



INTERNATIONAL
**LAND
COALITION**



PAFID

Harnessing biodiversity through enhanced land rights of communities: A Learning Exchange

Proceedings

Lighthouse Marina Resort Hotel | 24-26 March 2025
Subic Bay Freeport Zone, Philippines





Founded in 1979, the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) is a regional association of national and regional networks of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Asia that actively promotes food sovereignty, land rights and agrarian reform, sustainable agriculture, participatory governance, and rural development. ANGOC member networks and partners work in nine Asian countries together with some 3,000 CSOs and community-based organizations (CBOs). ANGOC actively engages in joint field programs and policy discussions with national governments, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and international financial institutions (IFIs).

The complexity of Asian realities and diversity of CSOs highlight the need for a development leadership to serve the poor of Asia, providing a forum for articulation of their needs and aspirations as well as expression of Asian values and perspectives. Thus, the ANGOC network promotes land and resource rights, smallholder agriculture, and human rights and civic participation by serving as a platform for Asian CSOs to generate knowledge, share tools, and conduct constructive policy dialogues.



The International Land Coalition (ILC) is a global alliance of civil society and intergovernmental organizations working together to put people at the center of land governance. The shared goal of ILC's over 200 members is to realize land governance for, and with people at the country level, responding to the needs and protecting the rights of women, men, and communities who live on and from the land.



National Land Coalition in the Philippines (NLC PH) is the country implementation platform of the ILC.



Kaisahan Tungo sa Kaunlaran ng Kanayunan at Repormang Pansakahan [Solidarity Towards Agrarian Reform and Rural Development] or Kaisahan, Inc. is a social development organization promoting a sustainable and humane society through the empowerment of marginalized groups in rural areas, especially among farmers and farmworkers, to undertake their development, participate fully in democratic processes, and demand their rightful share in the stewardship of the land and the fruits of their labor.



PAFID is a social development organization that has been assisting Philippine indigenous communities to secure or recover traditional lands and waters since 1967. It forms institutional partnerships with indigenous communities to secure legal ownership over ancestral domains and to shape government policy over indigenous peoples' issues. PAFID works exclusively with the indigenous peoples' sector, specifically upon written or signed requests for assistance from indigenous communities or their representatives. PAFID envisions indigenous communities as responsible stewards of their resources.

Harnessing biodiversity through enhanced land rights of communities: A Learning Exchange

**Proceedings
May 2025**



24-26 March 2025
Lighthouse Marina Resort
Subic Special Economic and Freeport Zone
Zambales, Philippines



***Harnessing biodiversity through
enhanced land rights of communities:
A Learning Exchange***

Proceedings

ISBN: 978-971-8632-94-9

Editorial team: Nathaniel Don Marquez, Gerard Jerome Dumlao, Stefano Di Gesa, Enrique Nuñez, David Benjamin De Vera, Anu Verma

Layout and design: Gerard Jerome Dumlao

Cover art: Maria Azel Cabello Gorne

Photo credits: All images used in this publication, unless specified, are from ANGOC.

Citation:

Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC), International Land Coalition (ILC), Kaisahan Tungo sa Kaunlaran ng Kanayunan at Repormang Pansakahan (KAISAHAN), National Land Coalition-Philippines (NLC-Philippines), and Philippine Association For Intercultural Development (PAFID). (2025). *Harnessing biodiversity through enhanced land rights of communities: A learning exchange*. ANGOC, ILC, KAISAHAN, NLC-Philippines, and PAFID. [Proceedings].

Disclaimer:

The learning exchange is made possible with the financial assistance of the International Land Coalition (ILC), Rainforest Trust (RFT), Wildlife Conservation Society Philippines (WCS), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Biodiversity Management Bureau of DENR (DENR-BMB), Global Environment Facility (GEF), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The organizers express appreciation for the financial contribution of RFT and ILC for making this publication possible.

The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the RFT, WCS, DENR, DENR-BMB, GEF, and UNDP.



Contents

Acknowledgments	6
Summary	8
Messages	13
Context, objectives, and flow of activities	18
Land tenure, land use, and biodiversity: Framing the link between land rights and biodiversity	21
Unpacking global biodiversity frameworks: Pathways to empower community land rights and ecosystem resilience	34
The state of NBSAPs in Asia: Panel Presentation	51
Localizing the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan	61
Challenges and opportunities for engaging women and youth in biodiversity conservation and resilience work	69
Biodiversity conservation initiatives and their contributions in meeting the global and national biodiversity targets	81
Knowledge and skills sharing on frameworks and tools on conservation	104
Community visits	119
Moving forward, key takeaways, and closing	132

Acknowledgments

Discussants

Angie Lou Alcantara, DENR-BMB
Rolly Caballero, LGU of Tubajon, Dinagat Islands, Philippines
Dennis Calvan, RARE-Philippines
Ruth Canlas, NTFP-Philippines
Juliana Rossi de Camargo, RFT
Carlo Carlos, ACB
Pranab Choudhury, Landstack
Ricklend Grist Bin Christopher, PACOS
Marie Joy Demaluan, CARRD and NLC-Philippines
Lanz Espacio, NLC-Philippines
Wahyubinatarra Fernandes, RMI
Maria Rebecca Ferreras, WCS
Stefano di Gessa, ILC
Ngo Van Hong, LANDA
Ahmad Jaetuloh, SAINS
Chetana Nand Jha, FES
Cindy Julianty, ICCA-SEA
Dayoon Kim, SEI
Zhinal Kinoc, PAFID
Sarita Kumari Lama, NLC-Nepal
Nathaniel Don Marquez, ANGOC
Lisa Paguntalan-Marte, PhilBio
Anthony Marzan, KAISAHAN
Jeffrey Mesias, DENR-BMB
Enrique Nuñez, ILC
Pablo Paet, Jr., PAFID
Femy Pinto, NTFP-EP
Renuka Pradabphuthong, NIPT
Antonio Quizon, ANGOC
Giovanni Reyes, Philippine ICCA Consortium
Marianne Saniano, WCS
Asami Segundo, IKAYO
Lakpa Nuri Sherpa, AIPP
Rahmat Sulaiman, JKPP
Dave de Vera, PAFID
Thieza Verdijo, XSF
Anu Verma, ILC Asia RCU

Facilitators

Dewi Kartika, KPA
Nathaniel Don Marquez, ANGOC
Enrique Nuñez, ILC
Roel Ravanera, XSF
Giovanni Reyes, BUKLURAN
Nikka Rivera, AFA
Dave de Vera, PAFID
Anu Verma, RCU, ILC



Host communities

Aeta Ambala, Pastolan, Zambales, Bataan
Aeta Magbubukun, Kanawan, Morong, Bataan
Pawikan Conservation Center, Nagbalayong, Kanawan, Morong, Bataan

Notetakers

Melissa Bolitres, PAKISAMA
Claire Demaisip, KAISAHAN
Lanz Espacio, NLC-Philippines
Katlea Itong, PhilDHRRA
Marianne Jane Naungayan, ANGOC
Angelica Paller, PAKISAMA

Documentor

Gerard Jerome Dumlao, ANGOC

Secretariat

Vanessa Angeles, ANGOC (Intern)
Lennie Rose Cahusay, ANGOC
Mary Nicole Matalog, ANGOC (Intern)
Joseph Onesa, ANGOC

The organizers are grateful to Rainforest Trust (RFT), Wildlife Conservation Society Philippines (WCS), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Biodiversity Management Bureau of DENR (DENR-BMB), Global Environment Facility (GEF), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the support provided for the conduct of the learning exchange.

