries have legal pathways through community-based tenure regimes (CBTRs) that could enable communities to pursue such recognition under Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) and Indigenous and Traditional Territories (ITTs), many countries still lack the necessary policy or legal frameworks to recognize OECMs and ITTs under GBF Target 3 (to effectively conserve and manage at least 30 percent of Earth's land, waters, and seas by 2030). PAs remain the overwhelming national approach to conservation, with analyzed countries reporting far fewer OECMs (227 compared to 12,257 PAs) and no ITTs. Community governance of PAs and OECMs remains under-recognized, with only 987 of 12,257 PAs and 7 of 227 OECMs governed by IPs and LCs.

2 Despite widespread legislative reforms since 2015, opportunities for effective community-based conservation remain mixed across PAs, OECMs, and ITTs.

While 17 of the 30 reviewed countries have passed legislative reforms since 2015, results of these interventions are broadly uneven. Some reforms expanded formal recognition of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities' tenure and management rights, resulting in strengthened potential pathways for community-led conservation, whereas others have rolled back previously secured rights, illustrating the fragile legal landscape communities must navigate to exercise stewardship of their territories.

Moreover, the extent of recognized community rights is often inadequate to ensure local stewardship and autonomy in area-based conservation systems. Of the 26 countries that recognize community-led conservation within their national PA systems, 12 do so for lands that are fully owned by communities and voluntarily included in national PA systems, and eight are conditioned by special management regimes that restrict community decision-making rights in overlapping areas. In comparison, 24 countries were found to have legal pathways that could enable community conservation via OECMs and ITTs for areas fully owned by communities, but based on available data, none were found to have formally recognized ITTs as a distinct and complementary pathway to PAs and OECMs, as defined in GBF Target 3.

3 Free, prior, and informed consent remains inadequately protected.

Despite international consensus that conservation activities must respect the right to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), fewer than half of the 30 countries recognize FPIC as an enforceable right. Only 11 countries recognize and define this right, while six recognize the right but lack a clear definition. With over half the countries lacking recognition of a clear and enforceable right to FPIC, communities are left especially vulnerable to rights violations as countries seek to expand their PA systems to meet their conservation targets for the GBF Target 3 land area goals.

4 The rights of women within communities are poorly protected in legislation, ignoring their key roles within community governance and conservation initiatives.

Within CBTRs that both recognize communities' full bundle of rights and establish a pathway for community-led conservation, women's rights to equal membership, voting, and leadership remain insufficiently recognized. There are 35 CBTRs across 24 of the 30 countries analyzed in this report where community-led conservation could be guaranteed through the recognition of community ownership and a potential inclusion of such areas as OECMs or ITTs. However, under these 35 CBTRs, the rights of IP, ADP, and LC women to membership, voting, and leadership remain inadequately protected. Community women's right to equal membership within their communities is the most recognized of these indicators, but equal membership is still only guaranteed in slightly over half of community-led conservation CBTRs. Only two CBTRs (6 percent) adequately protect women's voting rights and only three CBTRs (9 percent) adequately protect community women's leadership rights by requiring both a quota and a quorum of women within community-level executive bodies.

5

Recognition of the rights of IPs, ADPs, and LCs in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans varies significantly across GBF Targets.

Only 12 out of the 30 countries explicitly recognize a human rights-based approach within their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAP). While most countries used a participatory process to develop their NBSAP, only 19 explicitly mention consultations with IPs, ADPs, and LCs. Recognition of community rights to their territories; equitable benefit sharing; use of natural resources; participation in decision-making; access to justice and information; and the rights of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and environmental human rights defenders varies significantly across countries.

Opportunities and Ways Forward

This analysis demonstrates that rights-based, community-led conservation is within reach: legal frameworks already exist in nearly every country studied. The challenge is to translate commitments on paper into real recognition, protection, and support on the ground. To achieve this, governments, donors, and conservation actors must:

- **Secure community tenure rights.** Guarantee the full bundle of rights for IPs, ADPs, and LCs and ensure existing and new PAs do not override or weaken community ownership of territories.
- **Recognize Indigenous and Traditional Territories as a distinct conservation pathway.** Enable community-led conservation under Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework and establish the necessary mechanisms and frameworks to include ITTs within nationally recognized and reported conservation areas.
- **Strengthen legal frameworks and reform gaps.** Review and harmonize existing laws to prevent rollbacks, address inconsistencies, and ensure alignment with community-led conservation pathways and international human rights obligations.
- **Guarantee FPIC.** Enshrine enforceable FPIC rights in law and practice.
- **Advance gender equality.** Reform laws to guarantee women's membership, voting, and leadership rights in community governance and conservation initiatives.
- **Align NBSAPs with rights obligations.** Fully embed human rights commitments across all GBF targets, include ITTs under Target 3 strategies, and ensure communities are equal partners in policy design and implementation.
- **Bridge the gap between law and practice.** Implement and enforce existing legal protections, provide financial and technical support for community-led initiatives, ensure equitable benefit-sharing, and protect communities from violence and reprisals.

Turning opportunities for rights-based conservation into credible actions, however, will require the broad-scale support of national and international partners, including the dedicated engagement of affected communities and the leaders that support them. While governments may have the legal authority to realize the rights-based ambition of the GBF, the political authority to make this happen and initiate urgently required transformative change ultimately lies in the hands of societies as a whole.

Chapter 1

Introduction



Indigenous Pygmy man in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Congo Basin. Photo by EnviroNews RDC for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.

The world faces an urgent triple crisis of biodiversity loss, climate change, and desertification, demanding bold action from all countries to not only protect their ecosystems but also to recognize the rights, leadership, and contributions of the peoples who have long stewarded them. Indigenous Peoples (IPs), Afro-descendant Peoples (ADPs), and local communities (LCs) collectively govern and manage vast territories that harbor significant areas of the world's remaining biodiversity.¹ Yet despite their proven effectiveness in sustaining ecosystems, conservation policies and practices continue to exclude and undermine their rights, perpetuating dispossession and conflict.

Internationally, there is now broad recognition that equitable and durable conservation outcomes can only be achieved through the explicit engagement and involvement of those that depend on and steward the areas requiring conservation attention. The adoption of the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) in 2022 clearly demonstrated the global consensus of the need for a human rights-based approach to conservation, requiring countries to recognize and respect such rights in their respective biodiversity action plans and strategies.



A man carries wood on his back along a mountain range in China. Photo by the World Bank.

By acknowledging that biodiversity goals cannot be met without securing communities' tenure rights, guaranteeing their full and effective participation, and respecting their self-determined priorities, the GBF has the potential to align conservation with justice, shifting the paradigm away from exclusionary models to embedded approaches that recognize the intrinsic role of IPs, ADPs, and LCs as biodiversity stewards and guardians. Yet, achieving such ends will only be possible if the rights of affected communities are secured and their contributions valued and legally recognized by states.²

This report assesses the legal frameworks and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) of 30 high-biodiversity countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It reveals both the progress made and the persistent barriers communities face in securing recognition of their rights and contributions. The report also includes an assessment of legal reforms since 2015 across the 30 countries that have had varying degrees of influence over the extent of recognized community tenure rights and opportunities for community-led conservation more broadly.

Findings show that while nearly all countries have at least one potential legal pathway to recognize community-led conservation, most have yet to formalize community-led conservation as a distinct and additional means of achieving national conservation priorities. However, provided that collective tenure rights and the rights of community-women in particular are recognized and respected; that rights to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) are upheld; and that avenues for community-led conservation are defined in state legislation or policies and prioritized in NBSAPs – most countries can leverage existing legal frameworks to meet their obligations under the Global Biodiversity Framework.



Members of the Talang Mamak community in Riau province collect forest products, Indonesia.
Photo by Jacob Maentz for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2022.

Chapter 2

Context



Men from the Massaha local community in Gabon. Photo by If Not Us Then Who? for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.

Globally, IPs, ADPs, and LCs play an outsized role in sustainable use, governance, and conservation of the world's biodiversity.³ At least 2,064.5 million hectares of land across 73 countries is owned by or designated for communities,⁴ including many of the most biodiverse ecosystems on Earth. Biodiversity outcomes are often strongest where communities hold secure tenure and exercise their traditional governance systems.⁵ From tropical forests to savannahs, wetlands, and coastal ecosystems, these communities have developed and sustained sophisticated systems of ecological knowledge and practices that maintain balance between human well-being and healthy ecosystems.⁶ More critically, protecting biodiversity at the scale required to meet the goals of the GBF simply cannot be achieved without dedicated efforts to secure the rights and autonomy of IPs, LCs, and ADPs, and ensure that all conservation measures uphold socio-environmental justice and human rights.⁷

Rights-based conservation builds on this reality. It posits that **safeguarding biodiversity depends on securing the inalienable tenure rights of communities, respecting their right to self-determination, and ensuring their full participation in conservation decision-making.**⁸ The adoption of the GBF in 2022 marked a turning point for embedding rights-based approaches into global biodiversity policy, recognizing that to achieve sustainable and equitable outcomes, all conservation actions must respect, protect, promote, and fulfill human rights.⁹ This commitment runs across the GBF's 23 targets,¹⁰ signifying the strongest international mandate yet for the advancement of rights-based approaches that recognize the inherent role and contributions of communities in achieving the goals of the Convention. And amongst these, Target 3 of the GBF—to effectively conserve and manage at least 30 percent of Earth's land, waters, and seas by 2030 (30x30)—has emerged as the most emblematic area for realizing progress toward the implementation of the rights-based agenda.

In addition to recognizing ITTs as a distinct pathway for the effective conservation and management of biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, the GBF calls on all parties to recognize and respect the rights of IPs and LCs, including over their traditional territories, and to further ensure the equitable governance of all conservation interventions, whether centered on the establishment of protected areas (PAs) or the pursuit of OECMs.¹¹ Together with the many other human rights provisions of the GBF, affirmation of the inherent rights of IPs, LCs, and ADPs over all of their customary lands and territories marks a critical turning point in the pursuit of the sustainable development agenda and the recognition of their essential role in achieving conservation outcomes.¹²

Whilst endorsed by all signatories of the Convention, actual progress toward the pursuit of rights-based approaches remains a challenge across nearly all jurisdictions. In contexts where human rights infringements in the conservation arena have historically been the norm, rather than the exception, the global shift toward autocratic rule, increasing demand for land and resources, and progressive loss of civic space are only likely to exacerbate efforts to correct past wrongs and bring an end to exclusionary, fortress-style conservation approaches.¹³

Therefore, the current moment is one of both urgency and opportunity. As countries move to update and implement their NBSAPs, the GBF provides a unique framework to ensure that conservation policies and initiatives are ambitious and aligned with a human rights-based approach that fully respects the rights of IPs, ADPs, and LCs.

Table 1 | Key Concepts

Key Concepts	
Community-based tenure regime (CBTR)	"A distinguishable set of national laws, regulations, and case law governing all situations under which the right to own or manage terrestrial natural resources is held at the community level." ¹⁴
Community rights-based conservation	Culturally appropriate conservation initiatives supported through the self-determination and collective agency of communities granted through the secure and inalienable collective tenure rights over their traditional lands. ¹⁵
Community-led conservation	The protection, stewardship, and sustainable use of ecosystems, biodiversity, and natural resources that are initiated, directed, and governed by local communities themselves, according to their knowledge systems, values, and priorities. Community-led conservation differs from state-driven exclusionary approaches (that is, "fortress conservation" models) by recognizing the social-ecological interdependence of community health and ecological integrity. It favors sustainable resource governance, equitable benefit-sharing, and respect for the rights of both people and nature.
Legally recognized community-led conservation	This analysis identifies community-led conservation as areas that are i) legally recognized as governed by IPs, ADPs, and LCs (whether legally owned by or designated for their use under RRI's bundle of rights methodology); and ii) formally included and accounted for in national systems of area-based conservation measures and contributions.
Protected areas (PAs)	An area of land and/or sea that is especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means. A protected area can be under either public or private ownership. ¹⁶
Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs)	"[A] geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values" ¹⁷

Chapter 3

Methodology



Pucara community in Junin, Peru. A Quechua Indigenous woman grows vegetables. Photo by CAO/CIAP.

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the enabling conditions and pathways for the advancement of community rights-based conservation across 30 high biodiversity countries. These include **10 countries in Africa** (Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia), **7 countries in Asia** (Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Thailand), and **13 countries in Latin America** (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Suriname).

A broad-scale analytical framework was developed to assess enabling conditions for the advancement of rights-based conservation. The framework covered 40 indicators, grouped under the following six categories: i) community tenure rights; ii) legal pathways for countries to recognize community-led conservation; iii) the extent of community rights within state reserved areas for PAs and OECMs; iv) rights to prior consultation and FPIC; v) women's rights to membership, voting, and leadership within their communities; and (vi) alignment of NBSAPs with the GBF's human rights-based approach to conservation. The analysis draws on RRI's Depth of Rights database tracking the bundle of rights legally held by communities over time for 27 of the 30 selected countries,¹⁸ and significantly expands previous research on the nexus of community tenure rights and PAs.¹⁹

To assess the quality and extent of community rights recognized by states, including those protected within legal pathways for conservation, the study relied on the national-level CBTRs that define the bundle of rights associated with i) government-administered lands and territories; ii) areas designated for IPs, ADPs, and LCs; and iii) areas owned by the latter.

Figure 1 | The Bundle of Rights by Category under RRI’s Statutory Tenure Typology



Community-led conservation efforts or contributions to NBSAPs were assessed on the basis of two distinct pathways. First, whether countries recognize and include community conserved areas within their national PA systems. And second, whether countries have **legislative pathways** that could potentially be used to establish community-led conservation areas, either as distinct contributions to nationally-approved OECMs or as a distinguishable asset class (for example, ITTs), per Target 3 of the GBF. Because most national conservation regimes lack formal procedures for recognizing community-led conservation as a distinct and differentiated pathway from countries’ PA systems, the study can only assess the potential of existing legislative pathways to achieve such ends, rather than their actual effectiveness.

Finally, it should be noted that rights in form are different from rights in use. While this study examines the extent of legally recognized rights and protections for IPs, ADPs, and LCs, it does not evaluate the extent to which these rights are respected, upheld, or realized on the ground. Persistent gaps between legal commitments and actual practice are a critical challenge for the advancement of rights-based agendas.

To address this shortfall, and provide more grounded, real-world perspectives, this report includes 10 case studies of community-led conservation initiatives ([Annex 1](#)). The cases illustrate the practical challenges communities face in exercising their rights, the strategies they have used to overcome barriers, and the successes and lessons that can inform more effective, rights-based conservation policies moving forward. The case studies serve not only as a tool for communities to learn from one another’s experiences, but also as a valuable resource for policymakers seeking to support and implement more effective, rights-based conservation approaches.

Chapter 4

Analysis



Shree Bindeswari Community Forest User Group near Kathmandu, Nepal. It consists of 54 hectares and is managed by 254 households. Names of the women photographed from left to right: Ganga, Lila, Sita, Jayanti, and Yashoda. Photo by Asha Stuart for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2025.

4.1 Legal Reforms in Conservation and Community Rights

Since 2015, **17²⁰ of the 30 countries assessed in this study have either adopted new legislation or passed legal reforms that impact rights-based conservation.** While a handful of reforms have created opportunities for community stewardship, most IPs, ADPs, and LCs remain excluded from national conservation strategies, and efforts to harmonize community-led conservation with state-led approaches often fall short of international human rights obligations—leaving communities vulnerable to exclusion, land grabs, and the rollback of hard-won rights.

Even in countries where the tenure rights of communities may be formally secured, some of the reforms have resulted in rollbacks or risks to communities' rights within conservation areas. In the case of Cambodia, the new Code on Environment and Natural Resources (2023) essentially eliminated all references to Indigenous communities, whose management and access rights were recognized in the previous Protected Areas' Law. As a result, Indigenous communities now fear an expansion of PAs, with little or no recognition or protection of their rights,²¹ as demonstrated by the government's expedited expansion of its PA network by more than 1 million hectares in 2023.²²

In some countries, reforms have inconsistent impacts, demonstrating the frail legal ecosystems that communities must navigate when pursuing stewardship of their territories. For instance, in Ecuador, under the reformed Environmental Code of 2017 and its Regulations adopted in 2019, communities' norms and

customary law must be considered as norms of internal administration and be incorporated into the management plans of PAs. Not captured by this report's cut-off date are new developments in the country that weakened community-led conservation. Despite this and constitutional court decisions confirming communities' ownership of territories within PAs, the current legislative assembly has proposed a new Law for the Strengthening of Protected Areas permitting private entities to participate in the management of conservation zones without any consultation with communities. The law has received widespread criticism from Indigenous leaders and advocates who express concern that such proposals for privatization will facilitate land grabbing and resource exploitation in conservation areas.²³ Further, on July 24, 2025, the government announced the mergers of more than a dozen ministries, including the elimination of the Ministry of the Environment and delegation of its responsibilities to the Ministry of Energy and Mines, as well as the elimination of the Ministry of Women and Human Rights.²⁴

Despite uneven legal reforms, communities can pursue diverse pathways for community-led conservation. For instance, communities' forest tenure rights often provide a basis for rights-based conservation due to their recognition of community ownership and governance rights over territories. Since 2015, six countries have passed such reforms, leading to the creation of nine new CBTRs that provide new opportunities for the pursuit of community-led conservation.

Building on these developments, the following section considers legislative developments that enable community-led conservation under PAs, OECMs, and ITTs, and the extent to which these align with and support rights-based approaches.

4.2 Pathways for Recognition of Community-Led Conservation

The GBF outlines three pathways for countries to meet the goals of Target 3: PAs, OECMs, and ITTs. According to its implementation guidance, IPs, ADPs, and LCs should be engaged in the implementation of all three pathways, and their rights—including rights to their traditional territories—should be recognized and respected in all circumstances.

Nearly all reviewed countries (29 out of 30) have at least one potential pathway to legally recognize community-led conservation under GBF Target 3 through either national PAs or through state recognition of CBTRs as OECMs or ITTs if countries establish the necessary mechanisms. Suriname is the only country that does not recognize the potential for any form of community-led conservation. But as captured in [Table 2](#) below, the widespread presence of enabling legal frameworks presents significant opportunities for countries to step up support for community-led conservation as part of their Target 3 plans and activities.



A man in Madagascar harvests from a tree.
Photo by iStock.

Table 2 | Pathways for Community-led Conservation

Country	Is there a legal pathway for community-led conservation through PAs?	Is there a potential pathway for community-led conservation through OECMs and ITTs? ²⁵
Bolivia	Yes (Special Management Regimes for TIOC, Communal Property, Communal Titles for Agricultural-Extractivist Communities in the Northern Amazonian Region)	Yes (Original Peasant Indigenous Territory, Communal Property, Communal Titles for Agricultural-Extractivist Communities in the Northern Amazonian Region)
Brazil	Yes (Sustainable Development Reserves, Extractive Reserves, and Recognition of Quilombola Territories Private Natural Heritage Reserves)	Yes (Indigenous Lands and Quilombola Land, not declared as natural heritage reserves)
Cambodia	Yes (Community Protected Areas)	Yes (Indigenous Communities Land and Community Forest)
Cameroon	Yes (Community Protected Areas and Community Managed Hunting Zone)	Yes (Community Forests)
Colombia	Yes (Civil Society Natural Reserves, Indigenous Reserves, and Afro-Colombian Community Lands)	Yes (Indigenous Reserves, Afro-Colombian Community Lands, and Peasant Reserves Zones)
Republic of the Congo	No	Yes (Indigenous Populations' Land, Community Forest and Customary Land)
Costa Rica	Yes (Indigenous Territories and Community Local Organizations with recognized governance)	Yes (Indigenous Territories)
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Yes (Conservation Concessions Allocated to Communities)	Yes (Rights of Indigenous Pygmy Peoples, Local Community Forest Concessions, and Droits d'utilisation de la population locale dans les forêts classées (Local Population Use Rights Within Classified Forest))
Ecuador	Yes (Community Protected Areas)	Yes (Ancestral Territories of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-Ecuadorians, and Montubios)
Gabon	Yes (Contract for the Management of National Park Land)	Yes (Community Forests)
Guatemala	Yes (Co-management of Protected Areas and Permanence Agreements)	Yes (Community Concessions and Communal Lands)
Guyana	Yes (Amerindian Protected Areas)	Yes (Titled Amerindian Village Land not classified as Protected Area and Community Forest Management Agreement)
Honduras	Yes (Co-management Contracts of Protected Areas between public entities and organized communities and Indigenous and Afrohonduran Communal Property Rights under a Special Regime)	Yes (Indigenous and Afrohonduran Communal Property)
India	Yes (Community Reserves)	Yes (the lands of "scheduled tribes" and other traditional forest-dwellers)
Indonesia	No	Yes (Adat Forests)
Kenya	Yes (Community Conservancies and Community Forest Association Participation in the Conservation and Management of Public Forests under Approved Forest Management Plans)	Yes (Registered and Unregistered Community Lands)
Liberia	Yes (Conservancies and areas set aside for conservation within Customary Land)	Yes (Customary Lands outside of Authorized Community Forests and Authorized Community Forests)

Country	Is there a legal pathway for community-led conservation through PAs?	Is there a potential pathway for community-led conservation through OECMs and ITTs? ²⁵
Madagascar	Yes (Protected Areas Community Co-management Convention)	Yes (Community Management Contracts)
Mexico	Yes (Comunidades and Ejidos voluntarily conserved areas, co-management agreements, and Comunidades and Ejidos within Protected Areas)	Yes (Comunidades and Ejidos)
Mozambique	Yes (Community Conserved Areas within DUATs and Forest (Zones) of Historical and Cultural Use and Value)	Yes (DUATs)
Nepal	Yes (Buffer Zone Community Forests, Buffer Zone Religious Forest Transferred to a Community)	Yes (Religious Forests transferred to a Community, Community Forests, and Community Leasehold Forest)
Nicaragua	Yes (Co-management of Protected Areas not considered to be Communal Land and Communal Land under Special Management Regime)	Yes (Communal Property of Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Communities)
Panama	Yes (Indigenous Peoples' Territories within and outside Comarcas voluntarily conserved areas)	Yes (Indigenous Peoples' Territories within and outside Comarcas)
Papua New Guinea	Yes (Protected areas within Customary Lands)	Yes (Customary Lands)
Peru	Yes (Communal Reserves, Native communities and peasant communities voluntarily conserved areas, and overlap areas)	Yes (Indigenous Reserves, Native communities, and peasant communities)
The Philippines	Yes (Protected Area Community-Based Resource Management Agreement (PACBRMA))	Yes (Ancestral Domains and Lands and Community-Based Forest Management)
Suriname	No	No
Tanzania	Yes (Village Land Forest Reserves and Community Forests Reserves)	Yes (Village Lands and Joint Forest Management Agreement)
Thailand	No	Yes (Community Forests)
Zambia	Yes (Community Partnership Park)	Yes (Community Forests and Joint Forest Management Area)

Nevertheless, per the limited number of areas recognized as owned by IPs, ADPs, and LCs ([Section 4.2.3](#)), rightsholders are rarely cited as governing or decision-making entities in the context of conservation areas. Only 987 of the 12,257 PAs and 7 of the 227 OECMs reported by the study's 30 countries were classified as governed by IPs or LCs.²⁶ While the number of instances where community-owned and managed lands could potentially be recognized as ITTs is possibly significant,²⁷ the relative absence of data on this third pathway suggests that formal recognition of community-led conservation remains limited if not underrecognized or underutilized by states. Still, as favored by the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB), **IPs, ADPs, and LCs should be allowed to pursue whichever legal pathway aligns with their self-determined priorities and selected approach to conservation.**²⁸

The following sections ([4.2.1](#) and [4.2.2](#)) review how existing national legal frameworks recognize community-led conservation under PA, OECM, and ITT pathways.