Appreciation is extended to RFT and ILC for the production and printing of this publication.

Summary

BIODIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY LAND RIGHTS are intrinsically linked. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), Paris Agreement, and other international frameworks highlight the importance of land rights and indigenous and traditional knowledge for reversing biodiversity loss, restoring degraded ecosystems, and addressing climate change. The sustainable land use practices of indigenous and traditional communities have proven effective for the protection of endangered species from direct pressure. Tenure security for indigenous peoples (IPs) and local communities (LCs) is a cost-effective instrument to preserve ecological knowledge and practices.

Recognizing the above, the National Land Coalition-Philippines (NLC-Philippines) and the International Land Coalition (ILC), in partnership with the Kaisahan tungo sa Kaunlaran ng Kanayunan at Repormang Pansakahan (KAISAHAN), Philippine Association For Intercultural Development (PAFID), and the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC), convened a learning exchange, “Harnessing biodiversity through enhanced land rights of communities,” on 24-26 March 2025 at Lighthouse Marina Resort in Subic, Philippines.

The event gathered 68 representatives from ILC Asia CSO members and partners, international organizations, Philippine government institutions, and local community representatives to deepen their understanding on the linkage of land rights and biodiversity; share the initiatives in the Philippines in localizing the Philippine Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan (PBSAP); orient participants on key frameworks and practical tools on biodiversity; and, learn from community initiatives on biodiversity protection and conservation.

The discussion started with exploring the connection between tenure security and biodiversity, delving as well into the challenges associated with these concepts. Antonio Quizon (ANGOC) and Enrique Nuñez (ILC) emphasized that land tenure security is a key factor that encourages people to protect and sustainably manage larger landscapes, forests, and farm systems on which their homes and livelihoods depend. It underpins the ability of communities to sustainably manage their environments, supporting both biodiversity and cultural continuity. Conversely, without tenure security, conservation cannot succeed.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) was highlighted, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the governance and land rights of indigenous communities. Cindy Julianty (ICCA SEA) and Lakpa Nuri Sherpa (AIPP) shared through recorded video presentations that there is a strong need to enhance the involvement of IPs, women, youth, and local communities in implementing KMGBF. Discussions underscored the importance of engaging indigenous peoples and local communities (IPs and LCs) in global negotiations and incorporating lessons learned from their experiences to inform better decision-making.



National biodiversity strategies across Asia were shared, including the implementation of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) in selected Asian countries. India has updated its NBSAP, integrating traditional practices with modern governance systems to conserve biodiversity and address contemporary environmental challenges. For Indonesia, its current iteration of NBSAP aims to cover 57.14 million hectares of land as Protected Areas by 2045. Nepal made significant progress in meeting biodiversity targets. Malaysia has developed its National Policy on Biological Diversity (2022 to 2030) but emphasized the need for a shift from exclusionary conservation practices to community-led initiatives. The Philippines aligned its biodiversity strategies with local priorities. In Thailand, fragmented governance remains a challenge, limiting the engagement of communities in the implementation of its NBSAP.

A number of ILC members have limited understanding and initiatives on biodiversity, as well as have had minimal engagement in the NBSAP process in their respective countries. Constraints include limited civic and democratic space, lack of access to information, and few funding for biodiversity and conservation initiatives. These challenges are cushioned by opportunities through growing interest among CSOs, IPs, and farmers on biodiversity. Further discussions have emphasized that localized strategies such as sectoral engagements, collaborative governance frameworks, recognition of IP land rights, and grassroots-driven biodiversity initiatives, are some key approaches to advancing conservation goals while addressing the gaps within NBSAP processes. It was noted that there is a potential role of the National Land Coalitions (NLCs) to be dialogue platforms for addressing these constraints and optimizing available opportunities at the country level.

Offering the experience of the Philippines in engaging and localizing its NBSAP, a panel was organized to share the perspectives and initiatives of government, indigenous peoples, farmers, fisherfolk, and local government in relation to the current phase of updating the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (PBSAP). The session underscored the deep interconnection of IPs, farmers, and fisherfolk with biodiversity conservation, highlighting their traditional practices as strategies for sustainable management of land and resources. Panelists reflected on the successes and challenges of embedding PBSAP strategies at the local level, emphasizing the need to navigate bureaucratic hurdles, build multi-sectoral support, and amplify grassroots voices. A notable achievement was the passage of a local ordinance supporting biodiversity efforts, credited to strong awareness campaigns that fostered unity in policy-making. The discussion also stressed the critical role of local champions in integrating PBSAP and Indigenous Peoples' Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (IPBSAP) into governance systems, ensuring long-term sustainability beyond political cycles.

The discussions also emphasized the vital contributions of women and youth in biodiversity conservation, showcasing initiatives like Nepal's Community Forest User Groups and eco-tourism projects, and the Philippines' intergenerational efforts in Ikalahan Ancestral Domain and inclusive governance models in Dinagat Islands. It concluded that indigenous women and youth need more information on their indigenous knowledge and practices, biodiversity conservation, and land rights. The youth also need incentives to stay in their ancestral lands and do biodiversity conservation work, in the form of attractive and economically-viable jobs. There is also a need to look into how to acknowledge and reward indigenous women for their major contributions to biodiversity conservation.



Biodiversity conservation initiatives across countries highlighted the critical role of community-driven approaches in achieving global and national biodiversity targets. In the Philippines, efforts ranged from establishing Local Conservation Areas (LCAs) to Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and Indigenous Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) to undertaking Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES). CSO participants from Indonesia emphasized customary forest protection to balance biodiversity and community welfare, while Vietnam showcased voluntary community conservation to reduce poaching and improve livelihoods. India shared initiatives on integrated traditional knowledge with community forestry and stewardship to sustain ecosystems, as well as on advocating for climate finance for local actions. Rainforest Trust underscored community ownership and governance as the key to successful conservation projects.

In the session on practical tools for biodiversity conservation, Marianne Saniano (WCS) provided an overview framework for conservation planning. The input was followed by a workshop on Conservation in Action, wherein the participants were divided into groups to paint a picture of what conservation means to them and what course of action need to be undertaken, using the following scenarios: storm damage, pollution in rivers and coasts, declining fish stocks, wildfires and forest degradation, drought and water scarcity, and soil erosion on farmland.

ICCAs serve as critical areas for biodiversity conservation, yet often lack formal recognition. Dave De Vera (PAFID) emphasized the importance of documenting ICCAs through mapping, biodiversity assessment, and traditional governance integration – strengthening their legitimacy and highlighting the role of traditional knowledge in conservation. Further, recognizing ICCAs within formal conservation frameworks legitimizes traditional governance and promotes community-led biodiversity protection.

Dr. Lisa Marte (PhilBio) presented accessible monitoring indicators, emphasizing community-based approaches such as bird population counts and habitat assessments. Femy Pinto (NTFP-EP) presented the human well-being indicators in measuring biodiversity, stressing that conservation efforts must consider community well-being to ensure sustainable and inclusive protection strategies. Pinto also highlighted the KMGBF's emphasis on equitable governance, sustainable use, and the recognition of indigenous rights, urging stakeholders to incorporate social and economic dimensions in biodiversity conservation.

“Biodiversity conservation initiatives across countries highlighted the critical role of community-driven approaches in achieving global and national biodiversity targets.”



Participants visited select community sites to observe and engage in discussion on local conservation initiatives in practice. Some traveled to the ancestral domain of the Aeta Magbukun in Kanawan, Bataan, where indigenous stewardship has maintained the ecological integrity of their forested lands despite external development pressures. Others visited the Joint Management Agreement Forest Ecozone between the Aeta Ambala in Pastolan, Bataan and the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority, which showcases a governance model balancing conservation and resource use. Another group explored the Pawikan Conservation Center in Nagbalayong, Morong, Bataan, where a community-led initiative on protecting endangered marine turtle populations has been supporting and maintaining the integrity of the environment. Many of their volunteers are small fisherfolk in the area. These visits highlighted the invaluable role of Indigenous and local communities in sustaining biodiversity and the importance of tenure security in conservation efforts.

The exchange concluded with reflections on ways forward. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to tenure security and inclusive biodiversity governance, strengthening cross-country solidarity in mainstreaming land tenure in biodiversity policies. Among the takeaways include:

On recognition and role of IPs and LCs in conservation

- Traditional conservation governance should be valued and integrated into frameworks.
- IPs and LCs play a crucial role in biodiversity conservation, but their involvement remains limited.
- Traditional conservation governance should be valued and integrated into frameworks.
- Strengthening the participation of IPs and LCs in crafting policies on conservation is necessary.
- Documentation of ICCAs is important for recognizing community-led conservation.
- Women and youth engagement in conservation efforts is vital.

On biodiversity indicators and conservation strategies

- Choosing biodiversity indicators that communities can easily monitor is important.
- Biodiversity conservation must be tied to land rights to ensure sustainable protection.
- Linking biodiversity conservation to food systems and livelihoods is key.
- Localization of conservation strategies, including NBSAPs, improves effectiveness.

On collaboration and policy work

- Engaging different stakeholders, including donors, enhances conservation impact.
- Strong governance and clear policies are necessary for successful conservation.
- Conservation should be integrated into sustainable agriculture initiatives.
- Networking and collaboration among institutions can improve biodiversity action.

On challenges in implementing biodiversity initiatives

- Land tenure recognition varies across countries and faces implementation hurdles.
- Conservation finance and Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) need further exploration.
- Legislative support and funding for community-led conservation must be strengthened.



On community involvement and grassroots action

- Community empowerment is crucial for sustainable biodiversity protection.
- Intergenerational learning enhances long-term conservation efforts.
- Localizing global frameworks requires direct engagement with communities.
- Experiences from different countries provide valuable insights and replicable models.

On education and capacity building

- Youth involvement in conservation should be supported through green jobs.
- Raising awareness about biodiversity through conservation education is critical.
- NGOs play a significant role in supporting IPs and LCs and advocating for their rights.

Toward the end, participants committed to advancing biodiversity conservation in their respective countries and expressed interest in continuing this learning exchange process. ■



Messages



Welcome Remarks

Marie Joy Demaluan
National Land Coalition-Philippines

AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HOST ORGANIZATION of the National Land Coalition-Philippines (NLC-Philippines) and on behalf of our members, it is my great honor to welcome all of you to this learning exchange on ***Harnessing biodiversity through enhanced land rights of communities***. We are privileged to have with us today and for the next two days a very diverse group of advocates – our partners on the ground: the indigenous peoples, fisherfolks, smallholder farmers and agrarian reform beneficiaries, members of the International Land Coalition in Asia, partner CSOs in Asia, representatives from the regional and global secretariats of the International Land Coalition, government partners in the Philippines and local and international donors – all of whom share a common vision of secured land and resource rights as fundamental pillars of biodiversity conservation.

This learning exchange provides us with an opportunity to highlight the critical role that land security and local communities play in biodiversity conservation. For our partners on the ground, securing land and resource rights is about much more than obtaining land titles, ancestral domain recognition, or stewardship agreements. More importantly, it is about sustaining livelihoods, protecting ecosystems and ensuring food security. Yet, despite our partners on the ground's vital contributions as frontline stewards of biodiversity, they continue to face threats from land grabbing, deforestation, and climate change.

With the adoption of global biodiversity frameworks such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), many of our countries are now aligning our National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) with these global commitments. We will share our work and experiences in engaging our respective governments in the implementation of NBSAPs, while some of us will present our community-driven initiatives on biodiversity conservation. We hope to generate valuable recommendations that will help promote inclusive policies and programs, community-driven solutions, and broaden collaboration and partnerships among local communities, governments, NGOs, CSOs, and the local and international donors.

Lastly, the NLC-Philippines would like to extend our gratitude to our partners and sponsors – the Rainforest Trust, Wildlife Conservation Society Philippines, Department of Environment and Natural Resources and its attached Biodiversity Management Bureau, Global Environment Facility, United Nations Development Programme and the International Land Coalition for making this event possible.

I would like also to thank our members ANGOC, ARNow!-KAISAHAN and PAFID for their leadership and dedication in organizing this event.

Together, let us transform the knowledge and insights gained from this event into meaningful action, reaffirming our commitment to a future where secure land and resource rights are aligned with biodiversity conservation. ■



Message

Anu Verma
ILC-Asia Regional Coordinating Unit

THERE IS A TRUTH SO FUNDAMENTAL that it should be obvious to all: there can be no biodiversity without secure land rights.

Let me begin with a story.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of visiting a small indigenous community deep in the forests of Mahasamund district in India. This village, nestled in the heart of the deep forest, was a world of its own. An elderly woman named Ambika pointed to the towering trees and the wildlife around us and said, "We have no written maps, but every inch of this land is recorded in our hearts. We know which tree is the oldest, which bird calls at dawn, and where the water will flow when the rains come."

Despite their deep connection with the land, Ambika's community faces eviction as their home becomes a **sanctuary**. A once-thriving ecosystem, protected for generations, may now be cleared for tourism – while its true guardians are forced out. This loss is not just theirs; it is the world's.

This is not just Ambika's story. This is the story of countless indigenous peoples (IPs) and forest dwellers across the globe. They and many of you have safeguarded forests, rivers, and ecosystems for centuries – not because you were told to, but because the land is your identity, your heritage and your life.

The question persists - How can we talk about protecting biodiversity while ignoring the rights of those who have protected it for centuries?

Asia is home to nine of the world's 36 global biodiversity hotspots and seven of the 17 megadiverse countries. It is no coincidence that 80 percent of the world's biodiversity hotspots are found on the lands and territories of IPs and local communities. Yet, these same communities often lack legal recognition of their land. We see this across Asia:

- In the Philippines, Indonesia, and India, legal frameworks exist, but millions of indigenous lands remain unrecognized.
- In Nepal and Cambodia, land conflicts continue to displace communities.
- In many other parts of Asia, conservation projects exclude indigenous voices instead of strengthening them.

We cannot afford to continue this hypocrisy.



The evidence is clear:

- Forests thrive where indigenous land rights are secure.
- Wildlife flourishes where traditional land management practices are respected.
- Water bodies remain clean where indigenous land stewardship is recognized.

Biodiversity is not an abstract concept – it lives and breathes in the forests, rivers, and sacred lands of IPs. But when their rights are ignored, biodiversity dies with them.

The International Land Coalition (ILC) is working to ensure IPs and local communities have secure land tenure, manage biodiversity, and have a voice in decision-making. Through the Global Land Catalyst Facility, we support national coalitions in securing land rights to protect biodiversity and combat land degradation.