4.2.1 Community-led Conservation Under Protected Area Systems

Only four of the reviewed countries lack the legal means of recognizing community-led conservation in the context of their official PA system. For the 26 countries²⁹ with a legal pathway to achieve such ends, the basis for inclusion in a country's PA system may be attributed to: i) voluntary inclusion within National Protected Areas; ii) management and co-management agreements; and iii) special regimes to address overlaps between community lands and PAs.

Box 1 | Liberia: Community-led Conservation in Protected Areas

The adoption of Liberia's Land Rights Act (the LRA) in 2018 reflected a wider paradigm shift in conservation science and law in allowing for protected areas to be located on Customary Land and to *continue* being community-owned rather than appropriated by the state. This legislative change put Liberia in the vanguard of the move to implement a progressive, rights-based approach to conservation. The principal section of the LRA in relation to protected areas —land designated for conservation purposes—is Article 42. This article states that new protected areas can be established either at the request of a community within its Customary Land, or by the request of the government following good faith negotiations with the community. Provided the community is content to have a protected area on (or within) their Customary Land, it will remain Customary Land. It can be used by the community so long as the use is consistent with the conservation and management provisions of national law. The option for a community to zone a part of its Customary Land as a protected area is also highlighted in the list of suggested land-use categories in Article 38(1), though communities are entitled to define their own land-use categories other than those listed. As such, the LRA provides substantial legislative structure for communities to lead the way in community-led conservation and develop models that meet conservation principles and their own development agendas. *For additional details, see the [Liberia Case Study in Annex 1](#).*



Mesurado River from the air, Monrovia, Liberia. Photo by iStock.

Voluntary inclusions

The voluntary inclusion of areas customarily held by communities in national PA systems requires a formalized legal pathway. Reasons for pursuing such arrangements vary across regions but generally involve opportunities for financial, technical, and/or monitoring support, in addition to protection from the threat of externally driven pressures from extractives and other intense land use activities. Whilst protective of the integrity of community lands and territories, such arrangements often require communities to renounce some of their use, management, and exclusion rights.³⁰

Of the 26 countries that legally recognize community-led conservation under their national PA systems, 12³¹ allow for voluntary inclusion of community conserved areas. In Papua New Guinea, for instance, where 97 percent of the land is classified as customary land, recent reforms (the Protected Areas Act of 2024) were passed to allow for the creation of PAs within customary lands, with specific provisions for alternative livelihoods of forest-dependent communities and the establishment of a long-term funding scheme communities can access to support the implementation of management plans and conservation objectives.³²

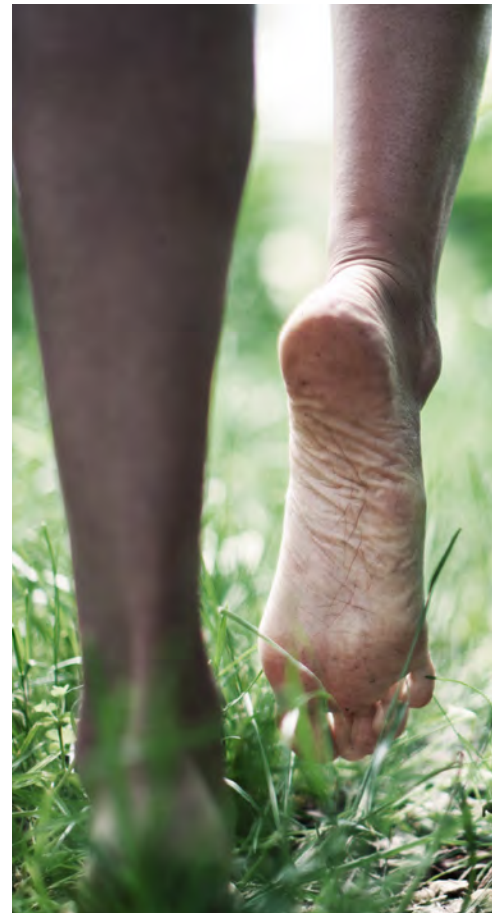
Management agreements

Conservation area management and co-management agreements³³ typically allow communities to participate in the management of government administered PAs through joint contractual agreements. Of the 26 countries that recognize community-led conservation under their PA systems, 14³⁴ recognize community-led conservation under conservation area management or co-management agreements.

While such agreements can provide opportunities for community-led conservation, they usually come at the cost of complex procedural requirements; top-down management plans that do not consider the traditional knowledge and practices of IPs, ADPs, and LCs; and compliance challenges that can be used to justify its cancellation. For example, despite the creation of a legal procedure for management agreements between communities and Guatemala's National Council of Protected Areas (*Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas - CONAP*) in 2007, such agreements have yet to be signed between the national authorities and affected communities as of 2015.³⁵

Overlap management

Some countries have established special management regimes to resolve contested overlaps between PAs and the traditional lands and territories of IPs, ADPs, and LCs. While these regimes typically restate the legal recognition of CBTRs, they often place limitations on communities' use, management, and exclusion rights. Of the 26 countries that recognize community-led conservation within their PAs, eight³⁶ include special management regimes to address overlaps between PAs and community lands. All eight are in Latin America.



A person walks in the grass. Photo by iStock.

4.2.2 Community-led Conservation Under OECMs and ITTs

The GBF recognizes the possibility of community-led conservation as either a distinct form of OECM or the outright recognition of ITTs. For communities, ITTs should constitute the primary pathway for conserving biodiversity, as they can be instituted without the formal creation of a PA or OECM.³⁷ The potential for a legal pathway recognizing community-led conservation under OECMs and ITTs was assessed on the basis of either of the following conditions: i) the existence of at least one CBTR classified as designated for IPs, ADPs, and LCs that is customary focused and regimes regulating community forestry; or ii) the existence of at least one CBTR classified as owned by IPs, ADPs, and LCs under RRI's bundle of rights methodology.

Out of the 30 countries in this study, only Suriname does not have a potential legal pathway for the recognition of community-led conservation through either OECMs or ITTs. **All other 29 countries have at least one CBTR that could allow communities to pursue community-led conservation under one of these two pathways, provided that the requisite policies or legal frameworks for the recognition of ITTs or OECMs have been formally established** (a condition that has yet to be realized in most jurisdictions).

The lack of such mechanisms is a stark reminder of countries' often paternalistic approach to conservation, where communities' stewardship is not accounted for when making decisions and planning conservation goals. This finding has significant implications for countries meeting their GBF national targets.

Whilst all parties of the Convention need to identify solutions that are appropriate to their national circumstances, the evidence in favor of communities' abilities to effectively govern and deliver GBF-aligned conservation outcomes is robust and globally acknowledged.³⁸ As demonstrated by the DRC's leadership in developing a National Strategy for Nature Conservation Outside of Protected Areas,³⁹ all countries can effectively develop conservation policies that recognize IPs, ADPs, and LCs as implementation partners.⁴⁰ A key to the inclusion of conservation work communities already practice is the need to recognize and protect the tenure rights of IPs, ADPs, and LCs.⁴¹

4.2.3 Quality of Rights within Pathways for Community-led Conservation

The extent of tenure rights recognized across potential pathways for the advancement of community-led conservation varies widely. Specifically, outside of CBTRs classified as owned by IPs, ADPs, and LCs under RRI's bundle of rights methodology, community governance rights—including management, use, access, and exclusion rights—tend to be restricted, thus limiting their ability to exercise their autonomy and self-determined conservation priorities. In addition to failing to meet state obligations under international law, such limitations ultimately undermine the feasibility and likely efficacy of community-led conservation efforts.

Box 2 | Guyana: Insecure Tenure Rights and Community-led Conservation

The Wapichan people of southwestern Guyana have protected the forests in the eastern half of their territory for generations. Unfortunately, the current legal framework provides limited options for formal support for rights-based conservation. Despite decades of advocacy to secure title over the headwaters area, the government has continuously failed to title those lands to the Wapichan people. The GBF presents a new opportunity for the Wapichan people to advance recognition of their conservation efforts. The Government of Guyana has, in line with the GBF, publicly committed to doubling its conserved areas by 2025 to 17 percent of the country's area, and to achieving its 30x30 target. However, the government must make sure that Indigenous Peoples' rights are not violated in the process of increasing conservation efforts.

Historically, the establishment of the only Indigenous-owned protected area in Guyana to date, Kanashen Amerindian Protected Area, was not community-led and resulted in negative unintended consequences, including displacement of villagers out of the community and negative impacts on neighboring communities. The Wapichan's South Rupununi District Council (SRDC) has already started approaching relevant agencies within the government to engage in discussions around recognition of the Wapichan conserved headwaters area and its contribution toward the Government of Guyana's 30x30 target. Working with the SRDC to recognize their headwaters area as an Indigenous-owned and conserved area is a significant opportunity for the government. The SRDC proposal is the first time an Indigenous People have presented their own proposal for conservation to the Government in Guyana. *For additional details, see the [Guyana Case Study in Annex 1](#).*



Timehri, Guyana. Photo by Joshua Gobin.

Rights in protected area systems pathways

As per [section 4.2.1](#) of this study, 26 countries provide pathways for community-led conservation within PAs. Amongst these pathways, however, the extent to which communities' rights are recognized varies. Less than half of these countries (12 of 26)⁴² provide for pathways that are classified as owned by IPs, ADPs, and LCs, meaning these pathways provide legal protection to the rights of communities to access, withdrawal, management, exclude third parties, due process and compensation, and to the unlimited duration of such rights. **This study identifies that none of the countries assessed has a state-led process for the recognition of community-led conservation in areas that are classified as owned by IPs, ADPs, and LCs. Instead, all pathways classified as owned by communities within national PA systems are those voluntarily conserved by communities and subsequently formally included in these systems.**

Fifteen⁴³ of 26 countries provide for PA pathways that are classified as designated for IPs, ADPs, and LCs, meaning a more restricted array of communities' rights are protected, including the rights of communities to access, withdrawal, and at least one between management and exclusion rights.

As noted previously, in addition to the noted pathways, some countries establish special management regimes for overlapping areas. These regimes often include additional restrictions on community management rights even if the latter hold formal ownership rights over their territories, thus limiting their ability to exercise their autonomy and self-determined conservation priorities.

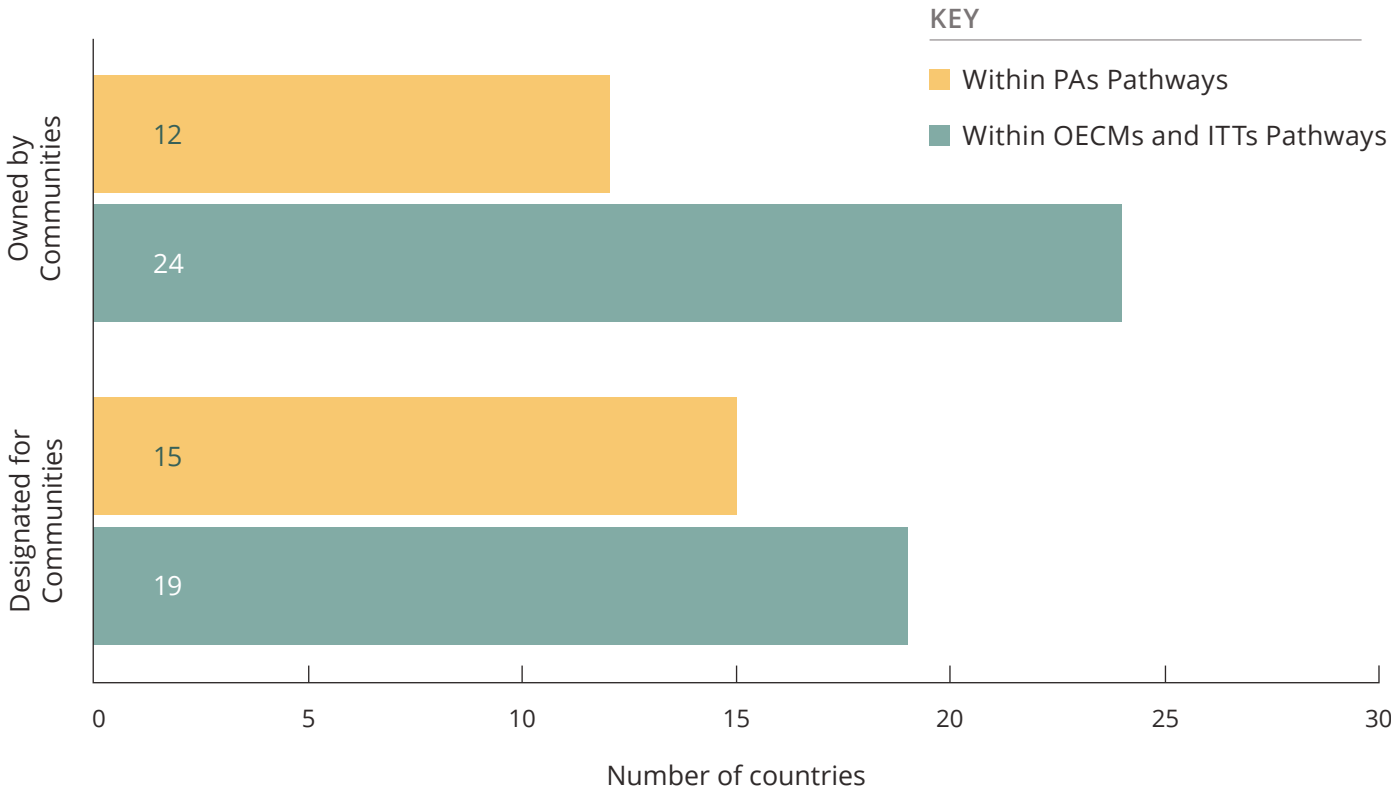
Rights in OECMs and ITTs pathways

While the outlook is more positive within OECMs and ITTs, adequate protection of communities' rights is still missing in five of 29 countries.⁴⁴ Of the 29 countries where such pathways are available given the existence of CBTRs, **24 countries (83 percent)⁴⁵ have legal pathways classified as owned by communities that could result in recognition as ITTs or OECMs and an overlapping set of 19 countries (66 percent) have pathways classified as designated.**⁴⁶



A man walks in the Amazon Rainforest in Colombia. Photo by Amazon Conservation Team.

Figure 2 | Extent of Rights in the Available Pathways



4.3 Community Rights within Established PAs and OECMs

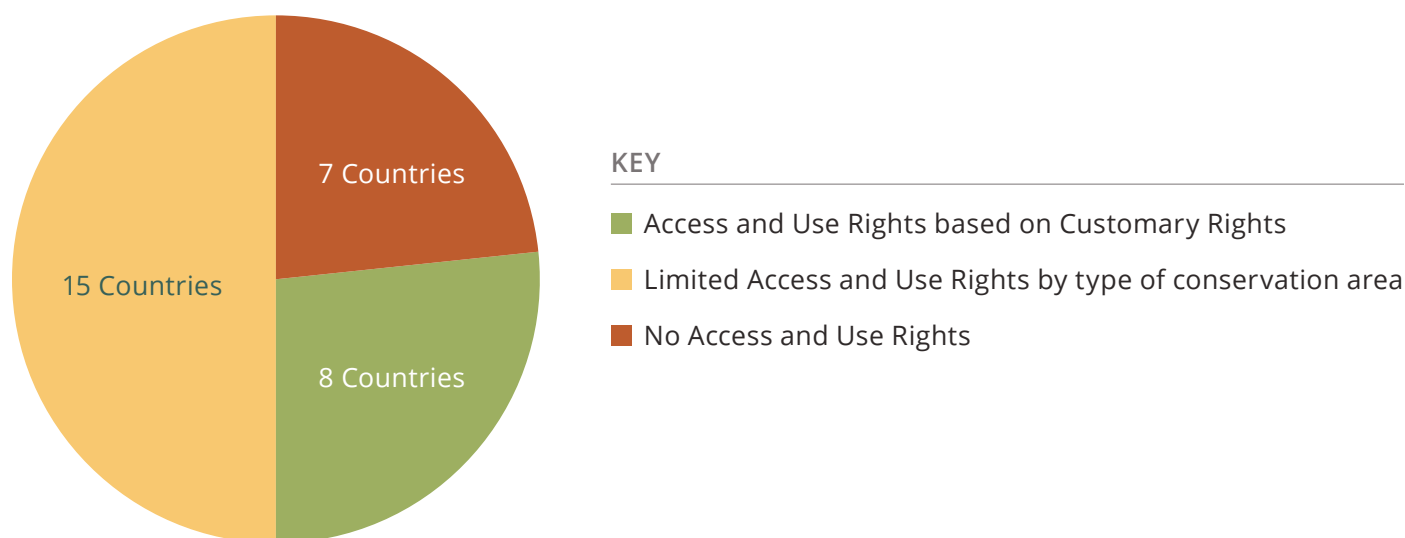
In addition to identifying pathways for community-led conservation, this study also assesses the extent to which communities’ rights to access and use lands and resources within conservation areas—including PAs and OECMs—are recognized. In this study, community-led conservation is considered to assess the extent to which communities can utilize legal pathways for the recognition of conservation areas they steward under GBF Target 3. However, there are several instances where states establish conservation areas—either through PAs or OECMs—in territories that communities have traditionally used and/or occupied, but that may not necessarily be owned by or designated for those communities, without engaging communities as stewards or where even though community-led conservation may occur, statutory provisions limit the exercise of communities’ rights in conservation areas. As such, this study also assesses to what extent communities’ rights are recognized within a country’s national PAs or OECMs systems, where available.



Afro-descendant woman works in a field, Colombia. Photo by Darwin Torres for Proceso de Comunicades Negras (PCN), 2023.

4.3.1 Access and Use Rights

Figure 3 | Community Rights within Established PAs



Communities' rights to access and use lands and/or resources within designated conservation areas is a hallmark feature of rights-based conservation that is central to the GBF. **Of the 30 countries assessed, 23⁴⁷ (or 77 percent) recognize at least some form of community use rights within PAs, and most allow for subsistence use only, often in accordance with management plans that use conservation as the main justification for restricting communities' rights.**

In a context where up to 2.5 billion IPs, ADPs, and LCs hold customary rights over half of the global land mass—protecting and stewarding critical ecosystems the world over⁴⁸—such justifications invariably perpetuate the paternalistic view that the maintenance of ecosystem integrity can only be assured by the state and the authority of so-called experts. Not only does this ignore communities' rights, but it fully discredits the enduring effectiveness of their locally-adapted governance institutions and the traditional knowledge that has supported sustainable social-ecological interactions for generations, if not centuries, while perpetuating various forms of discrimination that invariably undermine the rights of IPs, ADPs, and LCs. To name but a couple of examples, traditional subsistence use and hunting rights in Cameroon are guaranteed within State Forests under Law No. 01/1994, except where such Forests are protected for wildlife conservation. In Suriname, communities have limited access and use rights to forest resources in Communal Lands outside of conservation areas, but the country has no provisions for ensuring the participation and/or consultation of rightsholders when it comes to the establishment or management of PAs. In fact, it is common for jurisdictions that impose restrictions on use rights to also fail to include the perspectives of IPs, ADPs, and LCs in their management plans or bodies.

Within those 23 countries that have recognized some community use rights, there are eight countries⁴⁹ that have established a general recognition for communities' land and/or resource use on the basis of customary rights. In Peru, for instance, the General Law of Environment states that “[i]n all protected natural areas the State shall respect all ancestral uses linked to the livelihoods of peasant and indigenous communities and human groups in voluntary or initial or sporadic contact isolation.”⁵⁰

Yet even in these eight countries, where legal protections are in line with international obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP), and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169, criminalization may still take place. Such is the case in the Philippines in Section 13 of the National Integrated Protected Areas System Act (Act No. 7586/1992), as amended by Republic Act 11038/2018, clarified Ancestral Rights within Protected Areas, where it remains common for local authorities to make arrests or file charges against IPs for using resources inside PAs that overlap with Ancestral Domains.⁵¹ And even more worrisome is the fact that two (Colombia and the Philippines) of these eight countries with positive protections have the most cases of assassinated women environmental defenders, including noted massacres and serial killings of women environmental defenders.⁵²

The remaining 15 countries⁵³ of the 23 that provide legal recognition for use rights do so on a limited basis, either for specific types of PAs, zones within PAs, or other types of restrictions. In Cambodia, for instance, PAs are organized according to different zones, and officials may authorize the use of resources within Conservation, Sustainable Development, and Community Zones, but generally prohibit use within Core Zones.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, within OECMs, communities' rights to use and access resources cannot be adequately measured given the limited existence of formal procedures for the establishment of OECMs. Only three countries (Colombia, Peru, and the Philippines) have reported OECMs,⁵⁵ with all three recognizing community access and use rights based on customary rights protections as outlined above.