Additionally, ILC and allies successfully pushed for a land rights indicator in Target 22, holding governments accountable for recognizing Indigenous and local land rights as essential for biodiversity protection and traditional knowledge preservation.

A major breakthrough under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework now requires governments to recognize Indigenous land rights in their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). The Philippines' IPBSAP stands as a model for integrating indigenous knowledge into policy.

This is why this learning exchange is critical. We are not here just to discuss – we are here to act. We must walk away from this event with a renewed sense of urgency and commitment. Let us ensure that:

- Land tenure is fully recognized in biodiversity policies.
- Governments are held accountable.
- Funding is directed toward indigenous-led conservation.
- We listen to the voices of those who know the land best.

If we fail to protect indigenous land rights, we will fail to protect biodiversity. If we continue to displace the very people who have cared for these ecosystems, we will accelerate ecological collapse.

There can be no biodiversity without land rights. And there can be no more Ambikas losing their homes to empty promises of progress.

To those who protect the land – not just as a resource, but as a home, a legacy, and a sacred trust – we stand with you.

Let us strengthen our journey together. ■



Message

Julianna Rossi de Camargo
Rainforest Trust

RAINFOREST TRUST is a conservation funder. For the last 37 years, we have helped safeguard critical tropical and subtropical habitats, protect endangered species, and support community self-determined priorities. We do this with the partnership of local organizations and communities around the world in Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, and Africa. We support rights-based conservation measures, such as affirming indigenous and traditional territories.

We support the recognition of conserved areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). We also assist protected areas that have co-management schemes between the government and local communities. Through these partnerships, we helped protect more than 22 million hectares of vital habitats around the world.

When we talk about the global diversity framework, we talk a lot about protecting 30 percent of the world's areas by 2030. I want to recognize that the history of conservation is not encouraging and colonial conservation, or fortress conservation as it is also called, is rooted in racism, violence, and discrimination and unfortunately continues today in some areas. At Rainforest Trust we recognize this history; we recognize that conservation – lasting conservation – is led by communities, the rightful owners and governors of their lands.

My role here is not just to represent a funder but also to listen and learn about the solutions that you are working on the ground. We will take those back to my organization and my connections and ensure that we are putting resources in the right areas – the priorities that are set by communities, by local organizations, the nexus of land rights and conservation. ■

Context, objectives, and flow of activities

Nathaniel Don E. Marquez
ANGOC

BIODIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY LAND RIGHTS are intrinsically linked. In Asia, many communities depend on local ecosystems for their livelihoods and cultural practices. As indigenous and traditional knowledge and governance systems can help restore degraded ecosystems and protect biodiversity, the lack of tenure security hinders such potential.

Ensuring the land rights of communities while protecting natural resources is crucial for sustainable development, environmental conservation, and social equity. Despite this, challenges such as deforestation, land grabbing, and climate change threaten both biodiversity and the rights of indigenous and local communities.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), Paris Agreement, and other international frameworks highlight the importance of land rights and indigenous and traditional knowledge for reversing biodiversity loss, restoring degraded ecosystems, and addressing climate change. At COP16, parties agreed on a headline indicator (22.1) on land tenure and use in biodiversity monitoring, again reaffirming the importance of land tenure.

At the same time, as the overall framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was being negotiated, the concept of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) as a means to implement the framework through an integrated, multi-sectoral, participatory manner was concurred by governments. Beyond formulation, the CBD requires countries to ensure that the NBSAPs contain elements that are incorporated into the planning and activities of all those sectors whose activities can have either a positive or negative impact on biodiversity. It is in this context that the NBSAP should be seen as a multi-stakeholder process, with other stakeholders being brought into its development as early as possible.

Notwithstanding these opportunities, the awareness and understanding on the nexus of biodiversity and land rights as well as the NBSAP remain a challenge. Thus, the National Land Coalition-Philippines (NLC-Philippines) and the International Land Coalition (ILC), in partnership with the Kaisahan tungo sa Kaunlaran ng Kanayunan at Repormang Pansakahan (KAISAHAN), Philippine Association For Intercultural Development (PAFID) and Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) organized a learning exchange to:

- increase understanding among ILC members in the Philippines and in selected Asian countries on the linkage of land rights and biodiversity;
- share the initiatives of ILC members and other organizations in the Philippines in localizing the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan;
- orient participants on key frameworks and practical tools on biodiversity; and,
- learn from community initiatives on biodiversity protection and conservation.



Flow of Activities

The learning exchange ran for three days and consisted of inputs on biodiversity, efforts of selected countries to engage in the NBSAPs, introduction to select tools and methodology on biodiversity conservation, and field visits to selected communities.

Date	Morning	Afternoon
24 March	<p>Opening session</p> <p>Promoting greater understanding of the nexus and interdependence of land rights and biodiversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Land tenure, land use, and biodiversity ▪ Unpacking global biodiversity frameworks: Pathways to empower community land rights and ecosystem resilience ▪ Key takeaways of Convention of Biological Diversity 	<p>Global frameworks to local action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The state of NBSAPs in Asia ▪ Localization of the PBSAP ▪ Challenges and opportunities for engaging women and youth in biodiversity conservation and resilience work
25 March	<p>Biodiversity conservation initiatives and their contributions in meeting the global and national biodiversity targets</p>	<p>Knowledge and skills sharing on frameworks and tools on conservation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exploring conservation frameworks for sustainable agriculture ▪ Documenting ICCAs: conservation planning and governance ▪ Measuring biodiversity
26 March	<p>Community visits</p>	<p>Reflections, assessment, ways forward</p> <p>Closing session</p>

For details, refer to Annex A for the program. ■

Promoting greater understanding of the nexus and interdependence of land rights and biodiversity



KMOBF Goals and 23 Action Targets

Reducing Threats to Biodiversity

GLOBAL GOALS – 2050

Goal A Healthy ecosystems	Goal B Sustainable use	Goal C Sharing of benefits	Goal D Peace of governments
------------------------------	---------------------------	-------------------------------	--------------------------------

1. Land and the sea
2. Resilience
3. Area based interventions
4. Tenure, security of land rights
5. Healthy, safe and well managed ecosystems
6. Pollution
7. Invasive alien species
8. Climate change

Target 21

- emphasizes indigenous and local community rights, as a critical component of biodiversity conservation
- strengthens land tenure, governance, and the integration of traditional knowledge

Some of the photos were sourced from the presentation of Enrique Nuñez, ILC



Land tenure, land use, and biodiversity: Framing the link between land rights and biodiversity

Antonio B. Quizon
ANGOC

LAND IS THE ULTIMATE RESOURCE that we all depend on, and on which every aspect of life depends. **Biodiversity**, in turn, refers to “the variation among living organisms from different sources including terrestrial, marine and desert ecosystems, and the ecological complexes of which they are a part.”

The term *biodiversity* was coined in 1985. It deals with nature’s variety, the biosphere. It refers to variabilities among plants, animals and microorganism species, and refers to three different types or levels:

- *Species Biodiversity*: refers to the variety of different types of species found in a particular area. It includes all the species ranging from plants to microorganisms.
- *Genetic biodiversity* refers to the variation in genetic resources among organisms. Each individual of a species has a unique genetic makeup – among humans, and similarly, within the same species of crops like rice, wheat, and maize.
- *Ecological Biodiversity* refers to the variations in the plant and animal species living together and connected by food chains and food webs.

Biodiversity is the foundation for our **cultural diversity** (language, way of life, societies). To cite, the Philippines has different ecosystems spread across 7,100 islands making it one of the 17 megadiverse countries of the world, is also *culturally diverse*, with 110 ethnolinguistic groups.

Asia context

Today, the Asia and Pacific region depend heavily on a healthy environment and nature. Developing economies in the region rely on natural resources for local livelihood, national economy, and regional and global exports. According to the ADB, some US\$18 trillion – over 53 percent of the region’s economy is directly dependent on nature, including construction, agriculture and food systems, fishery and aquaculture, and forestry.¹

Asia and the Pacific countries accounted for over 70 percent of global GDP growth over the past decade, and GDP per capita is growing much faster in Asia than in any other regions.

¹ ADB (2024). *Environment Action Plan 2024 to 2030: Towards Nature Positive Asia and the Pacific*. 22 August 2024 (Draft).



However, growth has come with significant environmental costs, including severe ecosystem degradation and pollution. According to UN ESCAP, Asia has the most rapid decline in biodiversity-related ecosystem services:

- During the past three decades, forest areas in Southeast Asia declined by 48.7 million hectares, primarily driven by an increase in timber extraction and a conversion of land for agriculture and aquaculture.
- During the same period, mangrove areas declined by 403,000 hectares.
- Cities grew along with pollution; 99 out of the 100 most polluted air cities are in Asia.

Biodiversity loss can have serious economic consequences for economies, livelihoods, and well-being.

Globally, the Asia-Pacific region houses more than half of the megadiverse countries. Ensuring access to ecosystem services like food, materials, and clean air and water is crucial for improved livelihood and poverty alleviation as well as overall cultural, spiritual, and economic well-being of populations.

The drivers of environmental deterioration in the region are multifaceted: urbanization, intensification of agriculture, rising energy use and transportation, changing production patterns and consumer behavior, and population growth. They have led to land conversion and degradation for agriculture and industry; urban sprawl and infrastructure expansion; over exploitation of natural resources, resource inefficiency and waste, and unsustainable supply chain practices in industries. These unsustainable socio-economic activities – exert pressures on the region’s environment that degrade air, land, soils, freshwater and marine ecosystems. These limit the prosperity of people by the loss of ecosystem services that sustain livelihood, industry, and national economy.

The UN system uses the term “triple planetary crisis” – referring to the inter-linked challenges that humanity currently faces – climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss.

Right now, 37 percent of the Earth’s landmass (excluding Antarctica), is already used for food production. With a projected global population of 9.8 billion people by 2050, land utilized for agriculture is expected to increase. These land-use changes are one of the gravest threats to remaining biologically diverse habitats and the organisms that make up these ecosystems. Conservation efforts are critical for protecting biodiversity as well as for natural solutions to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, such as planting more trees and keeping the carbon-rich soils and forests that currently store carbon intact.

In the breakdown of global land today, 10 percent of the world is covered by glaciers, and a further 19 percent is barren land – deserts, dry salt flats, beaches, sand dunes, and exposed rocks. This leaves what we call “habitable land.” Half of all habitable land is used for agriculture. This leaves only 37 percent for forests; 11 percent as shrubs and grasslands; one percent as freshwater coverage; and, the remaining one percent – a much smaller share than many suspect – is built-up urban areas which include cities, towns, villages, roads, and other human infrastructure.



In agriculture, it is important to see how land is utilized. Currently, there is a highly unequal distribution of land use between livestock and crops for human consumption. If we combine pastures used for grazing with land used to grow crops for animal feed – then livestock accounts for 77 percent of all global farming land. While livestock takes up most of the world’s agricultural land, it only produces 18 percent of the world’s calories and 37 percent of its protein. Thus, the decisions facing us are not just how we will manage land and resources, but also how we are managing *human consumption* and *distribution* that impact on natural resources.

Historically, deforestation accounts for 30 percent of carbon emissions globally. Today, forest loss and damage are the cause of around 10 percent of global warming. Agriculture is also recognized as a major contributor to climate change. Overall, agriculture, forestry, and other land use represents around one-fifth (22 percent) of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). Livestock-raising accounts for over half of such GHGs.²

Healthy ecosystems offer enormous and cost-effective climate adaptation benefits. Coastal ecosystems can be particularly effective at maintaining or building climate resilience by protecting against erosion and reducing flood risks from storm surge and high winds. Likewise, forested watersheds serve as a buffer to water supplies facing either too little or too much precipitation, including from extreme rainfall events. However, since these benefits are often not assigned a monetary value, ecosystems and natural capital are often under-valued in policy and decision-making, resulting in mismanagement and overexploitation.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

Ratified under COP 15 in 2022, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) outlines a bold strategy to address biodiversity loss. Among its 23 targets is – to place at least 30 percent of the world’s land, freshwater, and marine ecosystems under effective conservation by 2030 – particularly through Indigenous Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) and Local Community Conservation Areas (LCCAs). It is clearly noted that *the governance of the people actually living in conservation areas* will have to be recognized.

Moreover, the KMGBF has a robust compliance mechanism, requiring Governments to submit National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). These plans detail how each country will meet its share of global biodiversity targets, ensuring transparency and accountability in progress toward the 2030 goals.

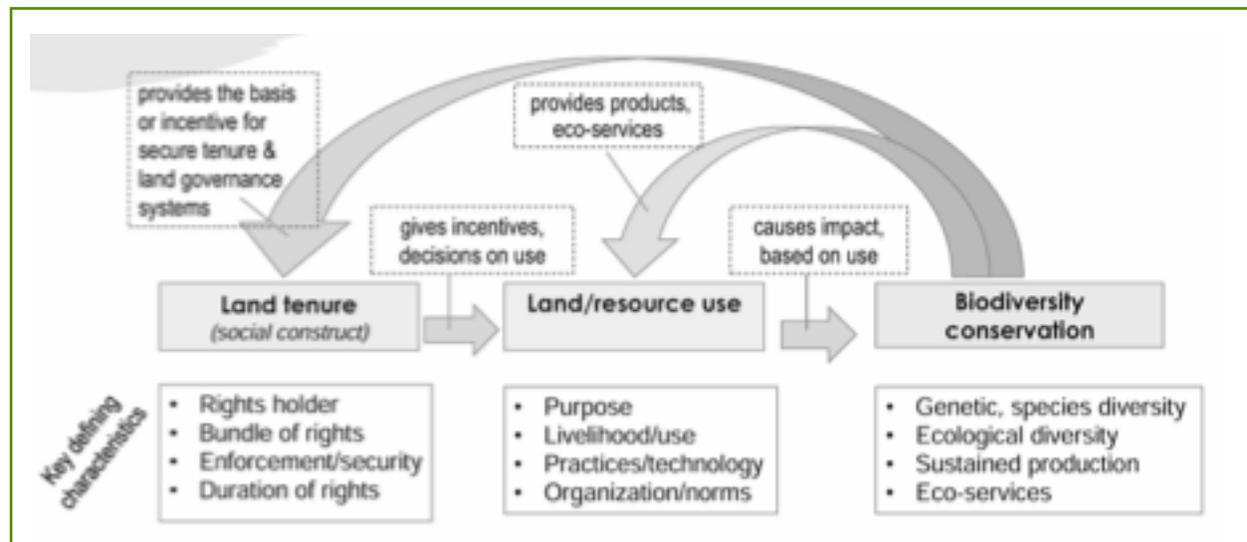
This Framework has four overarching goals to be achieved by 2050: (i) focus on ecosystem and species health including to halt human-induced species extinction, (ii) the sustainable use of biodiversity, (iii) equitable sharing of benefits, and (iv) targets on implementation and finance.