Indigenous men fishing on a river in the Amazon Rainforest. Photo by iStock.

4.3.2 Rights of Priority over Protected Areas

As found by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2022, states continue to favor an “exclusionary approach to protecting biodiversity [through] ‘fortress conservation’...[and] protected areas are often created without consulting or obtaining the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples, who are **then excluded from the administration and management of their traditional territories** and are often left without adequate compensation.” Such exclusionary approaches are pervasive, with the majority of countries providing legal precedence to state management or conservation management regimes over communities’ rights in the cases of overlap. Of the 30 countries assessed, 17⁵⁶ fail to prioritize the rights of IPs, ADPs, and LCs over established PAs. It is unsurprising, then, that cases of violence and conflict within areas of overlap are widespread throughout these countries and well documented.⁵⁷

Even in countries that allow communities to be involved in management, the creation of shared management or participatory management regimes still bears negative impacts on communities’ rights. For instance, when PAs are declared within areas already recognized as collective territories for communities, **these territories are often transitioned into special management regimes for conservation purposes and, as a result, are downgraded from being owned by communities to being designated for communities.** Most often, changes to applicable laws mean communities either lose or are forced to share management and exclusion rights with state authorities. At the same time, state powers over the territories are expanded in the name of conservation. In Nicaragua, communal authorities have the right to manage lands collectively without restrictions, but if the communal lands overlap with PAs, they must be jointly managed with the Ministry of the Environment, which reserves more decision-making power than communities. In 1991, the state established the Biosphere Reserve of Bosawás, overlapping with ancestral territories of the Mayagna and Miskitu Peoples, who were not consulted about the creation of the Reserve. Then, starting in 2002, seven Indigenous territories were titled in this area with the provision of a space for participatory governance. However, actual participation of Indigenous representatives often does not happen in practice due to the high cost of mobilization, transport, food, and accommodation. Efforts are now underway to transfer the management of the Reserve to the Indigenous governments with funds to promote effective conservation of natural resources.⁵⁸

Slightly better approaches can be found in other countries, where the law provides for co-management instead of merely participation within PA management bodies. In Ecuador, for example, communities and authorities co-manage areas of overlap between the PA and community lands. Article 70 of the Regulation to Environmental Code of 2019 stipulates that the rights of communities to access, use, and benefit from their lands must be considered norms of internal administration and be incorporated into the management plans of PAs. Despite such protection, however, communities’ territories continued to face pressure from extractive companies⁵⁹ and management rights were watered down in a way that significantly impacted communities’ self-determination rights. As a result, the Siekopal people contested these shared regimes and, in 2023, won a landmark case in the Ecuadorian Constitutional Court. The Court found in favor of the community, ruling that the government must guarantee the ownership of the Siekopai people’s land, including their right to possess a territory that had been declared a PA.⁶⁰

Across the 30 reviewed countries, only five⁶¹ have laws that provide some level of priority in terms of IPs', ADPs', and LCs' rights over the declaration of PAs. Of these, Brazil, Ecuador, and Kenya all have constitutional provisions protecting the rights of IPs over any environmental law. Yet, in at least two of those countries (Ecuador and Kenya), communities have had to resort to judicial recourse to protect their rights from state encroachment.⁶² In Kenya, where a landmark decision from the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR) acknowledged the role of the Ogiek people as custodians of the Mau Forest and their "unique relationship with their ancestral land, which is integral to their cultural, spiritual, and economic life,"⁶³ the state continues to violate the Ogiek's territorial rights. The state went so far as to contradict the AfCHPR's decisions, with Kenya's Environment and Land Court in Nakuru dismissing the Ogiek's claims to their ancestral lands and implementing such a ruling through a rushed demarcation process and continued displacement and related human rights violations.⁶⁴ In other places, such as Guyana, land can be classified as a PA with only a requirement of consultation, and such declarations result in restrictions to communities' customary usage rights.⁶⁵

Table 3 | Countries that Provide Recognition of Priority of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and Local Communities

Country	Recognition of Priority	Country	Recognition of Priority
Bolivia	—	Kenya	✓
Brazil	✓	Liberia	✗
Cambodia	✗	Madagascar	✗
Cameroon	✗	Mexico	—
Colombia	—	Mozambique	✗
Congo, Republic of the	✗	Nepal	✗
Costa Rica	✗	Nicaragua	—
Democratic Republic of the Congo	✗	Panama	—
Ecuador	✓	Papua New Guinea	✗
Gabon	✗	Peru	—
Guatemala	—	The Philippines	✓
Guyana	✓	Suriname	✗
Honduras	—	Tanzania	✗
India	✗	Thailand	✗
Indonesia	✗	Zambia	✗

Note 1: In India, no priority for the rights of IPs and LCs over the declaration of PAs is established in law, except when activities or presence do not cause irreversible damage or threaten the existence of wild animals (forest rightsholders in sanctuaries and national parks).

Note 2: All eight countries that provide partial recognition of priority for the rights of communities do so in a way that is differentiated by CBTR, meaning that priority rights may be recognized for some but not all communities in the country.

Unfortunately, other RRI studies provide evidence of the same **lack of rights-based conservation approaches in national legislation**. While states' recognition of communities' tenure rights seems to be advancing, when it comes to conservation, legislators continue to take exclusionary approaches that impact, restrict, or water down IPs', ADPs', and LCs' rights. Notably, RRI's forthcoming 2025 analysis on the tenure rights of IPs, ADPs, and LCs finds that those CBTRs established with the primary aim of conserving land and natural resources are the least protective of communities' rights. Amongst other challenges, communities that access tenure rights through conservation-oriented CBTRs are more often required to co-manage their forests through participation in management bodies that also include non-community stakeholders than those accessing tenure rights through CBTRs motivated by policies promoting community rights and extractive activities. Conservation-oriented CBTRs are also more prone to restrict communities' management and exclusion rights than CBTRs aimed at regulating the extraction or use of land and natural resources.

IPs, ADPs, and LCs are broadly recognized as fundamental stewards of nature, and the full realization of their rights to culture, education, health, self-determination, exercise of their traditional knowledge, and ability to live free from discrimination is inextricably tied to their relationship to their lands and territories. However, when states adopt laws and policies that attempt to disconnect communities' rights from conservation, they fail to account for this relationship and violate these communities' rights. States must consider overlapping areas with due regard for communities' ancestral lands and rights to self-determination.⁶⁶

4.3.3 Rights to Participate in the Management of Protected Areas

Even though international law requires that conservation initiatives and related legislation protect the full extent of IPs', ADPs', and LCs' tenure rights, at a minimum, states should provide for the right of these communities to meaningfully participate in any decisions that may impact their rights and livelihoods. Somewhat encouragingly, most of the countries assessed (28 of 30 countries, or 93 percent) do provide for this bare minimum recognition of participatory rights, with the exception of Suriname and Papua New Guinea, which do not have legislation to support community participation in official conservation/PA systems.⁶⁷

Despite the broad-scale recognition of participatory rights, such recognition is rarely adequate. Across the 28 countries with legal provisions for participation, laws tend to be broad and diverse, and rarely do they relate to a recognition of tenure rights, with many providing merely tokenistic or minimal "participation" within management regimes. Given that opportunities for community participation in PA management are often associated with empty and even non-enforceable policy statements, caution is necessary to avoid misidentifying poor legal protections with state compliance with international human rights law.

Nineteen⁶⁸ of the 30 countries assessed (63 percent) have established at a minimum a general call for community participation in PA management. Six⁶⁹ of these restrict participation to specific types of PAs, and five⁷⁰ host legal instruments that require or allow for participation in conservation areas' councils, monitoring implementation of management plans, or require consultations with communities in cases that may affect their interests.



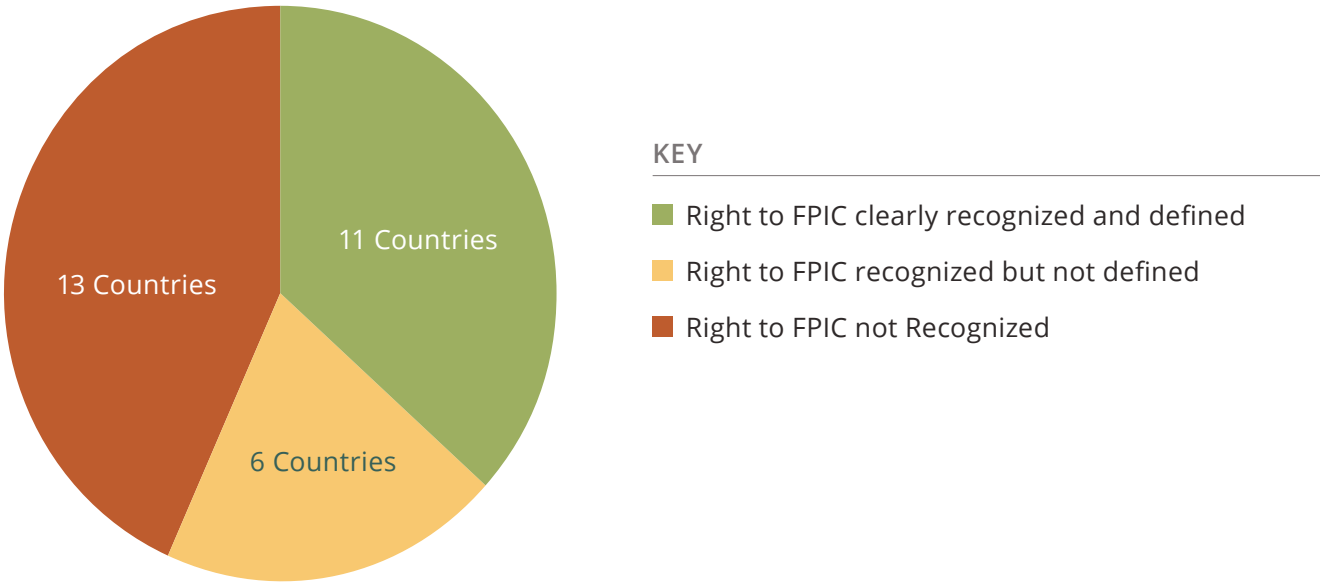
A mother pours water from a watering can with a child strapped to her back. Photo by the Accountability Framework Initiative (AFI).

4.4 Recognition of Rights to Consultation and FPIC

Advancing a rights-based approach to conservation requires that IPs, ADPs, and LCs are meaningfully consulted and actively involved in all conservation initiatives that may affect their lands, territories, waters, coastal seas, and resources. The establishment and management of new conservation areas, including PAs and OECMs, directly impact communities’ rights to access, manage, and use their territories and resources, to exclude external stakeholders from accessing those resources, and to seek legal recourse and compensation when those rights are threatened or revoked. Respecting these rights means upholding rights to FPIC and ensuring communities can participate fully in decision-making processes, as affirmed under international standards and, where applicable, national law.⁷¹

Out of the study’s 30 countries, the right to FPIC is enforceable in less than half of all countries. Only 11 countries⁷² recognize and define the right in a general law or constitution, while six countries⁷³ recognize the right to FPIC but lack a clear definition, making it difficult to protect. With over half the countries lacking recognition of a clear, enforceable right to FPIC communities are left especially vulnerable to rights violations as countries seek to expand their PA systems to meet their conservation targets for the GBF Target 3 land area goals.

Figure 4 | Recognition of the Right to FPIC Across 30 countries



Full respect and recognition of the right to FPIC also requires that communities define for themselves what true free, prior and informed consent looks like within their own community’s systems and values; communities should determine the mechanisms and processes for obtaining consent among their members. Of the countries that recognize FPIC in some form, 13⁷⁴ recognize this right as held by institutions created and managed by communities. Without clear legal recognition of community institutions and bodies as holders of the right to FPIC, consultation processes may not respect and follow community procedures that determine when and how community members should be consulted, which community members should be consulted, and how consent is determined within the community.

In addition to FPIC rights, general recognition of the right to prior consultation and full information for communities is crucial to ensure IPs, ADPs, and LCs can participate in consultations and decisions affecting their lands, territories, waters, and resources in a substantive and informed manner. With respect to LCs, the right to prior consultation and full information is protected in most of the countries analyzed, with only two⁷⁵ out of 30 not recognizing this right. Over three-quarters of the countries (23 countries)⁷⁶ guarantee and define this right for LCs, and five countries⁷⁷ guarantee the right without clearly defining it.

In contrast, almost half of all countries (14 countries)⁷⁸ do not recognize the right to prior consultation and full information for IPs. While 16 countries⁷⁹ legally recognize this right in some form, only 13⁸⁰ explicitly define it. Across the 12 countries included in this study with ADPs,⁸¹ only five⁸² guarantee and define their right to prior consultation and full information; the remaining seven have no legal recognition of this right. **With over 47 percent of countries and 58 percent of countries not recognizing the right for IPs and ADPs, respectively, communities may be denied the ability to participate in consultative and decision-making processes around the establishment and management of conservation areas that impact their territories in a manner that is free, timely, effective, meaningful, culturally appropriate, accessible, and informed.**

4.5 Recognition of Women's Rights

IP, ADP, and LC women have long been essential stewards of their communities' territories. Community women are traditional knowledge keepers and lead their communities in land conservation and climate resilience. There is now a strong global imperative on states to recognize IP, ADP, and LC women as key partners, rightsholders, and knowledge-bearers who must be placed at the heart of all biodiversity conservation and climate actions. As per the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) General Recommendation 37 on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, **it is a human rights imperative to secure the tenure rights of IP, ADP, and LC women.**⁸³ Despite this, the specific rights of women within communities are poorly protected in national legislation, putting them at particular risk and ignoring their key roles within community governance and conservation initiatives.

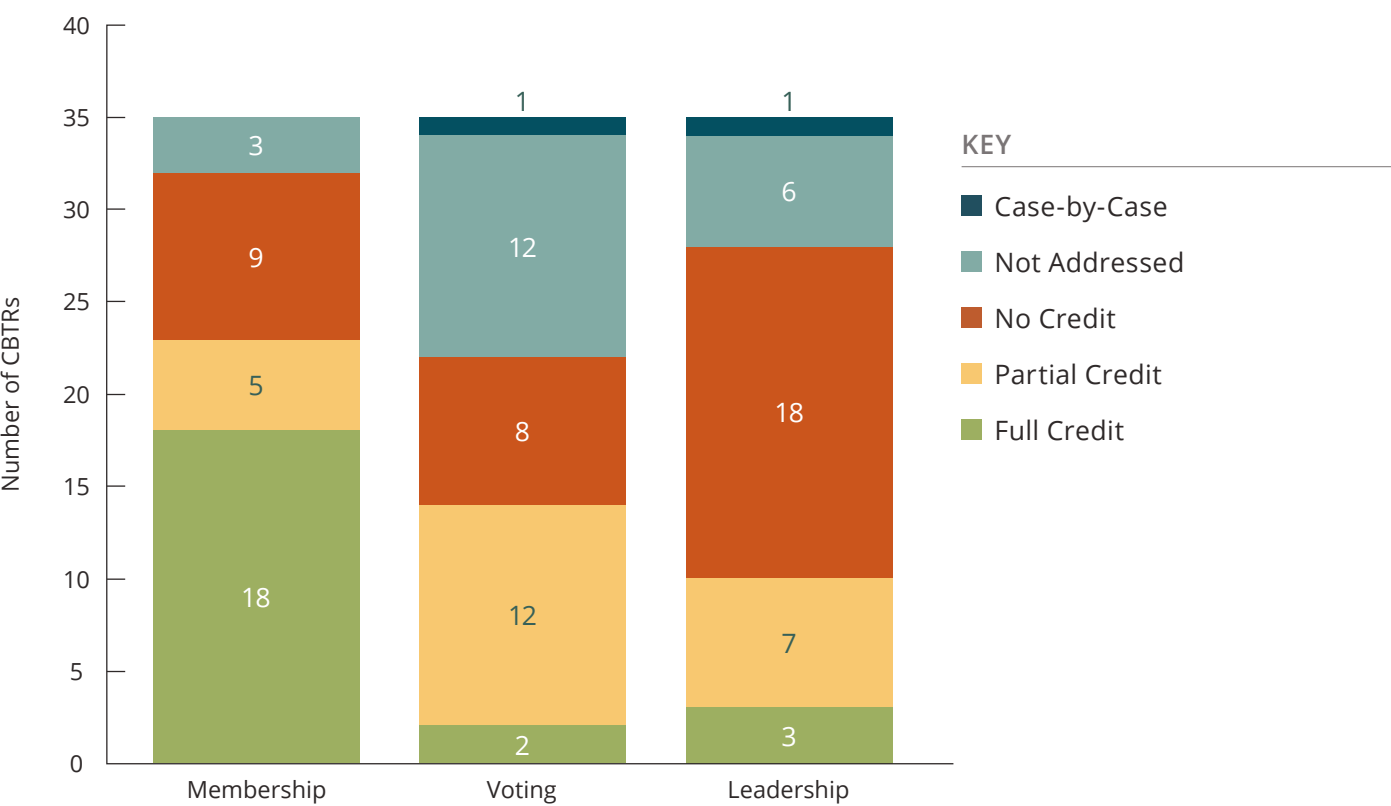
This remains true even in CBTRs that both recognize communities' full bundle of rights and establish a pathway for community-led conservation. There are 35 CBTRs across 24⁸⁴ of the 30 countries analyzed in this report classified as owned by communities under RRI's bundle of rights methodology and where community-led conservation could be guaranteed through the inclusion of such areas as OECMs or ITTs. By relying on RRI's Gender Methodology,⁸⁵ this study assesses to what extent these CBTRs and countries recognize community women's rights to participate in and govern community-based conservation. In doing so, it looks at three pivotal rights that ensure community women's roles: i) membership, ii) voting, and iii) leadership.⁸⁶

Under the 35 CBTRs where communities can exercise community-led conservation, the rights of IP, ADP, and LC women to membership, voting, and leadership remain inadequately protected.

While community women's right to equal membership within their communities is the most recognized of these indicators, **equal membership is still only guaranteed in slightly over half of community-led conservation CBTRs** (18 CBTRs,⁸⁷ or 51 percent). Concerningly, 9 CBTRs⁸⁸ (26 percent) fail to provide for women's membership within their communities, including provisions that define community membership at the household/familial level, or otherwise fail to recognize the individual membership rights of all adults in the community.

Voting and leadership rights present a noticeably more troubling picture. Only two CBTRs⁸⁹ (6 percent) that enable community-led conservation adequately protect women’s voting rights by including legal provisions that guarantee a right to vote *and* require a quorum of women for a community general assembly to vote or take equivalent, legally binding action. A further 12 CBTRs⁹⁰ (34 percent) recognize a right to vote but fail to require a quorum that would ensure women’s participation. Three CBTRs⁹¹ (9 percent) adequately protect community women’s leadership rights by requiring both a quota and a quorum of women within community-level executive bodies. A further seven CBTRs⁹² (20 percent) require such a quote but fail to require a quorum.

Figure 5 | Recognition of Women's Membership and Governance Rights within Pathways that are Owned by Communities



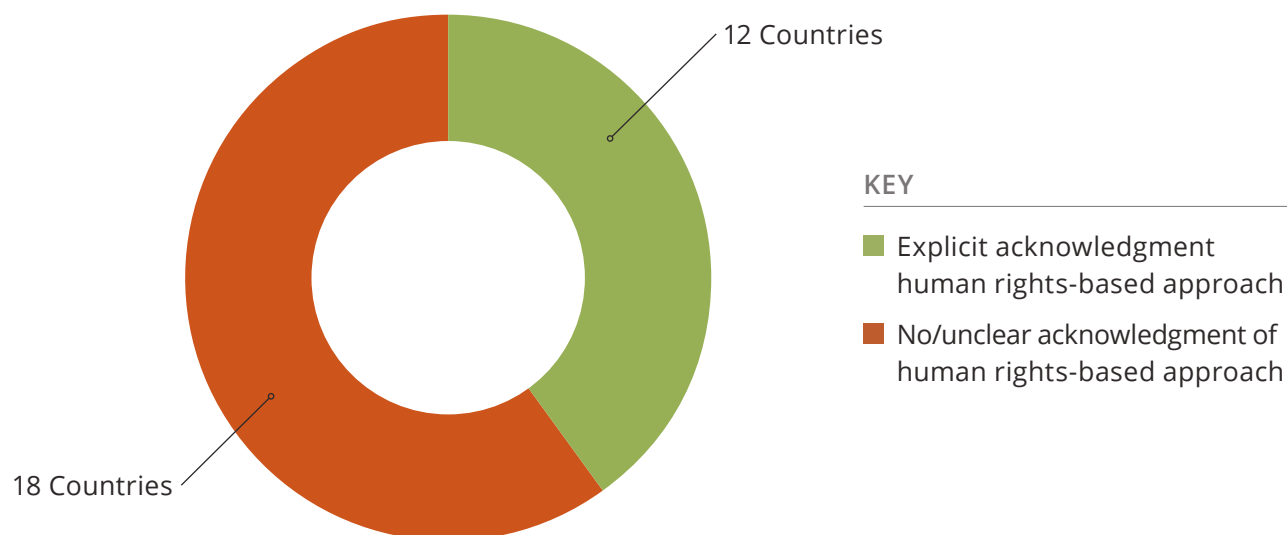
4.6 Recognition of Rights-based Conservation in NBSAPs

As part of the GBF, countries agreed to update their NBSAPs in time for COP16 in October 2024. Despite this deadline, 85 percent of countries missed the October deadline to submit the updated NBSAPs.⁹³ Only 25 countries and the EU had submitted their NBSAPs by COP16, leaving the vast majority of countries without a conservation policy that aligns with the requirements of the GBF.⁹⁴

The GBF further requires countries to “follow a human rights-based approach, respecting, protecting, promoting, and fulfilling human rights”⁹⁵ across all targets and throughout its implementation. However, **only 12⁹⁶ of the 30 reviewed countries explicitly acknowledge and prioritize a human rights-based**

approach within their NBSAPs. This glaring gap raises serious concerns about the extent to which human rights considerations are meaningfully integrated into national conservation policy. Without explicit commitments to human rights, there is a heightened risk that conservation activities may overlook or undermine the rights of communities.