Land rights, land use, and biodiversity

Historically, land rights CSOs evolved distinctly and separately from environmental CSOs in most Asian countries. Thus, it is important to have a closer look into the links between land tenure rights, land use, and biodiversity.

² FAO’s 2023 estimates currently place this at 11.1 percent, down from an earlier estimate of 14.5 percent (using 2004 to 2005 figures). <https://thebreakthrough.org/issues/food-agriculture-environment/livestock-dont-contribute-14-5-of-global-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

Fig 1. Land tenure, land use and biodiversity



Emergence of public domains and land tenure systems: A brief historical perspective

Many Asian countries have colonial legacies whereby States seized control over land and resources at the expense of local communities. Colonial property regimes and land tenure systems were originally designed for taxation, extraction, and colonial governance. These systems persist and continue to affect development and conservation outcomes to this day.

Colonial interest started with the *trade* which later shifted to economic and political interest in *land* itself. *First*, the colonialists introduced systems of land administration and land-based taxation in order to finance the costs of colonial expansion. *Two*, the colonialists then moved towards military and colonial conquest, and later, into empire-building (around 1850 to 1950) to feed the Industrial Revolution in Europe (Quizon, 2011).

In many Asian countries, the colonial State took over all lands outside of permanent settlements, and brought these lands under the *public domain*. These included those lands that local people used for shifting cultivation, grazing, and foraging – as “communal lands.” Landholdings were carved out and brought under State-controlled cultivation, or else sold or leased for private plantations. This disenfranchised native and indigenous populations. Non-native crops were introduced: rubber (Brazil), palm oil (Africa), tobacco (Americas), tea (China), and others. There was a new colonization by invasive crops, through the process of *ecological release*. New land registration systems further disenfranchised local populations, as all lands outside of registries were considered as belonging to the *public domain*. These undermined local institutions that used to manage forest lands (Quizon, 2011).

After independence, national governments continued to control these lands as “State territory”, and managed them as an important source of State revenues. But large valuable lands under State control have made them conducive to mismanagement, poor resource utilization and corruption (Quizon, 2011).

Today, lands under State control account for nearly half or more of the total land area of several Southeast Asian countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, and Myanmar). On the other end, forests account for less than 10 percent of the land area of Pakistan and Bangladesh (as cited in Quizon, 2011). Existing estimates of forest lands vary widely even for the same country, as the term “forest” is used with different meanings – i.e., as a category of land use based on actual tree cover, as a system of land classification, or as a category of legal ownership.³

Today, since most of Asia’s forests remain under the direct control of central governments, their tenurial status is often left unclear, with weak or no legal protection given to existing customary norms concerning local access and control.

Central governments assume the ownership and control of forests, yet they are too remote, ill-equipped and unmotivated to effectively manage and regulate forest use. And where tenure is poorly-defined, this brings about the gradual erosion of forests and of communities that depend on them. Oftentimes, forest resources end up as “open-access regimes” where they become degraded through unregulated use – leading to a “tragedy of the commons” (Quizon, 2011).

Tenure systems over common resources

There are four ways in which rights over common resources such as forests and freshwaters are often categorized – i.e., as (i) *State property or State-owned*, (ii) *private property*, (iii) *community property*, and (iv) *open access*.

In this formulation, “community property” is a separate category of rights that is distinct from both private property and open access. These regimes are defined primarily as *collective* rights; they give a range of rights to individuals and groups for access, withdrawal, management, exclusion and alienation. Under community property rights, an identified set of stakeholders has exclusive right to exploit the resource, rules regulate the exploitation of the resource, and certain bodies are responsible and capable of enforcing these rules (Bromley, 2007).

Community property arrangements may be further distinguished as “*customary*” (usually, indigenous or managed under cultural systems) and “*communal*” (managed/owned by the community).

Fig 2. Four Main Tenure Systems

State		Private	Community		Open access (default)
Protected	Public		Customary	Communal	

³ In the Philippines, forest lands are legally defined as all lands with 18 percent slope or higher, with no regard for actual vegetative cover. In Indonesia, the Forestry Law of 1999 gives the (central) government the authority to assign areas – forested or not – as “forest zones or to change the status of such forest zones into “non forests.”



Back in 2009, RRI estimated that about 67.8 percent of Asia’s forestlands were owned by the State, and about 23.6 percent are owned by communities and indigenous peoples (or common property). The rest were owned by individuals and private companies (5.7 percent), or designated for use by communities (2.9 percent) (RRI, 2009).

State control over forests. There are two primary State views of forests that define the way they are managed:

- *First, forests are a huge economic resource that needs to be managed efficiently and profitably, rather than a habitat for people and communities.* Thus, concessions are given for logging, harvesting non-timber forest products, mining, exploration, extraction of oil and gas, and agricultural production – overriding existing community rights. Mining in particular creates conflict because mineral rights are often vested in the State, even if surface land rights have been granted to communities (Quizon, 2011).
- *Second, forests provide external services to the larger society, like biodiversity conservation, carbon storage, water protection, or even potential power generation.* Since forest dwellers and private owners are not paid for these services, they may not prioritize them. Thus, the State must exercise exclusive control over these forests and their external services. Governments typically establish national parks and protected areas as “no-go” zones, placing large tracts of land under State control and restricting access for local users. Yet by removing land from the management of communities, governments undermine local efforts at creating effective management regimes. (Quizon, 2011)

Thus, we generally classify State Land as “Protected” and/or “Public” – although, in reality, classifications are much more complex and boundaries are not well-defined. In Indonesia, forest lands are classified into timber production forests, conversion areas, and conservation or protected areas. In production forests, the government awards timber concessions to private companies, while in conversion areas, planned deforestation is allowed to free areas for other uses. Based on CIFOR’s estimates in a 2004 report, some 50 million people or nearly one-fourth of the total Indonesia population were living in forest areas and 20 million more were found in villages surrounding the forests and are dependent on forest resources (Bachriadi & Sardjono, 2005).

The laws themselves are complex. In Indonesia, *adat* communities remain unsure of their status and their tenure over forests, as there are over 2,000 pieces of legislation, regulations, and norms concerning land, along with different layers of government and communities to manage forest resources and clarify rights (Contreras-Hermosilla and Fay). The Philippines has at least 39 different types of land tenure instruments issued by eight (8) government agencies – 12 involve private and alienable and disposable land, 23 are for public land, and four cover indigenous peoples’ lands (De Vera, Quizon and Ravanera, 2023).

Private lands. In Asia, some countries (e.g., Indonesia, Sri Lanka) continued to operate State-owned colonial plantations even after independence. This paved the way for the expansion of privatization of forest lands through grants, sales, and long-term leases. This was also supported by the prevailing view that – since the government could not take care of vast lands by itself, it should convey part of the land to the private sector.



Such thinking at the time was supported by works like the *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) – an essay by Garrett Hardin, a microbiologist and ecologist. Hardin was concerned about human population growth and the limits of resources (i.e., Malthusian Theory) – for example, several herders sharing a common parcel of land, which would lead to overgrazing. The conventional response at the time was to convert common pool resources (CPRs) into either private or public goods, instead.

Shift towards community and common property. Since the 1980s, there has been an incremental and slow devolution from direct State control towards community management of forests in Asia. This shift has been driven by: a growing recognition of the limitations with direct State management, continuing forest degradation, pressures from affected local communities and civil society, decentralization trends, market transactions and new revenue opportunities from forest resources, and the push for more participatory approaches from development agencies and international agreements (SEARCA, 2007). Moreover, governments of late have begun to recognize the fact that an overwhelmingly large portion of populations actually occupy and depend on classified forestlands, with tenures that are often insecure and even “illegal;” hence, the notion of “empty forests” no longer holds true for most of Asia (Quizon, 2011).

The shift towards community property was supported by the growing volume of academic field studies. Among these was the work of Nobel Prize awardee Elinor Ostrom – *Governing the Commons* (1990) – which challenged the prevailing view that “common property resources (CPRs) are inevitably overexploited and require either government control, or privatization.”⁴ She argued that many CPRs are, in fact, successfully managed through self-governance by local communities. Ostrom emphasized the role of social capital, including trust, reciprocity, and shared norms, in enabling successful collective action.

According to the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN), as much as 70 percent of the world’s land lie outside formal registration systems and cadasters and are managed under customary and informal tenure regimes (GLTN, 2015).

Customary lands. The strongest argument in support of community management is the fact that the indigenous peoples of Asia have managed their forests sustainably for thousands of years. Until today, significant tracts of forest continue to be *de facto* managed by communities in sustainable ways *despite* tenure insecurity. In the Philippines, 96 sites (or 75 percent) out of the 128 initially identified key biodiversity areas, lie within the traditional territories of indigenous peoples⁵ (De Vera, 2018). Moreover, a 2016 study of 36 countries by the Rights and Resource Institute (RRI) showed that forest lands that are legally-owned or traditionally held by indigenous peoples contain at least 54.5 million metric tons of carbon (MtC), or at least 24 percent of the total carbon stored aboveground in the world’s tropical forests.

⁴ Ostrom’s work focuses on common property resources (CPRs), which are resources that are open to multiple users but where the actions of one user can affect others (e.g., fisheries, forests, water resources).

⁵ In the Philippines, the overlap of ancestral domains and Protected Areas is 1,440,000 hectares, while the overlap between Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and ancestral domains with Certificates of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADTs) is 1,345,198 hectares (96 CADTs out of 128 KBAs). This means 29 percent of KBAs requiring protection fall within territories occupied by indigenous peoples, thereby confirming the inherent inter-dependency of nature conservation with the recognition and respect for the traditional governance systems of indigenous peoples. Furthermore, spatial analysis shows that in KBAs not covered by Protected Areas, Indigenous community conservation serves as a *de facto* governance regime, contributing significantly to the protection of forest cover despite absence of a declared protected area. About 75 percent of areas with forest cover are within ancestral domains.



There is still little formal recognition of indigenous peoples' land rights, and even much less of their contributions to biodiversity and environmental conservation. The two most progressive legislations are the Philippines' Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, and India's Recognition of Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006. In Cambodia, while the law provides for collective land titling (CLT) for indigenous peoples, the process has proven to be tedious, time-consuming, and costly. Moreover, lands under the CLT process continue to be threatened by conflicting claims and government concessions.

Collective management. Across Asia, community forest management arrangements cover a wide range of practice – from recognition of access rights (harvesting and using resources), to more substantive rights and responsibilities (engaging in management decisions involving forest use), to usufruct rights over the land (engaging in agroforestry), to direct community control or ownership of forest lands.

Nepal's 1993 Forest Act provides for the turnover of portions of national forest to local user groups via 40-year community leases. India's Joint Forest Management (JFM) program instituted in 1990 provides for joint forest management involving State forest departments and local communities. Although rules differ by State, the program gives communities access to forests for fuelwood, fodder and other extractive products, and grants them a proportion of revenue from commercial timber sales.

Other forest laws that provide mechanisms for communities to formally secure some form of forest management agreement with governments include: the Philippines' Executive Order on Community-Based Forest Management (2005), Vietnam's Law on Forest Protection and Development (2004), and Cambodia's Sub-Decree on Community Forestry (2003). In Thailand, the 2007 Community Forest Bill upholds the legal right of forest communities to manage forest lands surrounding their communities (RRI, 2010). In Indonesia, Community Forest Management (CFM) refers to an arrangement that varies enormously – from providing information, to various types of consultation, to interactive participation; it may involve usufruct, but does not include the transfer of land ownership rights (Quizon, 2011).

“There is still little formal recognition of indigenous peoples' land rights, and even much less of their contributions to biodiversity and environmental conservation.”



Community management and CPRs. Community management of forests has proven to be effective in sustainable forest management. Many experiences show that greater land tenure security for local communities provides them the incentives for resource conservation. In Nepal and Vietnam, the quality of forest management increased when rights to State forests were transferred to communities and individuals (Deininger, 2003). Over the years, the agenda of community forest management has increasingly incorporated poverty reduction, in recognition of the fact that communities cannot commit themselves to effective forest management if their basic needs are not secured (Quizon, 2011).

Reluctance of governments. Overall, governments continue to be ambivalent about relinquishing or sharing real power, and vesting significant rights in local people. Even where community forestry programs are implemented, government institutions tend to keep control of key decisions. Communities are treated as “beneficiaries” in government-sponsored designs where decisions remain in the hands of government agencies, reinforcing *patronage* rather than partnership. Moreover, governments have been quicker to recognize “access” rights than to grant management, usufruct or ownership rights to local communities, in view of the high value of forest resources (Quizon, 2011).

Governments initially instituted community forest management as a means to engage communities in meeting reforestation objectives. Hence, community forestry projects are often implemented on forest lands that have already been degraded (through timber concessions or new settlers), rather than on lands that are pristine and need to be protected.⁶ Community access rights to forests are often restricted to non-timber forest products (NTFPs), while the more valuable forest resources such as timber are granted as concessions to more powerful interests (SEARCA, 2007). Moreover, stringent requirements are sometimes imposed, such as the need for management plans, surveys or resource inventories that require rigid use of legal and technical language and tools. Also, as the government often retains the right to terminate the CFM arrangement, this administrative discretion often leads to patronage and corruption. And outside of CFM arrangements, many other regulations continue to impinge on the resource rights of local communities – e.g., restrictions imposed on the transport, sale, and proceeds of forest products (Quizon, 2011).

Perhaps the main issue even with many existing common property regimes is that CPRs remain legally vulnerable in cases where the State can continue to claim ownership for the underlying resource. In Nepal, for instance, the “ownership” of forest land remains with the State, even as community management arrangements vest various rights over that land to local groups.

Elinor Ostrom’s Eight Principles of Collective Institutions

Experience and research indicate that recognizing self-governing institutions in forest protection and management does not automatically ensure positive outcomes. According to Elinor Ostrom, sustained success largely depends on the effectiveness of these collective institutions – that should be based on eight fundamental principles:

- **Clearly defined boundaries:** The group using the resource should have clear boundaries and access rights.

⁶ In Vietnam, forest tenure reform implemented in the past several years has transferred 3.5 million hectares to local communities. However, it is said that the most productive forests often remain in government hands (RRI, 2010).