Figure 6 | Recognition of a Human Rights-based Approach within NBSAPs



Ensuring the rights of IPs, ADPs, and LCs are adequately and effectively integrated throughout NBSAPs requires the meaningful participation of communities during their development. These consultations are essential to ensuring that national conservation policies are equitable, effective, and aligned with not only the GBF's human rights approach, but also with the rights and self-determined priorities of communities. IPs, ADPs, and LCs are key knowledge holders and stewards of biodiversity, with deep-rooted governance systems and practices that have sustained ecosystems for generations.

Overall, the majority of countries in our dataset (29⁹⁷ out of 30) explicitly mention some form of participatory process to develop their NBSAP. Twenty-three countries⁹⁸ specifically included consultations with IPs, ADPs, and LCs as part of their participatory process, with four of the 23 (Peru, Panama, Nepal, Colombia) explicitly mentioning the inclusion of women rightsholders as part of the NBSAP public consultation process.

Although most NBSAPs involved a participatory development process that engaged different stakeholders, there is still a clear and significant gap in the intentional and proactive inclusion of IPs, ADPs, and LCs—especially the women within these groups—in the development of national conservation policy. Their involvement in shaping NBSAPs is crucial to ensure that biodiversity strategies reflect local realities, respect customary land and resource rights, and avoid top-down approaches that risk exclusion or harm. This omission of communities from NBSAP development may also contribute to the limited recognition of community rights in the country dataset described in the section below.

Box 3 | The DRC: Advocacy Around the NBSAPs

The unlawful eviction of Indigenous Pygmy communities from protected areas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) serves as a landmark case of rights violations, marking a baseline for the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples' rights in conservation efforts. Despite these challenges, Indigenous Peoples and local communities have demonstrated remarkable efficiency in conserving their lands and territories. Through the efforts of dedicated allies like ANAPAC-RDC and the ICCA Consortium, numerous ICCAs have been established across the country. Currently, more than 20 ICCAs have been identified and documented. Key challenges to rights-based conservation remain, however, including a lack of awareness or disregard for community rights by conservation authorities, the government's promotion of business activities on Indigenous Peoples' lands, and legal gaps in conservation laws and policies.

The ongoing violation of Indigenous Peoples' rights in conservation has prompted communities and various rightsholders, including Indigenous organizations and individuals, to engage with government bodies in advocacy for rights-based conservation. Awareness-raising and capacity-building efforts have been crucial in ensuring decision-makers understand and voice these issues. Progress includes the active participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in revising the country's NBSAP, contributing to the development of the seventh and eighth country reports on biodiversity, and playing a role in the revision of land laws. Indigenous Peoples have been actively involved in the ongoing process of developing the National Strategy for Conservation Outside of Protected Areas. This is a significant step toward ensuring that Indigenous Peoples and local communities have a voice in all conservation reforms and that their rights are respected.

For additional details, see the [DRC Case Study in Annex 1](#).



An Indigenous Pygmy woman collects water, the DRC. Photo by EnviroNews RDC for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.

Target 3 has emerged as one of the most defining features of the GBF, with countries seeking to expand their nationally recognized conserved areas to meet the 30 percent land and sea area targets. To align with the GBF's human-based approach, Target 3 requires that countries carry out conservation activities “recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.” However, across the 30 countries analyzed, only 19⁹⁹ recognize the rights of IPs, ADPs, and LCs over their traditional territories and affirm their effective participation in the establishment, management, and governance of conservation areas. Nine countries¹⁰⁰ offer only partial recognition of this, while the remaining two countries, Gabon and the Republic of the Congo, fail to recognize these rights in their NBSAPs. **The lack of explicit recognition of community rights increases the risk that implementation of Target 3 activities may infringe on the rights of IPs, ADPs, and LCs over their territories, particularly as many countries prioritize the expansion of state-led PAs to meet their national targets, which frequently overlap with customary lands and traditional territories.**

In contrast to the inconsistent recognition of community rights under Target 3 activities, there has been growing international momentum around the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources, including associated traditional knowledge and digital sequence information. Ongoing negotiations under the CBD and its Nagoya Protocol reflect increasing recognition of the rights of IPs and LCs to control access to their knowledge and resources, and to receive a fair share of benefits. This global shift is reflected across the NBSAPs, with all 30 countries recognizing and promoting benefit sharing with rightsholders from genetic resources, digital sequence information, and traditional knowledge as per Target 13. Ensuring effective and equitable benefit-sharing is critical to recognizing and upholding the rights of communities, supporting their cultural and economic well-being, and respecting their traditional knowledge and practices.

A rights-based approach to conservation requires recognition of the customary sustainable use of natural resources by communities. Targets 5 and 9 of the GBF both require countries to take into account the rights of communities to access, use, and manage their resources and to respect their customary use. Encouragingly, 22 countries¹⁰¹ recognized these rights for IPs, ADPs, and LCs in their NBSAPs, with only eight lacking clear recognition. This recognition affirms the role and expertise of communities in the sustainable use and governance of wild species as part of conservation activities.

NBSAP alignment with Target 22 varies widely across its sub-elements, including participation in decision-making; access to justice and information; rights of women, youth, and persons with disabilities; and protection of environmental human rights defenders. Nearly all countries (27 out of 30)¹⁰² included some recognition of the rights of IPs and LCs to participate in planning and decision-making in decisions



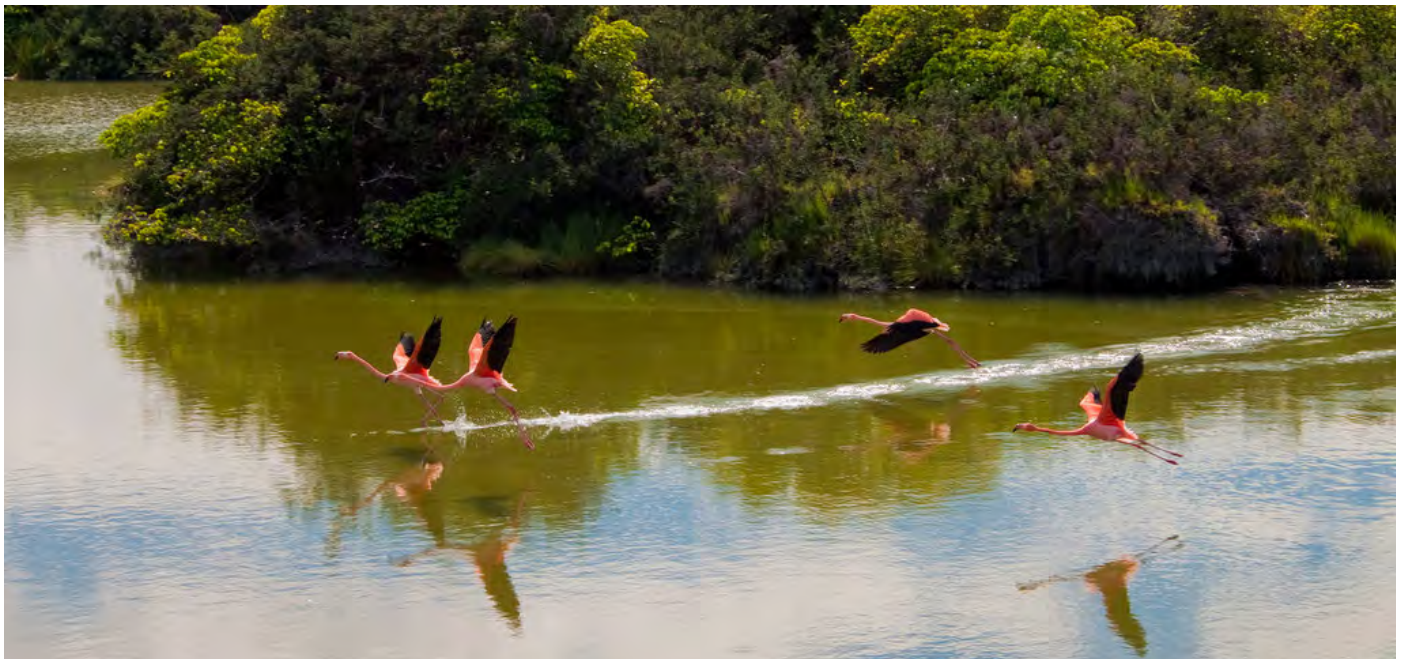
Gayanimaya Tamang, a member of the Lag Lage Pacha Community Forest User Group near Kathmandu, fertilizes the soil. Photo by Nicole Harris for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2025.

that impact their rights, customs, and territories. All 30 countries include measures to support access to information, yet only nine¹⁰³ reference actions or commitments to ensure access to justice. Comprehensive acknowledgment of the rights of women and girls, children and youth, and persons with disabilities is limited: only four countries¹⁰⁴ explicitly include all of these groups. Of the remaining 26 countries, 21¹⁰⁵ reference the rights of at least one of these groups, while five¹⁰⁶ make no clear mention of any. Notably, only Colombia explicitly recognizes the need to protect environmental human rights defenders.

Integrating gender equality into NBSAPs is essential to ensuring inclusive, effective, and equitable conservation outcomes. Women, particularly from Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities, play a vital role in biodiversity stewardship, yet their contributions and rights are often overlooked in policy design and implementation. Under GBF Target 23, countries should commit to ensuring gender equality in their approach to conservation, including recognizing i) equal opportunities, capacity and rights; ii) participation and leadership at all levels; and iii) equal rights and access to land and natural resources.

Across the 30 countries in our dataset, 12¹⁰⁷ do not recognize or have unclear recognition of these 3 target elements. Of the remaining 18 countries, 10¹⁰⁸ explicitly recognize all three elements, while eight¹⁰⁹ include recognition of at least one of these elements. A more comprehensive gender-responsive approach to biodiversity planning would help address ongoing structural inequalities, promote equitable access to resources and decision-making, and ensure that conservation efforts do not reinforce or exacerbate existing disparities.

In addition to the recognition of community and women's rights, a rights-based approach to conservation requires the active involvement, participation, and leadership of communities in the implementation of the NBSAP. Despite the inconsistent recognition of rights described above, 26 of the 30 countries analyzed in this study explicitly listed IPs, ADPs, and LCs as implementation partners to carry out specific conservation activities. This widespread inclusion reflects growing recognition that lasting and equitable conservation outcomes depend on the meaningful partnership and leadership of rightsholders on the ground.



Birds fly close to the water in the Amazon Rainforest. Photo by Accountability Framework initiative (AFI).

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Ways Forward



Participants of a training workshop on Early Warning and Action System in Bajo Quimiriki, Peru. Photo by AIDSESP-Peru.

This study shows that opportunities for rights-based conservation are many and varied, but most countries have yet to formalize Indigenous and traditional territories as a distinct and additional pathway to realizing national area-based conservation commitments. While nearly all of the reviewed countries (29 out of 30) have at least one potential pathway to advance community-led conservation, most lack the means to recognize and include community contributions to nationally recognized conservation areas.

Considering the complexity of the national legal landscapes that condition community land stewardship, this study affirms the need for greater harmonization between state commitments to rights-based conservation, international human rights obligations, and national conservation laws or policies. To ensure alignment between international commitments and national actions, the challenge now lies in strengthening community protections to close the gaps and translate rights-based principles into actionable pathways and benefits on the ground.

First, to meet their 30x30 goals under Target 3, states must recognize IPs', LCs', and ADPs' lands and territories as either owned by or designated for their use, and work with rightsholders and their allies to develop NBSAPs that leverage existing conservation pathways to advance community-led conservation, whether through PAs, OECMs or ITTs. To this end, governments must fully protect communities' tenure rights and respect their self-determined conservation priorities, while ensuring that national laws and conservation policies do not dilute, contradict, or override these protections. As countries seek to meet all relevant commitments, they must ensure that existing or proposed PAs or OECMs do not conflict with or weaken IPs', ADPs', or LCs' tenure rights, and they must put in place

the necessary frameworks to count ITTs and other community-led efforts under national conservation contributions to GBF Target 3.

Second, clear and enforceable rights to FPIC and meaningful participation must be guaranteed in law and practice in the context of all conservation actions sanctioned or authorized by states. Over half the countries included in this study do not recognize an enforceable right to FPIC. This puts communities at risk of conservation initiatives implemented on their lands and territories without their consultation or consent, leading to displacement, criminalization, or erosion of rights and customary practices. Policymakers must address this legislative gap, define a clear, explicit right to FPIC under national law, and affirm the authority of communities' own representative institutions to determine how consent is given.



Kwango province, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo by Ley Uwera for the Tenure Facility.

Third, countries should reform all applicable laws and policies to explicitly guarantee women's equal rights to participation in all conservation decisions and prioritize their leadership in biodiversity initiatives. IP, ADP, and LC women are knowledge holders and leaders in biodiversity stewardship, yet their rights to membership, voting, and leadership remain weakly protected, and many of the NBSAPs still do not clearly commit to concrete actions to ensure gender equality in their approach. To mend these gaps, gender equality must be recognized as a central pillar of effective conservation.

Fourth, NBSAPs should be developed and implemented in full partnership with communities and include measurable targets for community-led conservation in the context of national commitments to the realization of Target 3 and other applicable GBF goals. It is crucial that governments ensure that

NBSAPs fully align with the GBF's human rights-based approach. While IPs, ADPs, and LCs have been increasingly involved and consulted in the development of NBSAPs, their rights and priorities are still not adequately considered and included. Governments must embed community rights and priorities across all targets, with particular attention to ensuring the participation and leadership of women, youth, and environmental human rights defenders.

Finally, to turn words into deeds, rights-based legislative and policy reforms must be supported by concrete actions to bridge the persistent gap between law and practice. States and international development partners should provide technical and financial support for community-led conservation, ensure equitable benefit-sharing, and protect communities from violence and reprisals. Conservation donors also have a critical role to play in directing finance toward rights-based approaches, rather

than exclusionary models that undermine communities' well-being and self-determination.

In sum, this report demonstrates the presence of legal foundations for rights-based, community-led conservation in nearly every country studied. By acting decisively to secure rights, respect FPIC, advance gender equality, and fully integrate human rights into conservation policy, states can transform this opportunity into reality—delivering on global biodiversity commitments while ensuring justice and resilience for the peoples who are the world's most effective and enduring stewards of nature. However, as acknowledged by the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), state governments cannot achieve this on their own. Delivering transformative change implies fundamental, system-wide shifts in views, structures and practices that can only be achieved through whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches that engage all actors and sectors.¹¹⁰



A woman carries wood on her back. Photo by iStock.

Annex 1

Case Studies



A man throws a fishing net in the water in the Philippines. Photo by Shutterstock.

To complement this study's legal and policy analysis, this report includes an annex of ten case studies drawn from countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These cases highlight the lived realities of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of rights-based, community-led conservation. By documenting concrete experiences—ranging from struggles against restrictive legal frameworks to innovative strategies for securing tenure and practicing traditional conservation practices—the case studies provide essential insights into how conservation policies are implemented in practice and their actual impacts on communities and their rights. They also offer lessons for policymakers on what works, what barriers persist, and how future reforms can better align conservation efforts with the rights, priorities, and leadership of the communities most directly engaged in stewarding biodiversity.



An Indigenous woman collects medicine from tree bark in Sumatra, Indonesia. Photo by Jacob Maentz for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2022.

Protecting Community-led Conservation of Wapichan *wiizi*

By Lan Mei¹¹¹ and Gavin Winter¹¹²

Wapichan Conserved Headwaters Area

The Wapichan people of southwestern Guyana have protected the forests in the eastern half of their territory for generations. The area, spanning approximately 1.2 million hectares, is home to networks of sacred mountains—all named and have legends associated with them—sensitive sites, and resources used in cultural ceremonies and rituals. It also contains the headwaters of major river systems, including the Essequibo, Kuyuwini, Rewa, Rupununi, and Kwitaro Rivers. The area is home to a unique and diverse ecosystem with some of the most fertile lands in the region¹¹³ and high levels of biodiversity.¹¹⁴ The wider Rupununi region of Guyana is estimated to be home to more than 5,400 known species, including many highly endangered globally. During the rainy season, the Amazon and Essequibo River basins connect via the Takutu and Rupununi River basins, creating two important biological and geographical portals that allow for the exchange of species across different ecosystems.

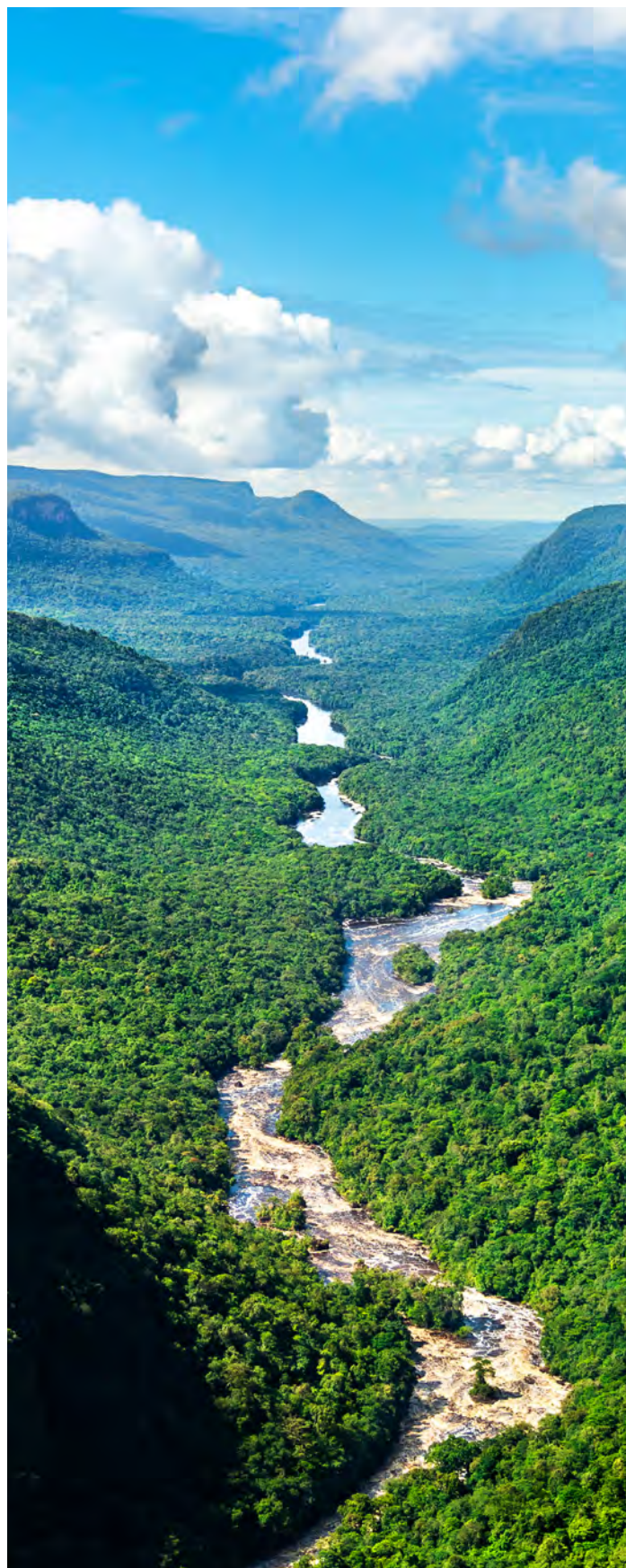
Despite generations of leaders pushing the government to recognize their ownership over their collective territory since Guyana's independence in 1966, the Wapichan people's stewardship over the headwaters region remains unrecognized by the Government of Guyana. Rather than recognizing the importance of the area for conservation, the government has threatened the environmental and cultural integrity of the area by granting gold mining concessions over Marudi Mountain, which sits in the middle of the headwaters area, and turning a blind eye to the illegal mining happening inside those concessions. The area's active and largely unregulated mining is already tearing down Mazoa Hill. When coupled with proposed blasting activities, this is poised to lead to greater ecological and cultural destruction.

The Wapichan communities of the South Rupununi, collectively represented by the South Rupununi District Council (SRDC), began to formalize their commitment to conserve the headwaters region in 2010 through a series of inter-community agreements and in 2012 when they published their Wapichan Territorial Management Plan. The SRDC established a monitoring program in 2012, training community monitors to observe mining and other activities and to document their impacts. They have also developed wildlife and headwaters management plans and cultural heritage policies, which elaborate upon the Territorial Management Plan. The Wapichan people developed and are implementing these management plans to demonstrate their ability to manage their lands sustainably. In 2023, their expertise and efforts were recognized by the Guyana Wildlife Conservation and Management Commission through a Memorandum of Understanding that recognized the authority of the SRDC to manage a wildlife checkpoint at one of the most trafficked entry points into their territory. Their commitment to conservation in the area has more recently been reaffirmed in their Village Sustainability Plans (VSPs), which are mandated by the government.

Challenges and Opportunities for Rights-based Conservation

Legal recognition and policy support for the Wapichan people's work to conserve their headwaters area is urgently needed to protect the area from further destruction by mining and future threats. Unfortunately, the current legal framework provides limited options for formal support for rights-based conservation. Land ownership rights in protected areas are not recognized unless an Indigenous community has a pre-existing title and chooses to designate part of that title as a protected area. Despite decades of advocacy to secure title over the headwaters area, the government has continuously failed to title the Wapichan people's lands. The government has on numerous occasions pointed to third-party interests—for example, mining at Marudi Mountain—as one obstacle to land titling parts of the Wapichan conserved headwaters area. It has also recently informed communities that forest areas are unlikely to be titled to communities anytime soon, but that they could give up their claims over those forest areas to receive title over parts of their savannah lands. Although no further explanation was given to communities, it is interesting to note that the government, since 2020, has entered into a carbon trading scheme covering the entirety of the forest area in the country.

The only other legally recognized form of conserved area in Guyana is a protected area over non-titled lands. One of these protected areas, the Kanuku Mountains Protected Area (KMPA), was established over parts of Wapichan *wiizi* (territory) without the communities' consent in 2011, leading to government-imposed restrictions on community resource use. For example, a new draft management plan for the KMPA describes “housing development projects” by villages—in other words, villagers using timber from the protected area to build their homes—as a key threat to the protected area.¹¹⁵ From the communities' perspective, protected areas are just



Aerial view of the Potaro River in Guyana, South America
Photo by iStock.

another mechanism by which government plans are forcibly displacing them; in the early twentieth century, communities were forced out of their savannahs to make space for cattle ranching investments and moved back into their forests. Now, with the establishment of protected areas, they are starting to be displaced out of their forests.

The Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) of 2022 presents a new opportunity for the Wapichan people to advance recognition of their conservation efforts. The Government of Guyana has, in line with the GBF, publicly committed to doubling its conserved areas by 2025 to 17 percent of the country's area, and to achieving its 30x30 target.¹¹⁶ The Protected Areas Commission has also stated its intention to revise and update the Protected Areas Act. However, the government must make sure that Indigenous Peoples' rights are not violated in the process of increasing conservation efforts. Historically, the establishment of the only Indigenous-owned protected area in Guyana to date, Kanashen Amerindian Protected Area, was not community-led and has resulted in negative unintended consequences, including the displacement of villagers out of the community and negative impacts on neighboring communities.

Notably and ironically, although it is widely reported that a major threat to Kanashen is mining in Parabara—one of the SRDC villages that borders Kanashen—it is, in fact, Kanashen residents themselves who are illegally mining in Parabara. The restrictions on resource use in Kanashen have also led to overuse of wildlife by Kanashen residents in Parabara's lands and resource use conflicts.

The SRDC has already started approaching relevant agencies within the government to engage in discussions around recognition of the Wapichan conserved headwaters area and its contribution toward the Government of Guyana's 30x30 target. Working with the SRDC to recognize their headwaters area as an Indigenous-owned and conserved area is a significant opportunity for the government. The SRDC's proposal is the first time an Indigenous People have presented their own proposal for conservation to the Government in Guyana.

However, advancement of the SRDC's proposal to create an Indigenous-owned conserved area and contribute to the national 30x30 target requires much stronger political support. Despite legislation authorizing government agencies to make decisions in various sectors, in practice, all decisions are taken through the Cabinet, and particularly the President and Vice President. Support from the agencies responsible for the environment, forests, mining, law enforcement, and border control will also be necessary to support the SRDC in exercising its authority over illegal mining activity in the area.

Recommendations to Decision-makers

The Wapichan conserved headwaters area offers a unique contribution to global biodiversity and to Guyana's 30x30 target. Government agencies and officials should, without delay, issue title over those lands to the SRDC villages and begin the process of sustained dialogue with the SRDC to design and develop a strong implementation plan for management of the area. The government must support the SRDC in developing and implementing proposals to ensure that the SRDC has the necessary authority and support to enforce its management plan. If successful, this conserved area would offer a positive example of true Indigenous-led conservation that respects Indigenous Peoples' self-determination, land, resource, and participation rights.

Community-led Conservation in Liberia: A Case for Opportunity

By Chris Kidd¹¹⁷ and Tom Lomax¹¹⁸

The adoption of Liberia's Land Rights Act (LRA) in 2018 reflected a wider paradigm shift in conservation science and law. It allowed for protected areas to be located on Customary Land and to continue being community-owned rather than appropriated by the state. This legislative change put Liberia in the vanguard of the move to implement a progressive, rights-based approach to conservation.

The Land Rights Act

The principal section of the LRA in relation to protected areas—land designated for conservation purposes—is Article 42. This article states that new protected areas can be established either at the request of a community within its Customary Land or by the request of the government following good faith negotiations with the community. Provided the community is content to have a protected area on (or within) their Customary Land, it will remain Customary Land and can be used by the community so long as the use is consistent with the conservation and management provisions of national law. The option for a community to zone a part of its Customary Land as a protected area is also highlighted in the list of suggested land-use categories in Article 38(1), though communities are entitled to define their own land-use categories other than those listed.

While Article 42(3) provides that protected areas on Customary Land can continue to be owned, conserved, and managed by the community, there is nothing in the LRA to prevent communities from entering into collaborative management and conservation arrangements with the government and/or another conservation collaborator (for example, a conservation NGO). The statement and intent of the law in providing for Customary Land to be set aside for conservation is therefore aimed at ensuring that communities are not evicted by the government from their land or restricted from managing such protected areas themselves or jointly.

As such, the LRA provides substantial legislative structure for communities to lead the way in community-led conservation and develop models that meet conservation principles and their own development agendas.

Protected Areas Expansion

Given that Liberia's existing protected area network adds up to 4.1 percent of its land area, and the country has committed to the environmental protection of 30 percent of its forests, there is increasing pressure from the state to expand the country's protected area network. As the majority of Liberia is under customary land ownership, the legal structure provided by the LRA is crucial to support the rights-based expansion of protected and conserved areas, with the leadership and consent of customary owners.

However, despite this legal framework, the Liberian state continues to demonstrate a preference for creating state-owned protected areas, including areas within communities' Customary Lands. Since the passage of the LRA, significant funding from NORAD (via the World Bank) and USAID has been committed to expanding the protected areas network in Liberia, with the initial assumption that this would be achieved through the creation of additional state-owned protected areas. As recently as 2023, the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) submitted gazettelement packages to parliament to create [Kwa National Park](#) without first confirming the customary tenure of the land in question.

Community-led Conservation

In addition to the firm legal basis for respecting community land rights set out in the LRA, there is an array of available options set out in Liberia's environmental and wildlife conservation laws (ranging from the least restrictive to the most restrictive measures) and important procedural safeguards on when and how conservation measures can be put in place. Those procedures prioritize good faith negotiations between communities and the government with a view to reaching a voluntary consensus on the conservation measures that would be most appropriate, subject to the free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) of the Customary Land owners.

Liberia is in a relatively unique position, with a legislative framework already in place to enable the creation of community conservation models. At the same time, there is growing international recognition of the significant roles that local communities play in delivering these international commitments by the state. It is clear that community-led conservation is an essential part of climate change reduction targets and state-owned and managed protected areas are no longer preferred, or even necessary in many cases.

Local communities affected by the proposed Krahn Bassa and Cestos Senkwehn Protected Areas have resisted state attempts to enforce state-owned protected areas on their Customary Lands, and their allies, like [Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development](#) (SESDev), have helped stakeholders understand the implications of the LRA to the conservation sector. At the same time, SESDev has worked tirelessly to convince the government and conservation partners that local communities are in the best position to achieve climate targets if given the resources needed to sustainably manage those lands. A pivotal moment in the last few years was the signing of the [Gbehzohn Declaration](#) in February 2023, in which the heads of state land, forest, and environment agencies were among 70 or so government and civil society stakeholders who participated in a consensus-building workshop that resulted in a commitment to a conservation approach that respects community land rights and enables community-led conservation. The key commitments were:

- Promotion of a rights-based approach that recognizes local communities as central to advancing the conservation of Liberia's biodiversity;
- Recognition that customary ownership of land creates an entitlement to the community rather than just an opportunity to benefit from the activities on their land;
- Commitment to undertake land formalization and respect affected communities' right to FPIC before the commencement of any new protected areas and other area-based conservation initiatives;
- Recognition that Liberia can meet its 30 percent national forest conservation target and other international commitments through various innovative means that go beyond the creation of government-controlled protected areas;
- Emphasis on the importance of mainstreaming gender in all interventions related to the creation and management of protected areas and in the land formalization process; and
- Recognition that community ownership of land designated for conservation within customary areas does not require possession of a separate deed. However, organizing the communities through the land formalization process is expedient to protect their customary tenure rights.

Advocacy by SESDev and others and constructive dialogue involving all relevant government agencies, as well as a range of civil society organizations with relevant expertise in conservation, human rights, and sustainable development, were crucial ingredients in reaching a consensus on the central importance of community rights in the Gbehzohn Declaration's commitments. This, in turn, contributed to the FDA putting the gazettement process of the proposed new Kwa National Park on hold, to ensure alignment with those commitments and the legal framework in which they are rooted. This involves determining the extent of Customary Land ownership in the area being proposed as a new protected area and ensuring that Customary Land rights are respected in the process for advancing conservation objectives in that area.

Key Lessons

- A clear and enabling legislative framework is critical to supporting community conservation efforts, including one that puts secure community rights to land front and center.
- A vigilant and empowered civil society is needed to drive change and guard against state and conservation agency practices that (intentionally or otherwise) serve to shortcut or undermine a human rights-based approach to conservation.
- International recognition in global policy and science of the contributions that community conservation efforts make to the dual climate and biodiversity crises is key.
- Legislative progress does not automatically translate into implementation, and historical practices by conservation and state agencies can be difficult to change.
- Dialogue and cooperation are critical in developing new models and ways of working in the conservation space moving forward.
- Informed legal analysis is necessary to inform and guide national debates to help identify roadblocks and opportunities.
- Legal avenues (and, as a last resort, litigation) may become necessary if organizations and agencies fail to abide by national and international protections for the rights of Customary Land owners.



Local community in Liberia demonstrates community mapping to visitors. Photo by Isabel Albee for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2022.

Rights-based Conservation in Kenya: Barriers and Opportunities for Forest Peoples

By Liz Alden Wily

The key barrier to rights-based conservation in Kenya is the persistence of colonial attitudes, including the purposive (mis)interpretation of laws and exploitation of loopholes to favor retention of forest and wildlife resources by the state at the cost of enabling Indigenous communities to regain their forestlands, enabling them to uphold tried and tested customary conservation norms. This is both harmful to communities and delivers their lands to state institutions that are conflicted as to the purpose of state forests: for biodiversity protection or profit.

Policy, Law, and Institutional Power in Kenya

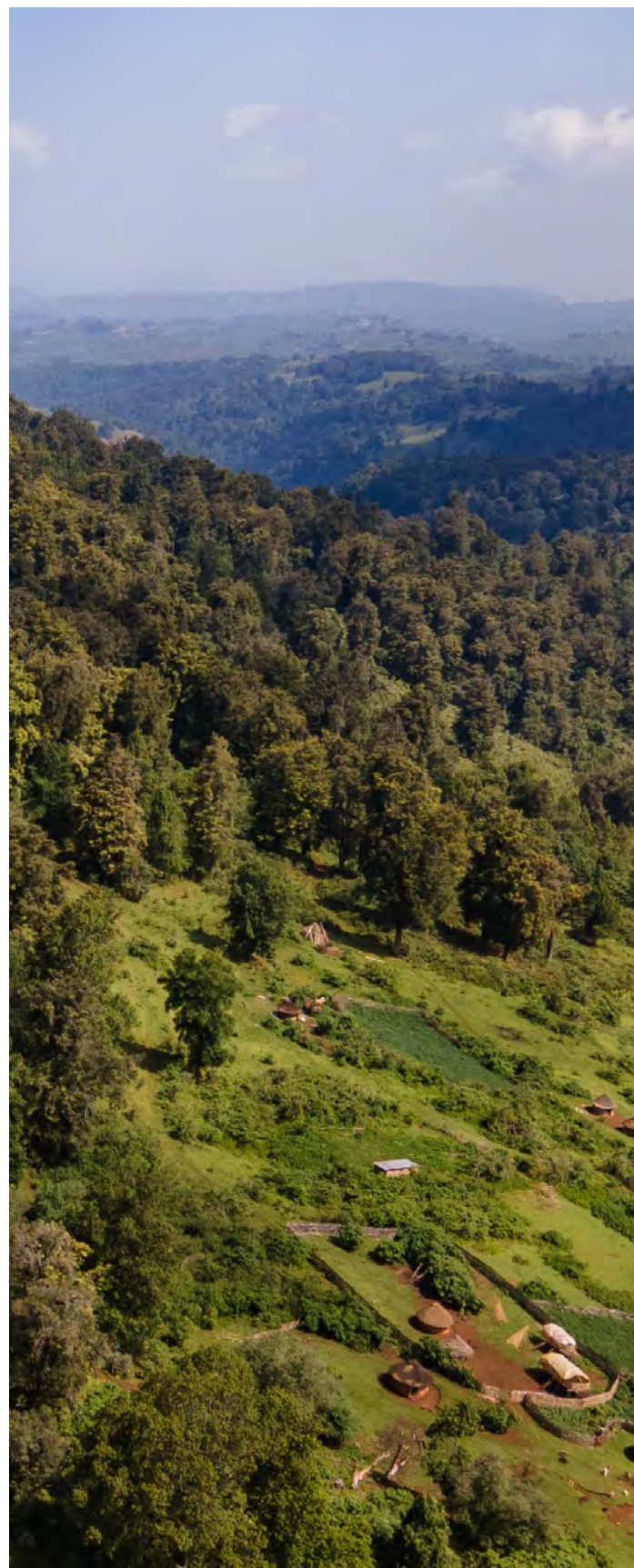
The Forest Act of 2005 forbade communities from living on their ancestral lands, and the Wildlife Act of 2013 prohibited their hunting and gathering. Neither required the government to seek communities' free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) when turning their land into protected areas nor paid communities for the privilege. Indeed, despite Article 2(5) in the 2010 Constitution upholding international law, such as expressed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), FPIC remains ambivalently recognized by officialdom. This impacts the few remaining hunter-gatherer forest peoples, who, despite repeated evictions, remain profoundly attached to what is left of their ancestral forest territories. These are the Sengwer, Elgon Ogiek, Mau Ogiek, Aweer, Sanye, and Yaaku. However, these forests are owned and controlled by the government as public forests.

In providing for community lands as a distinct landholding category alongside public and private lands, Kenya's Constitution (2010, Article 62) gave reprieve to the ownerless status of all communities that own and govern their lands under customary tenure. The "ancestral lands and lands traditionally occupied by hunter-gatherer communities" are explicitly included as community land (Article 63(2)(dii)). Communities also benefit from a constitutional commitment to effect reparation for historical land injustices (Article 67(2e)). Each forest community has duly made exhaustive submissions to the National Land Commission for the restitution of their lands, but with limited positive results thus far. Communities are also to be compensated for the compulsory acquisition of their lands for public purposes, but with grossly insufficient valuation of their losses under the terms of the new Land Value Amendment Act 2019. Helpfully, a judicial hearing scheduled for October 2025 will consider whether that law should be struck down as unconstitutional.

Other limitations afflict the forest rights of communities. On paper, the procedure for double-locking each community's domain under a registered community land title is adequately provided for by the Community Land Act 2016. The law requires communities to sustain natural resources (Section 35) and encourages them to reserve community conservation areas (Sections 13(3c) and 29). The right of each community owner to make and uphold bylaws is embedded. Consent of two-thirds of adult community members is required for decisions altering the status of any land within its property (Section 37). Although very slow, around 50 of potentially 800 customary communities now hold registered community land titles, but none of them are forest communities.

The forest sector has proven lukewarm in its support for this new class of community lands in Kenya and is obstructive with respect to the land and human rights of forest peoples. Positively, the Forest Conservation and Management Act 2016 provides for community forests to be designated on community lands, albeit only on the approval of the Kenya Forest Service (Section 30(3)). Negatively, advantage was taken of a contradiction originating in a drafting error in the Constitution, by stating that “any land which immediately before the commencement of the Act, was gazetted or registered as a forest reserve...shall be deemed to be a public forest under this Act” (Section 77(a)) while also acknowledging that “forests on ancestral lands and lands traditionally occupied by hunter-gatherers” are community lands (Section 30(3e)). Expectation was not met that these forests would be defined as “in transition,” and steps were not taken for their transfer from public to community land ownership. Instead, the law double-locks the state’s possession of these forests by vesting public forests in the Kenya Forest Service (Section 31).

At best, this is a delaying tactic, and at worst, a determination to retain the ancestral lands of forest peoples at all costs. This makes it even harder for forest peoples to reclaim what is left of their rightful territories and to institute the customary forest protection measures tenure security affords. This has been painfully exhibited in the failure of the Sengwer, Elgon Ogiek, and Mau Ogiek to secure restitution of their forestlands in domestic courts, the above contradiction giving judges leeway to retain the status quo. Impunity compounds the denial of rights, as the Government of Kenya fails to implement more positive court orders. This includes [the orders issued](#) by the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights obliging the government to return the Mau Forest to the Ogiek forest communities through the issue of community land titles (AfCHPR 2022: 6–7).



Drone footage of the customary territory of the Indigenous Ogiek of Mt. Elgon, Kenya. Photo by Tony Wild Photography for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2022.

Summary of the Problem, the Opportunity, and the Way Forward

The key problem for rights-based conservation in Kenya is one of governance, wherein the state can pit itself against its customary communities, reminding us that decolonization is still a work in progress in the land and conservation sector, and typically most egregious in its impacts upon the already marginalized and poor, where reforms are yet to be applied. By the government's [own admission](#), conflicting state objectives to conserve and profit from public forests exacerbate entrenched institutional corruption in the Kenya Forest Service (Republic of Kenya 2018: 6ff).

It also reminds us that while just law is critical to promote and achieve, the law is never enough on its own to engineer inclusive and equitable social change. Commenting upon the plight of the Elgon Ogiek and Sengwer in particular, the renowned Elgon leader, Peter Kitelo, observes that:

“It is the policymakers and agencies responsible for conserving the fauna and flora who have most to gain from evicting the very communities that have been conserving their lands despite the ills visited upon them over the last century. The Kenya Forest Service and Kenya Wildlife Service, who undertake the eviction and control aspects of the conservation process with the assistance of the police, at times also manage the compensation processes, poor as these are. The combination of these two processes—the eviction and control processes and the compensation processes—creates a context that enables those within the structures, as well as dominant elites in forest-adjacent communities, to benefit twice; first, by siphoning off compensation that was supposed to reach forest-dwellers being evicted from their land, and second, by evicting the very communities most committed to stopping the exploitation of the forests by these elites.” —Peter Kitelo

The key opportunity for rights-based conservation in Kenya still most practically lies in the use of the Community Land Act 2016 to pursue the titling of community lands, and to secure reclassification of their forests from state to community ownership. Conservation conditions are so integral to the forest peoples' way of life that agreeing to conditions is welcomed, provided these are rational, fair, and performance is independently monitored. Globally, the literature echoes findings that when Indigenous Peoples secure legal recognition of their possession, tried and tested community-based approaches to resource protection thrive. Nor is it in the interest of forest peoples or conservation that they be sidelined as adjacent forest-dwellers entitled to access and use state forests, the preferred strategy of the Kenya Forest Service in its promotion of community forest associations for this purpose. Forest peoples have such strong cultural, social, and livelihood relations with their forests that their wish and right are to be empowered to sustain these forests and be sustained by them.

The way forward: Whether protection of forests or human rights is prioritized, the scientific evidence is clear that these are mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive. This is reflected in the Global Biodiversity Framework in its recognition that Indigenous Peoples and traditional territories are a critical source for biodiversity protection, and its pledge that “nothing in this framework may be construed as diminishing or extinguishing the rights that indigenous peoples currently have or may acquire in the future” (UN 2022: Target 3 and Section C8). International pressure on Kenya to adhere to this pledge will not go amiss.

Meanwhile, each of Kenya’s forest peoples will indubitably continue their struggle for their land and forest rights. As the forest peoples network first articulated in 2014, a win-win for land rights and conservation is integral to respecting human rights.

“The best solution to conservation and water tower protection and rehabilitation lies in meeting our land rights on condition of us protecting those forests. We historically protected those forests, and we can do this again. This includes protecting against wrongful occupation and use by outsiders, against clearing and degrading practices, and actions to rehabilitate the forest. We want the bees, the wildlife, the canopy of trees, the diversity of trees and plants, and the water to come back. Our culture and our own forest-based livelihood depend upon this.” —Forest Indigenous Peoples’ Network (2014:3).



An Indigenous Maasai shows their land title deed, Kenya. Photo by Asha Stuart for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2025.

Community Mangrove Management in Loky Manambato: Women's Associations Enhance Conservation and Livelihoods

By Nicolas Salo¹¹⁹

Loky Manambato is a highly diverse landscape in northeast Madagascar spanning 250,000 hectares and includes high massifs, forested areas, grasslands, and a marine/coastal zone. Two rivers, Loky in the north and Manambato in the south, provide the area's boundaries and are at the origin of its name. The main population center is the commune of Daraina, although local communities are settled in other parts of the area as well.

Currently, Loky Manambato is classified as a category V, Protected Landscape/Seascape, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classification system. These protected areas are defined as spaces "where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced a distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values."¹²⁰

History and Context

Before 2000, the forest blocks of Loky Manambato were intensively exploited. In co-management with the communities, a multi-purpose forest station was established to protect biodiversity, but the site was not placed under temporary protection until 2005.¹²¹ Since then, it has been managed by Fanamby and expanded to include all stakeholders in the landscape.

Loky Manambato obtained its creation status as a protected area under Decree No. 2015-759 on April 28, 2015. Located in the Vohémar district of Madagascar, the total protected area of 250,000 hectares includes a 15,000-hectare marine zone and 2,000 hectares of mangrove forests located along the eastern coast in the Rural Commune of Ampisikinana, which extends over six villages and 10 hamlets.

The mangroves of Loky Manambato develop in estuaries and coastal areas, where the soft soil is dominated by mangrove trees from the *Rhizophoraceae* family. Among the most common species are *Ceriops tagal* and *Rhizophora mucronata*, which are plants adapted to high water salinity. These species play a crucial role in the productivity of coastal and pelagic (open sea/oceanic) fisheries in tropical regions. The mangroves provide a vital habitat for many invertebrate species, including shrimp and fish, which spend part of their life cycle there. Beyond biodiversity, these ecosystems also provide a value chain favorable to the economic development of women in the area.

Human Rights

Before Fanamby's arrival in 1997, the Malagasy state managed Loky Manambato, and the local communities lived there without restrictions and without specific regulations. The communities living in the riparian zones had unlimited access to natural resources. The men fished in the sea, but were often confronted with difficulties related to the climate, sometimes risking their lives. They left in the evening and returned the next morning with fish, but due to overexploitation and poor management of the mangroves, the quality of the fish was unsatisfactory, and the selling price was too low. The monthly income it generated did not meet their expectations.

Faced with this difficult situation, the fishermen's wives decided to take an active role, holding on to the hope that things would improve over time. Their involvement is particularly remarkable in the context of traditional Malagasy society, where women are often marginalized and mainly assigned to household chores and tasks perceived as requiring less effort, such as preparing products. So, the idea of uniting and acting together had already emerged during every public or community meeting. The fishermen continued fishing, and the women organized to create a unique association in Ampasimadera with the goal of managing natural resources. Thus, the Ampasimadera Women's Association was created to manage the mangrove, knowing that fishery products, such as crabs, shrimp, and fish, inhabit the mangroves. After two years, the Association's members had already seen an improvement in their household income. Consequently, there was growing recognition among the men that the women's organizing had brought hope for a change in their standard of living, regardless of pre-established gender considerations.

Since Fanamby's arrival, daily activities could no longer be carried out without authorization or without respecting management rules. The mangrove forests became protected as the habitat of fishery resources and were supported by law to ensure the survival of fishing populations. However, Fanamby chose a co-management policy to allow the community living in the protected area to participate in decision-making. Hence, the creation of the three additional associations, as the co-management system provides more advantages for the local community to access their resources. This was a difficult situation for the fishermen to understand at first, but with Fanamby's support, the awareness and support among the fishermen grew. Currently, 18 fisher associations consisting of 534 members have been established in Loky Manambato, and nine community management sites have been set up and are directly managed by the fishermen.

Multifaceted Women's Associations Engaged in Effective Mangrove Management

Since 2020, four women's associations with 114 members have committed to managing mangrove forests in their localities:

- **Women Protectors of Mangroves (VMH)** in the village of Soafagneva, with 24 members and 16 households, ranging from 20 to 60 years of age. They manage a mangrove forest with a total area of 649 hectares, with their main economic activities being crab fishing to sell to collectors at US\$1 per kilogram. Between 2020 and 2023, the association has restored 2.92 hectares of mangroves.
- **Women Protectors of the Environment of Ambavarano (FMTIA)**, consisting of 51 members ranging from 15 to 50 years from 47 households, manage 351 hectares of mangrove forest. Their main economic activities include crab and octopus fishing and the collection and preparation of fish by drying before delivery to collectors from the city of Vohémar. Since its creation, this association has restored 1.67 hectares of mangroves.
- **Well-organized Women of Ampasimadera (VEMIA)** is composed of 27 members from 24 households, ages 25 to 65 years, who are engaged in algae cultivation, shrimp fishing, and fishing for crabs, squid, and octopus. Thanks to the co-management established between the local communities and the managing institution of the Loky Manambato Marine Protected Area, they now have an advantageous economic situation. This association manages 53 hectares of mangroves and has restored 8.61 hectares.
- **Association of United Women for the Development of Ampasimena (FIMIHA)** is composed of 12 members from 12 households, ages 22 to 55 years. Their main economic activities include collecting and preparing fishery products, with the market being the city of Antsiranana. This association manages 37 hectares of mangroves and has restored 6.26 hectares.

Aside from fishing and gathering, the four women's associations in Loky Manambato engage in crafts through weaving to make mats/rugs and *soubiques* using local raw vegetable materials.¹²² A person can produce five mats in a week, with a unit price of US\$1.75 for one mat and a selling price of US\$0.88 for one *soubique*. Currently, the monthly income per household for members ranges from US\$25 to US\$55, which is beneficial relative to the current standard of living in the region.

The Fanamby Association, as the area manager, encourages women-led engagement by supporting the women's association, which consists of 99 households managing 1,090 hectares of mangrove forests, along with the restoration of 19.46 hectares, which is a rare practice in the management of protected areas. Each year, two training workshops are conducted by Fanamby to enhance organizational capacities and support their initiatives in the development of their conservation activities in association with craftsmanship and fish product preparation. This is a good practice to share with other villages to ensure that all mangrove forests are preserved and conserved. In 2023, five visits from institutions managing natural resources were hosted in Loky Manambato. In the future, all the mangrove forests of Loky Manambato will be managed by women's associations to ensure more rational and economically sustainable exploitation



Conservation initiative in Loky Manambato, Madagascar.
Photo by Fanamby and Forest Peoples Programme, 2024.

Key Recommendations for Decision-makers

Fanamby's mission is to collaborate with local communities to strengthen resilience in biodiversity conservation. Here are the three main recommendations that we suggest:

1. Directly finance local communities' adaptations to the effects of climate change and facilitate access to funds by establishing a direct financing mechanism.
2. Develop value chains and economic sectors with facilitated access to markets while ensuring fair benefit-sharing.
3. Strengthen economic resilience through the financial sustainability of existing economic and commercial practices such as ecotourism, responsible fishing, and sustainable agriculture, which would impact communities' involvement in biodiversity conservation and natural resources.

Conservation of Mu Billi: A Step Toward Collective Territorial Rights¹²³

By Jorge Luis Andreve Díaz and Onel Masardule¹²⁴

The Gunayala Comarca (hereinafter referred to as CG) is an Indigenous territory located in the Republic of Panama, in the east of the country. It is characterized by having a special territorial administration granted by the Republic of Panama in the early 1950s, following years of struggle between the inhabitants of the GC and the national police. Since that time until the present, the Guna people have managed their marine natural resources according to their own visions and management systems, with their authority recognized primarily within the framework of terrestrial territory (forests, crops, and wildlife, among others). However, little progress has been made in the marine area. In this regard, the proposal for a Biosphere Comarca gains importance.

Conservation and management measures are not new in the Comarca. Years ago, the ancestors of the Guna people practiced effective and respectful management measures in harmony with the natural environment. However, in recent decades, certain changes have been observed that are influencing the ancestral conduct of the Guna, weakening their traditional models and affecting their management of natural systems. These new conservation and environmental management models do not fully consider cultural management values, giving more importance to protecting species while rendering invisible the peoples who inhabit these areas.

Scientific and technical reports, as well as comments from the Guna people themselves, confirm and denounce changes, most of which are detrimental to their natural systems and Indigenous knowledge. The conservation of these Indigenous knowledge systems is perhaps one of the primary objectives of maintaining and strengthening the conservation of marine resources.

In response, the Guna people have implemented various actions for the conservation of marine wildlife through customary rules. These measures include a lobster fishing ban from March to June each year, the regulation of the permitted size for its capture, and the prohibition of fishing for lobsters with eggs. Additionally, they have declared sea turtle nesting sites as off-limits and celebrate the Turtle Fair every May. They have also banned fishing with oxygen tanks, all with the aim of conserving marine biodiversity and raising awareness among the inhabitants of the CG.

Responding to the pressures affecting Indigenous and traditional knowledge systems, restoring their vitality is a significant challenge at the global, national, and institutional levels. Traditional and Indigenous practices involve a complex mix of components (laws, policies, cultural norms) and the degree of compliance by society or individuals with the laws and regulations that govern them.

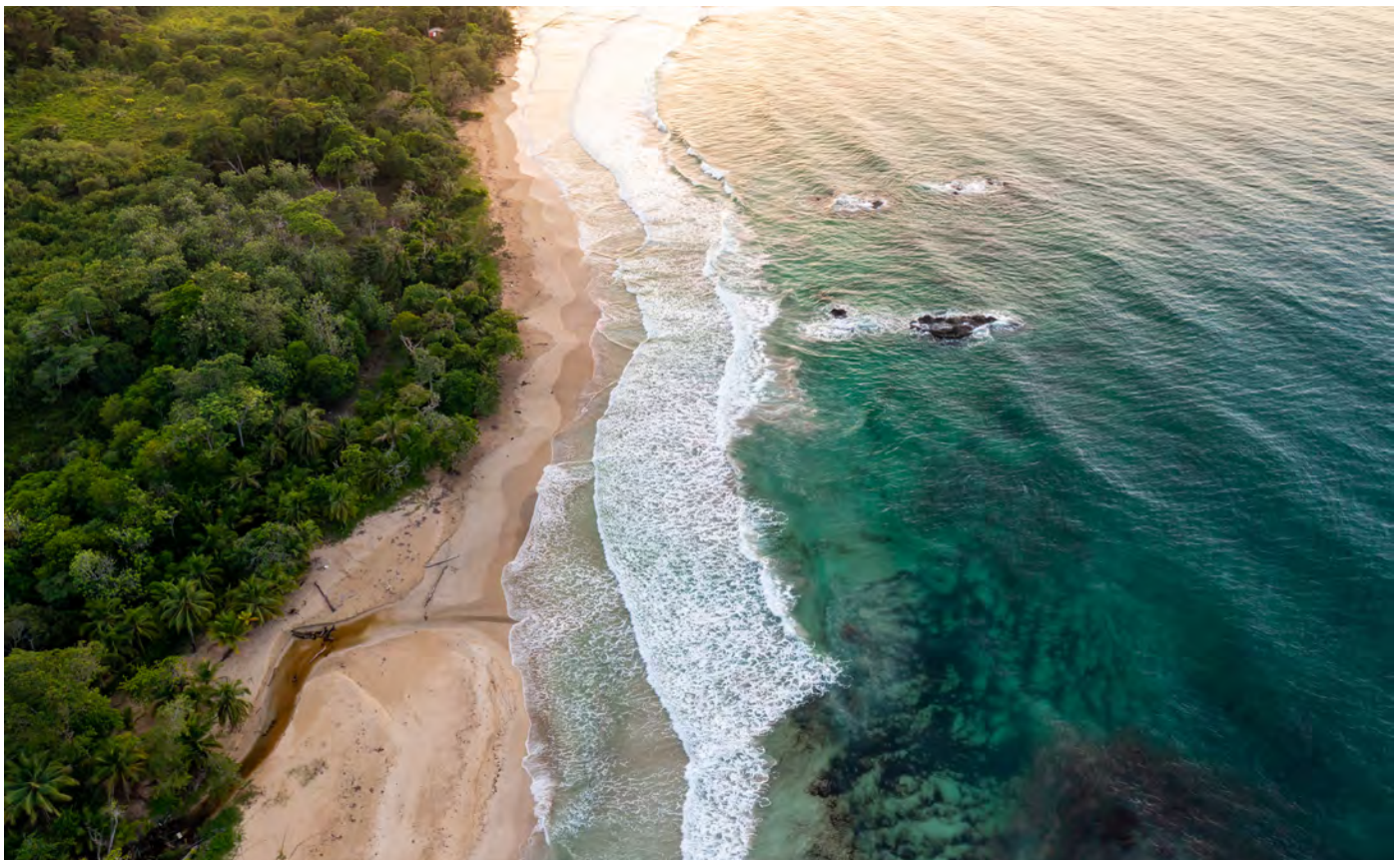
This assertion is not new. Since the 1980s, Indigenous Peoples have been advocating in meetings and international conferences for the inclusion and recognition of their visions and actions as a fundamental right, especially within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). For example, at the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) during COP9 in Bonn, Germany, in 2008, Indigenous Peoples succeeded in including the following text calling on Parties:

"[T]o integrate the traditional, scientific, technical and technological knowledge of indigenous and local communities, consistent with Article 8(j) of the Convention, and to ensure the integration of social and cultural criteria and other aspects for the identification of marine areas in need of protection as well as the establishment and management of marine protected areas."¹²⁵

There are different marine environmental management systems around the world, particularly in the Caribbean; however, few adequately consider Indigenous Peoples' cultural realities. They do not properly address the natural and social dynamics of these peoples, making the creation of their own environmental management models urgent.

Taking the above into account, the Guna people are analyzing the creation of the Gunayala Biosphere Comarca, a step toward realizing their collective territorial rights as a people. To this end, they base their actions on their right to conserve cultural and natural heritage, a right established in international and national instruments, customary laws (the Fundamental Law and the Statute of the Gunayala Comarca), and Law 72 of 2008.

This last law establishes the legal framework for protecting cultural heritage in Panama. It recognizes and protects the cultural rights of Indigenous Peoples, addressing aspects such as the protection of their language, customs, traditions, and forms of artistic expression. Additionally, it establishes mechanisms for participation in managing their cultural heritage and seeks to ensure that their cultural practices are respected and maintained in the face of external influence and modernization. These laws aim to ensure that cultural heritage is preserved for future generations and respected for its historical and cultural value.



Red Frog Beach on Bastimentos Island, Bocas del Toro, Central America, Panama. Photo by iStock.

The Guna people are certain that conserving natural marine and cultural heritage is the foundation for enhancing the population's capabilities, revaluing environmental culture or ancestral knowledge and love for Mother Earth. Therefore, the integration and development of biocultural aspects is an urgent task, and it is necessary to advance the formulation and execution of strategies, plans, and comprehensive territorial development programs from within, with a high degree of community participation, to foster creativity and social well-being, contributing to the management of the natural and social environment and generating economic income.

However, these actions have challenges that need to be considered, some of which are:

- The length of the Comarca (200 miles) and the mode of transportation (marine) are subject to climate changes, in addition to the increase in fuel costs, which could raise internal travel expenses for awareness-raising activities throughout the Comarca.
- The plan's implementation aims to ensure the conservation of terrestrial and marine biodiversity, sustainable development, and the preservation of natural ecosystems. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of having a dedicated management structure to oversee and execute activities. This action will require suitable actors for issues related to the creation of a biosphere Comarca and direct and effective participation from cultural knowledge keepers.
- On the other hand, climate change represents one of the most urgent and widely recognized environmental challenges of our time. The population (leaders, religious figures, politicians, educators, professionals, youth, women) must change their attitude toward Mother Earth to revalue environmental culture.

Conclusion

- Indigenous Peoples have their own ecosystem management systems based on their knowledge of nature and their customary laws in a holistic and integrated manner.
- These systems are based on their knowledge, worldview, customary norms, and cultural and spiritual values, which have proven to be effective for the conservation of resources and ecosystems, as well as for the sustainable use of biodiversity.
- Knowledge and practices have been transmitted from generation to generation for thousands of years, resulting in the conservation of ecosystems through cultural use and management, expressed in Indigenous Peoples' own systems that have allowed them to conserve biodiversity based on this knowledge.

A Study on Rights-based Conservation in the DRC

By Aquilas Koko Ngomo¹²⁶

Initial Problems and Key Barriers

The unlawful eviction of Indigenous Pygmy communities from protected areas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) serves as a landmark case of rights violations, marking a baseline for the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples' rights in conservation efforts. These evictions have had severe consequences, including the disruption of livelihoods; loss of access to natural resources; and breaches of human rights related to land, education, healthcare, and free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). Moreover, these actions have resulted in killings and have heightened the vulnerability and marginalization of the Indigenous Pygmies and local communities, who are the primary custodians of the country's biodiversity.

Despite these challenges, Indigenous Peoples and local communities have demonstrated remarkable efficiency in conserving their lands and territories. Through the efforts of dedicated allies like ANAPAC-RDC and the ICCA Consortium, numerous Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) have been established across the country. Currently, more than 20 ICCAs have been identified and documented. A notable example is the Kisimbosa Chamakasa ICCA, located in the Bakano sector of Walikale territory, North Kivu province, covering 557,252 hectares.

Key challenges to rights-based conservation remain, however, including a lack of awareness or disregard for community rights by conservation authorities, the government's promotion of business activities on Indigenous Peoples' lands, and legal gaps in conservation laws and policies. The fortress conservation model of national parks, such as Kahuzi-Biega, has left little room for Indigenous Peoples' rights to be respected. Additionally, businesses such as the Alphamin Bisie Mining company operating in Walikale have infringed on community rights with negative impacts, including forced evictions, ecosystem destruction, loss of sacred sites, and depletion of natural resources without fair compensation.

Solutions Implemented

The ongoing violation of Indigenous Peoples' rights in conservation has prompted communities and various rightsholders, including Indigenous organizations and individuals, to engage with government bodies in advocacy for rights-based conservation. Awareness-raising and capacity-building efforts have been crucial in ensuring decision-makers understand and voice these issues. Progress includes the active participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in revising the DRC's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), contributing to the development of the seventh and eighth country reports on biodiversity, and playing a role in the revision of land laws.

Indigenous Peoples have been actively involved in developing the national strategy for biodiversity conservation outside of protected areas. This is a significant step toward ensuring that Indigenous Peoples and local communities have a voice in all conservation reforms and that their rights are respected.

These advances complement the recent law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Indigenous Pygmy Peoples, enacted in 2022, which affirms their rights to land and respect in conservation efforts, including the emphasis on FPIC. Additionally, ANAPAC is implementing the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) project led by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which aims to promote rights and equity in conservation by supporting 20 ICCAs across three biocultural landscapes in the DRC (East, Center, and West). This initiative, alongside the national strategy for nature conservation outside protected areas, aligns with the implementation of Target 3 of the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Remaining Challenges

Despite significant progress, several challenges remain unresolved, including:

1. The slow pace of legal reform processes;
2. Poor implementation of existing relevant legal provisions;
3. Inadequate legal recognition and security of Indigenous Peoples' and community-conserved areas;
4. Limited capacity of rights advocates to influence decision-making at higher levels; and
5. Insufficient financial resources to undertake and achieve innovative new initiatives.



An Indigenous Pygmy man stands in the forest of the Congo Basin. Photo by Hugo Metz for If Not Us Then Who?

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

Considering the situation described above, the following recommendations are made to decision-makers:

- Directly support Indigenous and community-led processes to ensure that conservation fully and effectively respects human rights at all levels.
- Strengthen Indigenous and community governance systems in community conservation efforts.
- Support legal reviews, reforms, and research to ensure rights are integrated into conservation-related legal instruments and fully respected in practice.
- Encourage the effective participation of rightsholders, specifically Indigenous Peoples and local communities, in decision-making processes related to conservation at all levels.
- Support the legal recognition of ICCAs and promote Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).
- Provide capacity-strengthening support for conservation actors focusing on rights-based approaches and related topics in the implementation.

Land Rights as a Path to Inclusive Conservation: The Case of Kalahan Educational Foundation in Imugan Santa Fe, Philippines

By Asami B. Segundo

The Ikalahans, who at times call themselves Ikalahan-Kalanguya, are Indigenous Peoples living in the upland, tropical, deciduous forests of the northern Philippines. The word “kalahan” refers to the tropical deciduous forest, and the prefix “i” denotes the people who live in a certain place. The Ikalahans of Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines, are one of the communities that have resisted colonial powers. They have continued to assert their rights in the context of the current Philippine government.

Once displaced by the Second World War, the Ikalahans of Nueva Vizcaya returned to their land directly afterwards and continued cultivating their mountains by practicing *inum-an*, the traditional shifting cultivation practice. During the Marcos regime, whose cronies exploited Indigenous Peoples' territories, the Ikalahans were subjected to land speculators who wanted to acquire property for personal gains. The land grabbers saw the beautiful Ikalahan land and wished to develop a new mountain city akin to the famous Baguio City. This new city would be called Marcos City and would mainly be set up in the Malico village, one of the Ikalahan villages.

The Ikalahan elders fought for their ownership of the land; however, because they did not have a government document that signified their ownership, they were considered squatters, or illegal settlers, in their own land. They continued to lobby, discuss, and negotiate with the government, but that led to the filing of a case against two elders. They were also set to be relocated to different sites in the Isabela and Nueva Ecija provinces. Despite these challenges, they continued to assert their claim to their land and meet with government officials. Fortunately, they were able to get support from a human rights lawyer who supported them throughout this legal battle.

As they were community representatives, the government said they were not a legal entity and refused to negotiate with them. To strengthen their presence in dialogues and negotiations, the Ikalahans formed the Kalahan Educational Foundation (KEF), a community-based organization to legally represent the community as they negotiated and advocated for their rights. They registered it with the Securities and Exchange Commission on November 26, 1973, as the legal entity of the Ikalahans. They also aimed to educate their children through this organization. As they negotiated with the government, the Ikalahans offered that if the government allowed them to stay on the land, they would take care of the forests in the area. This was a novel and bizarre idea in the 1970s, as it was thought that to achieve conservation, local people must be removed from the area. The elders and their lawyer argued that allowing the local people to patrol the forest and carry out other conservation practices would save resources for the government.

After several discussions, negotiations, and dialogues with the government, the then-Bureau of Forest Development agreed with the Ikalahan elders and issued the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) No. 1 that established the Kalahan Forest Reserve. Through the MOA, it was ensured that the Ikalahans would not be displaced from their ancestral lands, and they were granted full control and authority to manage both the

land and its resources. Although not entirely a land title, the MOA became the legal document that allowed them to assert their ownership of the land. This is also one of the first policies that recognized communities' right to manage their land and natural resources. This became the precedent for the Philippines' Community-Based Forest Management Program (CBFM) and the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (RA 8371 of 1997), for which the Ikalahans are lobbyists.

Through the KEF, the Ikalahans surveyed their land and began mapping their territory. The data they obtained were used to create land use plans that strengthened their Indigenous conservation practices. They also realized that the forest plays a huge role in their water supply. Hence, through the leadership of the elders, the community agreed to designate forest zones that are strictly for the community water supply. In these zones, no cultivation or harvesting of timber is allowed. Areas where birds thrived were declared bird sanctuaries. The Ikalahans merged their Indigenous knowledge with modern technology to enhance their forest management.

In contrast to the misconception that shifting cultivation is a major driver of deforestation, the Ikalahans learned through their research partners that their Indigenous farming practices are, in fact, environmentally sustainable. The *inum-an* or *uma* is where Ikalahans grow a wide variety of crops, but the *ubi*, or sweet potatoes, is the main one. Several Indigenous farming technologies or practices are applied in the *inum-an*, such as *gen-gen*, *balkah*, *day-og*, *kinabbah* (fallow system), and *pang-omis*. The Ikalahans also practice Indigenous knowledge on site selection. For example, they can identify which side of a mountain is less windy and therefore, the best site for cultivation.

To make use of non-timber forest products, the KEF established a food processing center that provides a livelihood for community members. Ikalahans gather resources from the forest like the *dagwey*, *dikay*, *hibiscus*, and guava, which are then processed into jams and jellies. The Ikalahans are also able to protect their natural resources by further creating and implementing policies that ensure that these areas are conserved and protected. Policies on cutting trees, swidden farming, and other practices were established by the Ikalahans themselves through the KEF Board of Trustees. To this day, the Ikalahans protect and conserve their land for the benefit of future generations.

In November 2023, the KEF celebrated its 50th anniversary. Only one of the founding elders of the KEF is still alive, and, in his speech, encouraged the younger Ikalahan generation to continue the legacy. Although many of the elders who fought for their land rights have passed, it is undeniable that they made the world a better place. All these developments in policy, conservation, and quality of life for the Ikalahans began when a group of Indigenous elders rose up to fight for their land. Land rights are indeed the path to inclusive conservation.

Contributions of the Dayak Simpakng Community of Mekar Raya Village in West Kalimantan to the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity¹²⁷

By Cindy Julianty¹²⁸

“For us as Dayak Peoples, the Forest is our Home”

–Yogi, Indigenous youth of Dayak Simpakng-Mekar Raya

Community-based Conservation practices

The Dayak Simpakng Indigenous Peoples of Kampong Banjar, Lawe, and Karap in Mekar Raya Village, West Kalimantan, Indonesia, are aware of the need to protect their lands, particularly communal areas such as *Tembawang* and *Keramat* (sacred) areas. Genuine acts and efforts have been taken to defend their territories against the intrusion of outsiders, having been instilled by their ancestors with a sense of responsibility to preserve their land and value biodiversity, thereby ensuring the survival of future generations.

In the past, the community used to move their settlements and practice traditional shifting cultivation. Once they moved, the former settlement would be converted into forested areas known as *Tembawang*, which are now spread over 40 points within an area of 251 hectares and are 100 percent utilized. The area is preserved to provide a source of livelihood for the community, and it is collectively owned and passed down from generation to generation.

Tembawang is a term used by the Dayak people of West Kalimantan for planted forests that, among other species, contain fruit trees and other productive plants. The community strongly protects *Tembawang* for its ecological, economic, and cultural values. The community receives economic benefits from the seasonal fruit plants in *Tembawang*. It has abundant local fruit varieties, including *durian*, *temberanang*, *rosak*, *kamayo*, *tamarind*, *rambutan*, and many others. A customary institution manages *Tembawang*, and its management is written in the customary book (*Pamabaris*) and verbally passed down between generations. The community obeys the customary law that states, “You may plant a tree, but you cannot cut it.” There are punishments for those who disobey these customary rules as written in the *Pamabaris*.

The community also possesses other sacred and protected ancestral sites in addition to *Tembawang*. Among these are the Keramat Tanikng forest, Tanikng River, Bejangkar River, and Amuntuda River, as well as Semugo hills. These areas (forests and rivers) have historical and spiritual value for the community as ancestral heritage sites and important water resources for community. The community believes that the river areas are places of purification and can be used by the community to find sources of healing and rituals.

In these forest and river areas, people are strictly forbidden from taking anything that is in them, even though various types of fish can be seen in abundance in the clear rivers and various types of fruit can be seen growing abundantly among the trees. As a result, this area has a high level of biodiversity and serves as a habitat for a diverse range of wild creatures like *tajak* and ivory hornbill, *kuko hornbill*, bear, *kelasi* (red langur), deer, *pelanduk* (mouse deer), *kesiduk* (skunk), *nek uban* (white mouse), *klemipiao* (gibbon), tiger, and

mereka the orangutan. There are also various species of fish, such as *uceng*, *nyalian*, *banta*, *wader cakul*, catfish, *hampala*, *sili*, *tilan/sili batik* fish, *kiontong* fish, *anak aruan* fish, *baung*, and many others. This variety demonstrates that the community, in its own unique way, is capable of sustained conservation. *Tembawang* and these sacred and protected ancestral sites have also been registered as Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs)–Territories of Life into the national registry system of ICCAs held by Working Group ICCAs Indonesia (WGII).

Key Barriers and Challenges

There are two major challenges that the Dayak Simpangk community in Mekar Raya Village must face to maintain their local knowledge and wisdom. First, there are internal challenges. These include the problem of regeneration, shifting values in society, and loss of sources of livelihood in the village. It must be acknowledged that the various influences of modern science, technological developments, and the lack of knowledge transfer from the older generation to the younger generation have reduced solidarity between communities. Modern schools do not teach many values of local wisdom and customary areas, and the older generation is reluctant to invite young people to get involved in customary activities; as a result, their sense of concern for the area is decreasing.

The younger generation tends to prefer to leave their territories and earn a living by working in the city, and most of them do not return to the village. These things make the vortex of knowledge revolve only around the older generation, and the transmission of knowledge is hampered. As a result, the younger generation will be more easily influenced to abandon their customs, and local wisdom—including traditional conservation practices—can be lost.

Second, there are external challenges. The community in Mekar Raya village is starting to experience various threats of land grabbing. As the palm oil industry expands in West Kalimantan, various offers of palm oil and mineral mining investments have begun to enter their territories since 2013. They have begun to tempt the community with profit and improved economic welfare. Palm oil corporations have taken over many community lands around Mekar Raya Village, converting numerous forested areas into monoculture plantations. Luckily, the community is aware of the major threats that can occur if they allow these concession permits to enter their customary areas—they could lose their lands, source of livelihood and medicine, primary water sources (which also benefit neighbouring communities), and more.

Therefore, from 2013 to 2023, they have consistently rejected various investments and business permits to enter their customary areas. Yet, the strong solidarity in the community is inversely proportional to its conditions of recognition. They have still not received recognition from the local government, and recognition of Indigenous communities must go through various bureaucratic challenges that are quite difficult and costly in terms of time and money.

Solutions

To temporarily secure these ICCA sites from external threats, the village government issued Village Government Regulation No. 2 of 2022 to protect local wisdom and community-based conservation practices. This regulation is the lowest hierarchy of the law that is valid within village areas and should be respected by everyone. In addition, through a facilitation from some NGOs such as Tropenbos Indonesia, some of their forests have also been designated as village forests by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry.

Yet, Village Forest is not the final destination for the Dayak Simpakgn community in Mekar Raya to save and secure their ancestral domains because the village forest scheme has a validity period of just 35 years. The community is still trying to get recognition through the customary forest scheme. The customary forest is part of communally-held/owned forests (rights-forest) and has no time limit like village forests, thus it is able to provide full recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their forested areas.

Key Takeaways

Although legal recognition for the community is important, community self-strengthening is also crucial. A strong and solid community will be much more empowered and stronger in defending their Territories of Life from various threats. In addition, to ensure the sustainability of this community-based conservation practice, a joint effort is needed from both the community and supporting organizations to encourage a strong leadership regeneration process that transmits inclusive knowledge from older generations to younger ones.



Drone footage of a village in Sumatra, Indonesia. Photo by Jacob Maentz for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2022.

Opportunities and Challenges for Securing Indigenous Peoples' Rights in the Implementation of the New Global Biodiversity Framework in Chile

By Karina Vargas

Conservation is part of the way of life for Indigenous Peoples, who have a close relationship with, and feel a part of, nature. Their principles and values seek balance and harmony between the different forms of life that coexist and are intrinsically connected to the territories and seas that are their ancestral home.

Indigenous Peoples' contributions to the conservation of biodiversity, as well as the importance of their traditional ecological knowledge and related rights, have been increasingly recognized and valued in the international context. This was reinforced by the new Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) adopted at CBD COP15 in December 2022.¹²⁹

However, while Chile has received growing international recognition for its efforts to protect biodiversity and address the climate crisis, it has made little progress in recognizing and supporting Indigenous Peoples' contributions.

To date, conservation in Chile has been synonymous with the recognition of protected areas set aside from human interference and managed by the state through the National Forest Corporation (CONAF). In parallel, private conservation initiatives have emerged, some of which have encroached upon lands claimed by Indigenous Peoples,¹³⁰ without any state intervention to manage the situations.

Despite the large number of land and marine conservation initiatives led by Indigenous Peoples and local communities to strengthen self-determination and the protection of their territories, they are generally overlooked and receive limited technical or financial support to carry them forward.¹³¹

In response, in Chile, Indigenous Peoples from the mountains to the sea have come together to advocate for the recognition of their conservation initiatives and safeguard their efforts to protect these territories, all from an Indigenous perspective.

Conservation Challenges in Chile

Chile has recently made notable progress in terms of conservation, including through the enactment of Law 21.600, which established the Biodiversity and Protected Areas Service (SBAP), aimed at improving environmental governance and the protection of ecosystems.

Although this law represents a significant step forward in the institutionalization of conservation policies and recognizes Indigenous Conservation Areas as spaces that can be managed by Indigenous communities and organizations, it has been criticized for not fully complying with international standards for the recognition and protection of Indigenous Peoples' territorial rights, failing to effectively integrate Indigenous traditional knowledge and science, and rendering Indigenous Peoples' coastal and marine territories invisible.

Beyond the lack of adequate legal frameworks, Indigenous Peoples also face persistent threats such as extractivism, climate change, deforestation, and land loss, which endanger both their culture and the ecosystems they inhabit.

On the other hand, the Coastal and Marine Spaces of Indigenous Peoples (ECMPOs) law, enacted in 2008, enables the transfer of a designated marine area to the administration of an Indigenous community or an association of communities that have exercised the customary use of this space, with the aim of preserving its uses, ensuring the conservation of its natural resources, and promoting the well-being of these communities.

There is currently an effort to amend this law with the aim of "perfecting" it, justified by political and administrative obstacles, which are generated by the state itself. This is contradictory and symbolic of attempts to curtail rights in response to the law's impact on the reorganization and governance of marine and coastal areas in Chile.



Woman holding a clay bowl with Chilean pine nuts, pehuen, and araucaria fruits. Photo by iStock.

ECMPOs, recognized under Law 20.249, are vital for marine conservation and promote a form of conservation grounded in traditional knowledge and practices predominantly associated with women, including shellfish harvesting, seaweed gathering, fishing, basket weaving, and the smoking of fish. These are all practices that respect the nature cycles—tides, weather, climate, and timelines for marine resources to grow and reproduce—which contribute to conservation whilst also strengthening governance and the participation of women in said areas.

Coordination and Collective Action Among Indigenous Peoples

In this context, the Indigenous Peoples of Chile, from the north to the south of the country, and from the mountains to the sea, are gathering to raise the voices of these communities from the, "South of the South of Latin America."

Having long worked internally on these issues, networks such as the ICCA Chile Network, the Network of Indigenous Women for the Defense of the Sea, and the Futa Mawiza Inclusive Conservation Initiative have come together to advocate for the recognition of their traditional knowledge, spirituality, and forms of participation and governance that contribute to the protection and conservation of marine and coastal areas in Chile.

Earlier this year, these groups convened an international congress and pre-congress on Indigenous conservation, bringing together Indigenous Peoples from Argentina, Paraguay, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia, to discuss common threats and future collaborative actions to advocate both in Chile and beyond.

Challenges Ahead

Among the challenges ahead is the consultation on the provisions of the SBAP law. Chile's Indigenous Peoples have already begun to articulate their positions in response to the consultation, where they aim to participate to secure territorial rights, traditional knowledge, and their visions for conservation.

Another challenge lies in the recognition of ECMPOs as areas conserved by Indigenous Peoples in order to meet Chile's 30x30 target. These areas, managed and conserved by Indigenous Peoples, are vital for biodiversity and contribute to strengthening governance and women's participation. However, corporate interests are currently seeking to curtail Indigenous Peoples' rights in these areas, including by modifying the laws that protect them.

Key Considerations

Despite some legal progress, a more solid institutional framework for biodiversity is needed in Chile. This must include a more inclusive approach that guarantees Indigenous Peoples' rights in the implementation of the GBF, with the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous women and youth.

It is essential to recognize Indigenous Peoples' vision and methods of conservation, as well as their traditional knowledge and management and governance practices. Together, these contribute to the conservation of their territories and marine and coastal areas, guaranteeing the territorial rights of Indigenous Peoples while achieving effective, inclusive, and equitable conservation.

The Mayan People of Dziuché and the Defense of the Chichankanab Lagoon

By Albert Maurilio Chan Dzul

Introduction

According to the ancestors, the Dziú was the only one who dared to rescue the corn seed from a great fire. For this reason, it is black and has eyes as red as fire. Perhaps because of the abundance of this bird in the jungles of the northwest of the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, or perhaps following some indication from the ancestors, the first settlers called their community Dziuché, which in Spanish means, “place of Dziú birds in the trees.”

Dziuché is located in the municipality of José María Morelos on the road that goes to Chetumal, the capital of Quintana Roo, and borders the state of Yucatán. The predominant vegetation types are tall and medium semi-evergreen forest. The climate is warm and sub-humid in summer, with an average annual temperature of 26 to 28°C and a total annual rainfall of 1,100 to 1,200 mm.

The community of Dziuché was founded in 1932 as part of the process of providing communal lands after the Mexican Revolution. However, these territories were never, “idle,” as official policies stated, since they had in the past housed *chicleros* (natural gum producers) camps and, previously, Mayan rebels from the Social War, as well as Mayan *cacicazgos* (chiefdoms) long before the arrival of the Spanish. Today, almost 70 percent of the community considers itself Indigenous.

Dziuché has about 28,000 hectares, of which 99.7 percent is social property (*ejido*). The *ejido* (common land) assembly, as the highest authority, has established a permanent forest area of 10,000 hectares, 5,000 of which are under forestry use. In addition to other official conservation schemes, such as the Wildlife Management Unit (UMA) and Payment for Environmental Services (PSA), an incipient management for tourism in the Chichankanab lagoon has also been implemented.

Initial Problem or Barrier

Although the community has clear conservation results, a product of the management of the entire territorial surface from conventional conservation and from the so-called fortress conservation, the deficiencies or weaknesses of community conservation could only be solved through a protected area. From this perspective, and without community participation, the government of the state of Quintana Roo issued a decree for the creation of the State Protected Natural Area Chichankanab Lagoon System (ANP) in 2011, with which the state government was assigned the administration, conservation, development, and preservation of 11,610 hectares.

In addition, in this decree, the state government mentions the signing of collaboration agreements with the NGO Amigos de Sian Ka'an for the development of the management program, and, in Article 9, attributes the power to, “enter into coordination or cooperation agreements to grant the administration of the protected natural area.”

Implemented Solutions

Community governance was visible from the beginning, as the ejidal assembly denied Amigos de Sian Ka'an's first request in 2009 for more than 14,000 hectares to establish a protected area.

Once the community found out, by chance, that half of its territory was already part of a protected natural area, it called for assemblies to analyze the case. A promoter group managed to position itself as an *ejidal* authority, and the defense of lands was strengthened.

With the support of the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Project, A.C. (ProDESC) in 2018, the Dziuché community filed an application for amparo against the declaration of the ANP. That same year, they achieved the provisional suspension of the decree and, finally, in 2019, this amparo managed to nullify the decree creating the ANP, which was officially published in 2020. The resolution was delivered physically to the community in 2022.

Thinking of long-term solutions, the community has undertaken actions to strengthen its organization, both intra-community, such as the assembly of special formalities to protect the territory from companies, and inter-community, motivating nearby *ejidos*, also owners of the Chichankanab Lagoon, to form a Union of Ejidos. They have also identified the importance of training processes and alliances, as well as their incipient interest in the Community of Practice of Territories of Life, an initiative promoted by Members and Honorary Members of the ICCA Consortium in Mexico and led by U Yich Lu'um, the organization hosting the coordination of the Mesoamerican subregion.

Pending Challenges

The challenges are also at different levels. At the community level, one of the challenges is to involve the population beyond the *ejidatarios* (rightsholders of communal lands) as a population with rights of access to land. Likewise, there is the challenge of maintaining the sense of defense and unity in the face of changes in *ejido* authorities, both due to differences in approach and external pressures.

The challenge of strengthening the Union of Ejidos and the link with other communities beyond the state of Quintana Roo remains. This implies the possibility of knowing and influencing spaces where decisions that affect the rights of Indigenous Peoples are made. The latter includes knowing and understanding the global context that, with its challenges and opportunities, has made the international community understand and accept Indigenous Peoples' contribution to biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation.

Key Conclusions

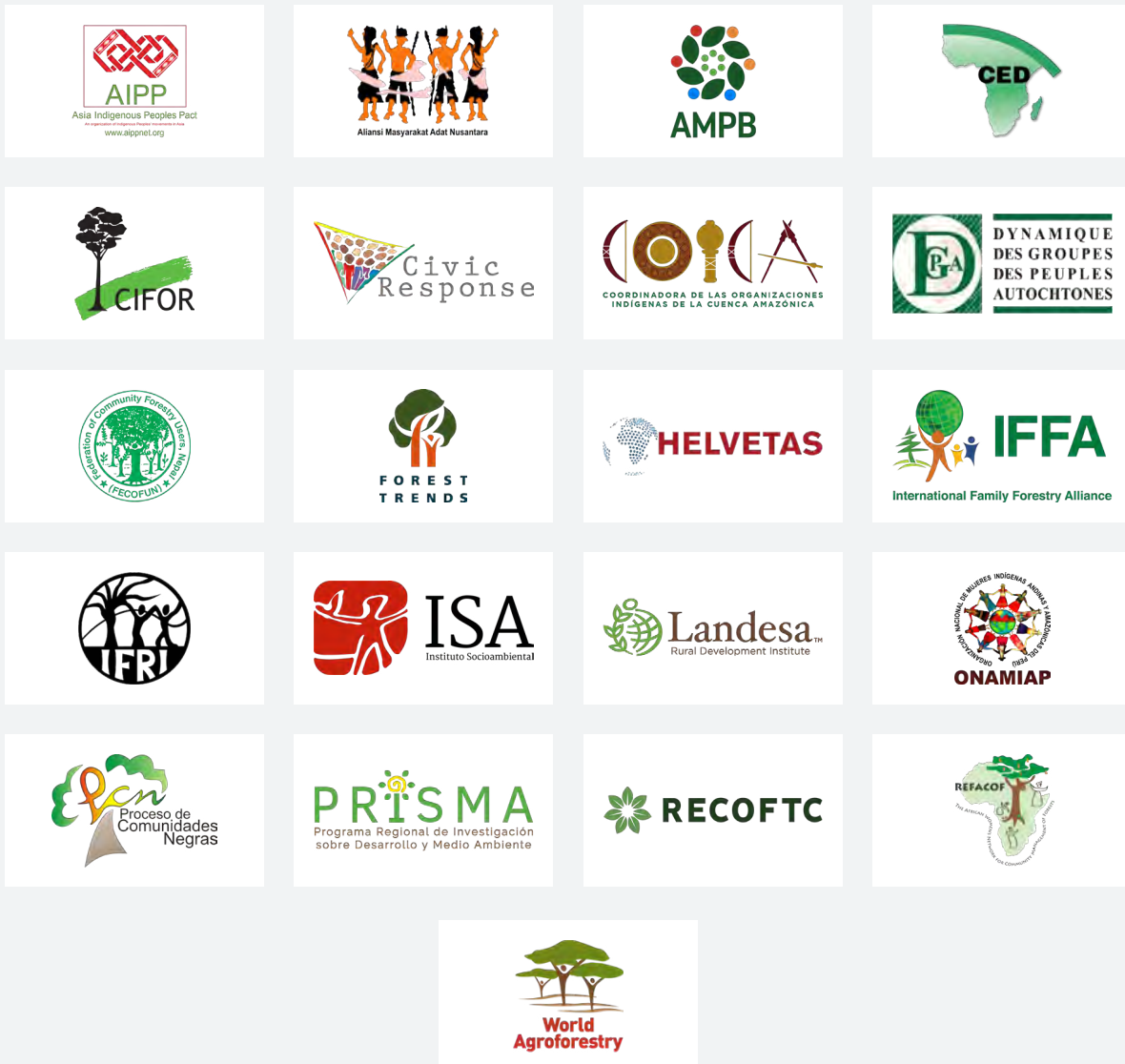
For Indigenous Peoples, the processes of biodiversity conservation and development can be understood from the logic of environmental racism. Not only because such processes have a top-down approach, but also because they are carried out from a position of power and superiority: from the imposition of protected areas to mass tourism projects, such as Maya Ka'an or the Mayan Train.

In fact, Dziuché is an example of a large number of Indigenous Peoples and local communities that maintain a strong relationship with their territory, that have strong decision-making bodies, and—that, without having explicit conservation objectives—, ensure biodiversity in the long term. The challenges and weaknesses presented by the community can be strengthened without the imposition of solutions from “above.”

About the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI)

RRI is a global coalition of over 200 organizations dedicated to advancing the forest, land, and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, local communities, and the women within these groups. 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. Its members capitalize on each other's strengths, expertise, and geographic reach to achieve solutions more effectively and efficiently. 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. For more information, visit rightsandresources.org.

Our Partners



Endnotes

- 1 World Wide Fund for Nature, UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre, GEF Small Grants Programme/ ICCA-Global Support Initiative, LandMark Global Platform of Indigenous and Community Lands, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, Wildlife Conservation Society, UN Development Programme Equator Prize, International Land Coalition, Conservation Matters LLC, and International Union for Conservation of Nature. 2021. The state of Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' lands and territories: A technical review of the state of Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' lands, their contributions to global biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services, the pressures they face, and recommendations for actions. World Wide Fund for Nature, Gland. Available at: https://www.fint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/report_the_state_of_the_indigenous_peoples_and_local_communities_lands_and_territory.pdf.
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- 25 As noted in the methodology section, this study considers a country to have a **potential legislative pathway** toward community-led conservation when it has one or several CBTRs under national legislation, which could be recognized as OECMs or ITTs under a country's total national conserved areas if it establishes proper policy or legal mechanisms to recognize such areas under the Global Biodiversity Framework's Target 3.
- 26 This includes PAs and OECMs that have been 'Designated' (legally/formally designated), 'Proposed' (proposed for legal/formal designation), or 'Established' (established through other effective means, for example, customary law) at the time the data was last updated. Thus, it includes areas that may already be functioning as PAs and OECMs, but are not yet legally recognized, as the legal processes for recognition may take a long time. If only Designated areas are counted, the number of PAs and OECMs managed by IPs and LCs would be even smaller; UNEP-WCMC, and IUCN. 2025. Protected Planet: The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) and World Database on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (WD-OECM). UNEP-WCMC and International Union for Conservation of Nature, Cambridge. Available at: www.protectedplanet.net.
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- 49 Bolivia, Colombia, the Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, Gabon, Honduras, Peru, and the Philippines.
- 50 Article 90, General Law of Environment (Law No. 28611–2005).
- 51 Perez, Padmapani L. 2018. Living with the problem of national parks: Indigenous critique of Philippine environmental policy. Thesis Eleven 145(1): 58–76.
- 52 Tran, Dalena, and Ksenija Hanaček. 2023. A global analysis of violence against women defenders in environmental conflicts. Nature Sustainability 6: 1045–1053. doi:10.1038/s41893-023-01126-4.
- 53 Brazil, Cameroon, Cambodia, Costa Rica, the DRC, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Liberia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Suriname, and Tanzania.

54 Article 364, Code on Environment and Natural Resources (2023).

55 As noted above, this includes OECMs that have been ‘Designated’ (legally/formally designated), ‘Proposed’ (proposed for legal/formal designation), or ‘Established’ (established through other effective means, for example, customary law) at the time the data was last updated. Thus, it includes areas that may already be functioning as OECMs, but are not yet legally recognized, as the legal processes for recognition may take a long time. If only Designated areas are counted, the number of countries with OECMs would be even smaller; UNEP-WCMC and IUCN. 2025.

56 Cameroon, Cambodia, the Republic of the Congo, Costa Rica, the DRC, Gabon, India, Indonesia, Liberia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Suriname, Tanzania, Thailand, and Zambia.

57 See, for example, the cases of:

Tanzania: Bluwstein, Jevgeniy, Jens Friis Lund, Kelly Askew, Howard Stein, Christine Noe, Rie Odgaard, Faustin Maganga, and Linda Engström. 2018. Between dependence and deprivation: The interlocking nature of land alienation in Tanzania. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 18(4): 1–25;

The DRC: Mangambu-Mokoso, Jean de Dieu et al. 2024. Conflicts Between Indigenous Pygmy Peoples, the Local Community and the Kahuzi-Biega National Park in Eastern DRC: Conflict Management Strategies towards Perspectives for Peaceful Cohabitation. *East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 7(1); Schlindwein, Simone. 2020 “Gewalt in afrikanischen Nationalparks: Wann bilden Einzelfälle ein System?” *TAZ*, March 31. Available at: <https://taz.de/Gewalt-in-afrikanischen-Nationalparks/!5671819/>. 2020. “The Kasula Trial: Punishment without justice for the Batwa in DR Congo.” Forest Peoples Programme, Moreton-in-Marsh. Available at: <https://www.forestpeoples.org/publications-resources/news/article/the-kasula-trial-punishment-without-justice-for-the-batwa-in-dr-congo/>; Rainforest Foundation UK. 2019. “Widespread human rights abuses in Africa’s largest forest park.” Rainforest Foundation UK, London. Available at: <https://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/widespread-human-rights-abuses-in-africas-largest-forest-park/>;

Indonesia: Barnes, Paul A., Sabhrina Gita Aninta, Tomi Ariyanto, Mukhlis Jamal Musa Holle, M. Khairul Ikhawan, and Herdhanu Jayanto. 2023. The gap between policy and practice for human rights in conservation: A case study in Papua Province, Indonesia. *Oryx* 57(3): 360–369. doi:10.1017/S0030605323000066; Gindroz, Anne-Sophie. 2018. Indigenous Peoples in Protected Areas in Indonesia: The Case of Gunung Halimun Salak National Park. Rights and Resources Initiative, Washington, DC. Available at: <https://www.fao.org/sustainable-forest-management/toolbox/cases/case-detail/en/c/1256087/>;

India: Chakma, Suhas. 2024. India’s Tiger Reserves: Tribals Get Out, Tourists Welcome. University of Arizona Press, Tucson. Available at <https://indigenous.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/2024-07/IndiaStatusofTigerReserves2024.pdf>; Maan, J.S., and Pradeep Chaudhry. 2019. People and protected areas: some issues from India. *Animal Biodiversity and Conservation* 42(1): 79–90. doi:10.32800/abc.2019.42.0079; Fanari, Eleonora. 2019. Relocation from protected areas as a violent process in the recent history of biodiversity conservation in India. *Ecology, Economy and Society—the INSEE Journal* 2(1): 43–76. doi:10.37773/ees.v2i1.55;

Nepal: Indigenous Peoples Rights International. 2021. Indigenous Peoples in protected areas in Nepal: A country report on criminalization and violation of subsistence occupation and customary rights. Indigenous Peoples Rights International, Baguio City;

Zambia: Mfune, Orleans. 2017. Conservation narratives and contested protected areas in Zambia: A political ecological analysis. *Journal of African Studies* 7(1): 118–137.

58 See Law No. 407–2001, law declaring and defining the Bosawás Reserve; Territorio Indígena y Gobernanza. n.d. Mayagna Sauni As y Bosawás. Accessed August 6, 2024. Available at: <https://www.territorioindigenaygobernanza.com/web/mayagna-sauni-as-y-bosawas/>; Dennis Mairena Arau. 2011. “La Reserva de la Biosfera de Bosawas y el territorio Mayagna Sauni As en Nicaragua: Desafíos para la gobernanza territorial.” Centro para la Autonomía y Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CADPI), región Autónoma Atlántico Norte.

59 In Ecuador, 29 percent of the total country area corresponds to the territories of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-Ecuadorians, and Montubios, and 46 percent of the biodiversity hotspot areas are located within those territories. Despite this, 31 percent of communities’ territories have active oil concessions. This is evidence of how, despite an apparent adequate protection of the bundle of rights, the existence of carve-outs in legislation still allows the state to advance extractive projects within communities’ lands, impacting both communities’ self-determination rights and biodiversity conservation. See WWF. 2021. El área bajo conservación en el Ecuador podría duplicarse con un apropiado reconocimiento de los derechos a la tierra de los Pueblos Indígenas y Comunidades Locales, revela informe. World Wide Fund for Nature, Seattle. Available at: <https://www.wwf.org.ec/?367271/pueblosindigenasIPCL>.

60 Blanco, Patricia R. 2023. “Historic Ruling in Ecuador Returns Ownership of Ancestral Land to the Siekopai People.” *El País*, November 30. Available at: <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-11-30/historic-ruling-in-ecuador-returns-ownership-of-ancestral-land-to-the-siekopai-people.html>; SwissInfo. 2023. “Histórica sentencia en Ecuador que reconoce territorio ancestral de los indígenas siekopai.” SwissInfo, November 28. Available at: <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/hist%C3%B3rica-sentencia-en-ecuador-que-reconoce-territorio-ancestral-de-los-ind%C3%ADgenas-siekopai/49015126>.

61 Brazil, Ecuador, Guyana, Kenya, and the Philippines.

62 See aforementioned challenge from the Sakopai people in Ecuador, as well as the case of the Ogiek in Kenya: African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights v. Republic of Kenya, Judgment, Application No. 006/212.

63 African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights v. Republic of Kenya, Judgment, Application No. 006/212.

64 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner. 2025. “Kenya: UN expert urges immediate halt to land demarcation violating Ogiek rights and African court judgments.” United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, June 4. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/06/kenya-un-expert-urges-immediate-halt-land-demarcation-violating-ogiek-rights>.

- 65 Atkinson, Sharon, Davild Wilson, Andrew Da Silva, Paul Benjamin, Charles Peters, Ignatius Williams, Roger Alfred, and Devroy Thomas. 2016. Our Land, Our Life: A Participatory Assessment of the Land Tenure Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Guyana. Report for Region 1 and Region 2. Amerindian Peoples Association and Forest Peoples Programme, Moreton-in-Mash. Available at: <https://www.forestpeoples.org/fileadmin/uploads/fpp/migration/publication/2016/12/fppguyanaltainternet.pdf>.
- 66 See, for instance, the AfCHPR decision on the rights of Batwa Peoples in the DRC. In July 2024, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights found that the violent forced eviction of the Indigenous Batwa community from Kahuzi-Biega National Park in the DRC was a violation of their human rights. The Commission also put forward a list of recommendations to the DRC government, including making a full public apology to the Batwa people; acknowledging the abuse by park rangers; rescinding all laws that prohibit the presence of the Batwa on their ancestral lands; compensating the Batwa; and granting them titles to their ancestral land within the park. Minority's Rights Group. 2024. "Press Release: DRC: Respecting indigenous peoples' rights ruled key in fighting climate crisis." July 29. Available at <https://minorityrights.org/batwa-ruling/#:~:text=For%20the%20first%20time%20ever,fighting%20climate%20change%20in%20Africa>. The full court decision is available here: <https://minorityrights.org/app/uploads/2024/07/communcation-588-002-decision--english-version.pdf>.
- 67 In the case of Papua New Guinea, it is important to note that only 3 percent of the land is classified as State Land and 97 percent is classified as Customary Land. The data refers to State Land only as, by definition, communities hold rights over Customary Land. In the case of Suriname, the country has committed to putting forward legal reforms to include participatory mechanisms.
- 68 Bolivia, Brazil, Cameroon, Cambodia, Colombia, the Republic of the Congo, the DRC, Ecuador, Gabon, Guatemala, Honduras, Liberia, Madagascar, Mexico, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and the Philippines.
- 69 India, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal, Tanzania, and Zambia.
- 70 Brazil, Costa Rica, Guyana, the Philippines, and Thailand.
- 71 The GBF requires countries to respect the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, in accordance with national legislation, international instruments, and human rights law. See CBD/COP/DEC/15/4, December 19, 2022.
- 72 Colombia, the Republic of the Congo, the DRC, Ecuador, Guatemala, India, Liberia, Mexico, Mozambique, Panama, and Papua New Guinea.
- 73 Bolivia, Brazil, Nepal, Nicaragua, Peru, and the Philippines.
- 74 Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, the Republic of the Congo, the DRC, Ecuador, India, Liberia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and the Philippines.
- 75 Panama and the Philippines.
- 76 Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Cameroon, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Republic of the Congo, the DRC, Ecuador, Gabon, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, India, Kenya, Liberia, Mexico, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Tanzania, and Zambia.
- 77 Indonesia, Madagascar, Nepal, Peru, and Suriname.
- 78 Cameroon, Costa Rica, Gabon, Guyana, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, Thailand, and Zambia. Three of these 14 countries (Mozambique, Nepal, Papua New Guinea) do recognize the right to FPIC separate from the right to prior consultation and full information.
- 79 The Republic of the Congo, the DRC, Liberia, Cambodia, India, the Philippines, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and Suriname.
- 80 The Republic of the Congo, the DRC, Liberia, Cambodia, India, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Suriname.
- 81 The 12 countries in this study known to have Afro-descendant Peoples are: Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and Suriname.
- 82 Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Nicaragua.
- 83 General Recommendation 37 (2018) on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate, para 26.
- 84 Bolivia (TIOC, Propiedades Comunitarias, Titulos Comunes), Brazil (Indigenous Lands and Quilombola Community Land), Cambodia (Indigenous Communities Land), Colombia (Indigenous Reserves, Afro-Colombian Community Lands, Collective Peasant Reserve Zones), the Republic of the Congo (Terres Coutumières), Costa Rica (Indigenous Territories), the DRC (Rights of Indigenous Pygmy Peoples), Ecuador (Ancestral Territories of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-Ecuadorians, and Montubios), Guatemala (Communal Lands), Honduras (Indigenous and Afrohonduran Communal Property), India (the lands of "scheduled tribes" and other traditional forest-dwellers), Indonesia (Adat Forest), Kenya (Registered and Unregistered Community Lands), Liberia (Customary Lands outside of Authorized Community Forests and Authorized Community Forests), Mexico (Comunidades and Ejidos), Mozambique (DUATs), Nepal (Community Forests), Panama (Indigenous Peoples' Territories within and outside of Comarcas and Peasant Settlements), Peru (Native Community Lands, Peasant Community Lands), the Philippines (Ancestral Domains and Lands), Papua New Guinea (Customary Lands), Tanzania (Village Lands), Thailand (Community Forests), and Zambia (Community Forests).
- 85 RRI. 2025. Resilience and Resistance: Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and Local Community Women's Statutory Rights to Community Forests. Rights and Resources Initiative, Washington, DC. doi:10.53892/QSTZ6441.
- 86 For a detailed explanation of RRI's Gender Methodology and the three selected indicators, see Rights and Resources Initiative. 2025. RRI Gender Methodology 2025. Rights and Resources Initiative, Washington, DC. Accessed September 8, 2025. Available at: <https://rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/RRI-Gender-Methodology-2025.pdf>.

- 87 Bolivia (Original Peasant Indigenous Territory and Communal Property), Cambodia (Indigenous Communities Land), Colombia (Peasant Reserves Zones), the DRC (Rights of Indigenous Pygmy Peoples), Ecuador (Ancestral Territories of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-Ecuadorians, and Montubios), India (Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Land), Indonesia (Hutan Adat Forests), Kenya (Registered and Unregistered Lands), Liberia (Customary Lands outside of Authorized Community Forests and Authorized Community Forests), Mexico (Communities and Ejidos), Mozambique (Uncertified and Certified Community DUATs), Peru (Peasant Community Forestlands Suitable for Forestry), and the Philippines (Ancestral Domains and Lands).
- 88 Bolivia (Communal Titles for Agricultural-Extractivist Communities in the Northern Amazonian Region), Brazil (Indigenous Lands), Colombia (Indigenous Reserves and Afro-Colombian Community Lands), the Republic of the Congo (Terres Coutumières), Guatemala (Communal Lands), Panama (Indigenous Peoples' Territories), Peru (Native Community Forest Lands Suitable for Forestry), and Zambia (Community Forest).
- 89 Colombia (Afro-Colombian Community Lands) and India (Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Land).
- 90 Bolivia (Original Peasant Indigenous Territory and Communal Property), the DRC (Rights of Indigenous Pygmy Peoples), Ecuador (Ancestral Territories of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-Ecuadorians, and Montubios), Kenya (Registered Lands), Liberia (Customary Lands outside of Authorized Community Forests and Authorized Community Forests), Mexico (Communities and Ejidos), Nepal (Community Forest), and the Philippines (Ancestral Domains and Lands).
- 91 Colombia (Afro-Colombian Community Lands), India (Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Land), and Tanzania (Village Land Forest Reserve).
- 92 Kenya (Registered Community Lands), Liberia (Customary Lands outside of Authorized Community Forests and Authorized Community Forests), Mexico (Communities and Ejidos), Nepal (Community Forest), and Peru (Peasant Community Forestlands Suitable for Forestry).
- 93 Dunne, Daisy, and Patrick Greenfield. 2024. "COP16: More than 85% of countries miss UN deadline to submit nature pledges." Carbon Brief, October 15. Available at: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/cop16-countries-miss-un-deadline-to-submit-nature-pledges/>.
- 94 As of April 2025, only seven of the 30 countries reviewed in this study have submitted an updated NBSAP. As a result, this study analyzes the seven updated NBSAPs and the latest NBSAP for the remaining 23 countries for their alignment with the GBF. The seven countries with updated NBSAPs at this time include Colombia, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Peru, Suriname, and Thailand.
- 95 CBD. 2022b, Section C, paragraph (g). Available at: <https://www.cbd.int/gbf/introduction>.
- 96 Colombia, Costa Rica, the DRC, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, the Philippines, Suriname, and Zambia.
- 97 Kenya's NBSAP does not describe a clear public consultation or other participatory process.
- 98 Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Cameroon, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Gabon, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Liberia, Mexico, Nepal, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Suriname, Tanzania, and Zambia.
- 99 Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Cameroon, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guyana, Honduras, India, Liberia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Suriname, Tanzania, and Zambia.
- 100 The DRC, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nepal, Panama, and Thailand.
- 101 Bolivia, Cameroon, Colombia, the Republic of the Congo, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, India, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Suriname, Tanzania, Thailand, and Zambia.
- 102 All countries except Guatemala, Guyana, and Thailand.
- 103 Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, India, Mexico, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Suriname, and Thailand.
- 104 Colombia, Ecuador, Indonesia, and Mexico.
- 105 Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo, Costa Rica, Honduras, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Suriname, Tanzania, Thailand, and Zambia.
- 106 The DRC, Gabon, Guatemala, Guyana, and Liberia.
- 107 Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo, the DRC, Gabon, Guatemala, Guyana, Liberia, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, Thailand, and Zambia.
- 108 Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, India, Mexico, Nepal, Peru, the Philippines, and Suriname.
- 109 Cambodia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Nicaragua, and Panama.
- 110 IPBES. 2024. "Summary for Policymakers: Transformative Change Assessment." In Thematic Assessment Report on the Underlying Causes of Biodiversity Loss and the Determinants of Transformative Change and Options for Achieving the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity, edited by K. O'Brien, L. Garibaldi, A. Agrawal, E. Bennett, O. Biggs, R. Calderón Contreras, E. Carr, N. Frantzeskaki, H. Gosnell, J. Gurung, S. Lambertucci, J. Leventon, C. Liao, V. Reyes García, L. Shannon, S. Villasante, F. Wickson, Y. Zinngrebe, and L. Perianin. IPBES Secretariat, Bonn. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.11382230.
- 111 Forest Peoples Program.
- 112 South Rupununi District Council.

- 113 See Report by the Amerindian Lands Commission of Guyana, August 1969, pp. 75–76.
- 114 Alonso, Leeanne E., Juliana Persaud, and Aiesha Williams (eds). 2016. Biodiversity Assessment Survey of the South Rupununi Savannah, Guyana. BAT Survey Report No. 1. WWF-Guianas, Georgetown. Available at: https://wwflac.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_bat_sr_low_res_1.pdf.
- 115 Protected Areas Commission of Guyana. 2024. Kanuku Mountains Protected Area: Management Plan 2024–2028. Protected Areas Commission, Georgetown. Available at: <https://www.pac.gov.gy/2024/06/10/first-draft-kmpa-management-plan-2024-2028/>.
- 116 Stabroek News. 2024. “Guyana to double legally protected areas.” Stabroek News, July 13. Available at: <https://www.stabroeknews.com/2024/07/13/news/guyana/guyana-to-double-legally-protected-areas/>.
- 117 Policy Advisor, Forest Peoples Programme.
- 118 Director, Senior Lawyer, Forest Peoples Programme.
- 119 Regional Director, Loky Manambato, Fanamby. Fanamby is a Malagasy non-profit that supports local communities and the sustainability of biodiversity in Madagascar. They work closely with the communities of Loky Manambato, a protected area in the northern part of the island.
- 120 Dudley, Nigel (ed.) 2008. Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories. International Union for Conservation of Nature, Gland. Available at: <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/pag-021.pdf>.
- 121 Rakotondravony, H.A. 2009. Aspects de la conservation des reptiles et des amphibiens dans la région de Daraina. Madagascar Conservation & Development 1(1). doi:10.4314/mcd.v1i1.44118.
- 122 The *soubique* is a traditional basket from Madagascar, made primarily of local materials such as palm leaves. It is an important element of daily life for many communities, especially among women, who are generally responsible for its production. In addition to its functionality for the storage and transport of agricultural and fishery products, the *soubique* represents an essential part of Malagasy culture and tradition.
- 123 For example, the ocean or sea.
- 124 Fundación para la Promoción del Conocimiento Indígena (FPCI). FPCI is an Indigenous organization that works directly with the Gunas communities of the Gunayala Comarca of Panama.
- 125 Decision adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its Ninth Meeting, IX/20. Marine and Coastal Biodiversity.
- 126 Policy and Advocacy Co-Coordinator for Africa, ICCA Consortium.
- 127 Adopted from WGII. 2023. Fifth Indigenous Peoples Voices for Nature and People. WGII, Delft, 83.
- 128 Program Manager of Working Group ICCAs Indonesia and Advocacy Coordinator of ICCA Consortium Southeast Asia.
- 129 This has been included in Decision 15/4 of the new Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework. Available at: <https://www.cbd.int/conferences/2021-2022/cop-15/documents>.
- 130 For example, Tantauco Park, owned by former President Sebastián Piñera, overlaps with “Realengo titles” (legal recognition of the Huilliche communities’ territorial rights) claimed to this day by Indigenous communities.
- 131 Arce, L., F. Guerra, and J. Aylwin, eds. 2016. Cuestionando los enfoques clásicos de la conservación en Chile: El aporte de los pueblos indígenas y las comunidades locales a la protección de la biodiversidad. Observatorio Ciudadano, ICCA Consortium, Chile. Available at: <https://observatorio.cl/cuestionando-los-enfoques-clasicos-de-la-conservacion-en-chile-el-aporte-de-los-pueblos-indigenas-y-las-comunidades-locales-a-la-proteccion-de-la-biodiversidad/>.



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