- **Proportionality of rules to local conditions:** Rules should be tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of the local context.
- **Collective-choice arrangements:** Mechanisms should be in place for users to participate in decision-making about resource management.
- **Monitoring:** Mechanisms for monitoring resource use and rule compliance should be in place.
- **Graduated sanctions:** Penalties for violating the rules should be proportional to the severity of the infraction and consequences.
- **Conflict resolution mechanisms:** Low-cost and informal mechanisms for resolving internal disputes should be available.
- **Minimal recognition of user rights:** External authorities should recognize the legitimacy of local rules and institutions.
- **Decentralized/nested enterprises:** Resource management systems should be organized in a decentralized way, with local rules nested within larger systems.

Note that these have some similar defining characteristics with ICCAs:

*There is a **close and deep connection** between a territory or area and an indigenous people or local community. This relationship is generally embedded in history, social and cultural identity, spirituality and/or people's reliance on the territory for their material and non-material wellbeing.*

*The custodian people or community makes and enforces decisions and rules (e.g., access and use) about the territory, area or species' habitat through a **functioning governance institution**.*

*The governance decisions and management efforts of the concerned people or community contribute to the **conservation of nature** (ecosystems, habitats, species, natural resources), as well as to community **wellbeing**.*



Finally, Ostrom identified *three key issues* that must be overcome if autonomous organizations and autonomous governance are to remain viable in the long term, namely: the *supply of new institutions*, the *problem of credible commitment*, and the *problem of mutual monitoring*.

Addressing on-farm biodiversity. It will be crucial that biodiversity conservation involves not just the protection of forests and common property resources in the “public domain”, but also lands and livelihoods that are closely linked to natural resources, particularly agriculture. Among the importance of *agro-biodiversity* include:

- Increase productivity, food security, and economic returns;
- Reduce the pressure of agriculture on fragile areas, forests, and endangered species;
- Make farming systems more stable, robust, and sustainable;
- Contribute to sound pest and disease management;
- Conserve soil and increase natural soil fertility and health;
- Contribute to sustainable intensification;
- Diversify products and income opportunities;
- Reduce or spread risks to individuals and nations;
- Help maximize effective use of resources and the environment;
- Reduce dependency on external inputs;
- Improve human nutrition and provide sources of medicines and vitamins; and,
- Conserve ecosystem structure and stability of species diversity.

Looking back over many decades, the biggest losses in biodiversity have happened on-farm.

- According to FAO, some 75 percent of plant genetic diversity has been lost since the 1900s, as farmers worldwide have left their multiple local varieties and landraces for genetically uniform, high-yielding varieties.⁷
- More than 90 percent of crop varieties have disappeared from farmers’ fields; half of the breeds of many domestic animals have been lost.
- Today, 75 percent of the world’s food is generated from only 12 plants and five animal species.⁸

There are about 400,000 plant species, of which only 150 to 200 are used by humans. Only three crops – rice, maize and wheat – contribute nearly 60 percent of calories and proteins obtained by humans from plants.

However, increasing corporate control under an industrial global food system have meant the displacement of smallholder production, and adoption of production systems that: are based on monocultures, dependence on external inputs, cheap and seasonal labor, and production for export markets – that cause social and environmental impacts (conversion of forests and ecosystems, pollutants, and discharges).

⁷ Crop diversity is commonly conceptualized at three main scales: species, variety (within species) and genetic (within varieties).

⁸ FAO. What is Agro-biodiversity? <https://www.fao.org/4/y5609e/y5609e01.htm>

The publication *The Food Barons*⁹ (2022) further reveals that:

- Many agrifood (agro-industry) sectors¹⁰ are controlled by just four to six dominant companies that wield enormous influence over markets, agricultural research and policy-development, which undermines food sovereignty.
- In 1997, only 10 companies controlled 40 percent of the global commercial seed market; today, just two companies control 40 percent of the seed market.

Many more examples are cited in the book.

The COVID-19 pandemic left nearly 12 percent of the global population – 928 million people – severely food insecure. Yet even as global food insecurity, food prices and hunger soared, big food corporations posted record breaking profits. Extreme volatility and staggering economic inequality have now become defining features of global food and agriculture markets (ETC, 2022).

In contrast, peasants and mostly small farms feed the equivalent of 70 percent of the world's people using less than 30 percent of the world's land, water and agricultural resources. It is important to put farmers, growers, fishers, hunters, and consumers back at the heart of the food system and undo the power being usurped by industrial agriculture (ETC, 2022).

Experience and research show that small farmers play major roles as “on-farm and in-situ conservators.” Small farms tend to be more diverse, emphasize agro-ecological practices, and protect local seeds and varieties – that are crucial for long-term food security. Pastoralists, forest dwellers and indigenous peoples engage in regenerative practices in production that are sustainable and resilient (Quizon, 2011).

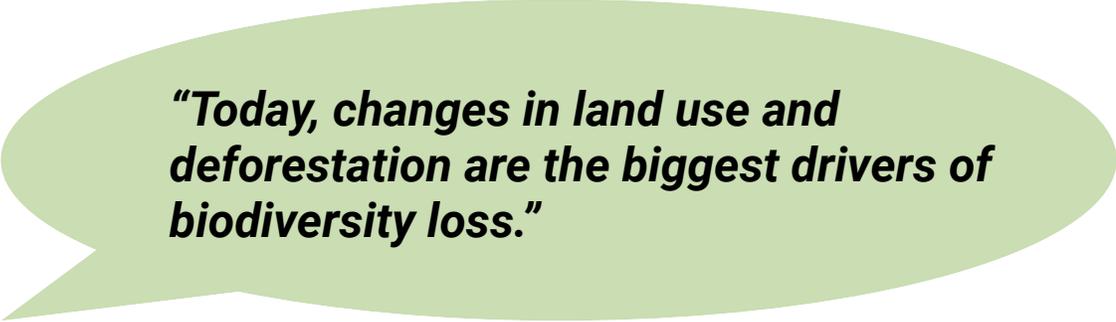
Land is the greatest asset for many rural people as it is their source of food, livelihoods, and identity. Improved tenurial status should provide households with a better sense of overall security that comes from their independence to make informed decisions over lands and water, crops, production systems, and livelihoods.

It will be crucial to address smallholders that are threatened by continuing landlessness, lack of tenure security; the capture of their profit margins by traders and markets; lack of/declining government support for agriculture; unfavorable policies against smallholders; the overall shift towards corporate industrial food systems; “supermarketization” that constricts their access to markets; new market rules and regulations that limit their access, and changing urban consumer tastes.

Moreover, as effective biodiversity conservation needs to be implemented at a certain scale, *organization* and *collective action* will be crucial. At the individual or family level, the scale is often limited by the amount of land that one has under control. As individual adaptation is bottom-up, the outcome is the result of a multitude of small decisions that are made

⁹ ETC Group (2022). *The Food Barons: Crisis Profiteering, Digitalization and Shifting Power*. <https://etcgroup.org/content/food-barons-2022>

¹⁰ Agrifood sectors include: seeds, agrochemicals, livestock genetics, synthetic fertilizers, farm machinery, animal pharmaceuticals, commodity traders, food processors, meat sector, grocery retail and food delivery.



“Today, changes in land use and deforestation are the biggest drivers of biodiversity loss.”

individually. Each household will implement actions depending on its location and use of the land, farming practices and crops, and opportunities available. The result is an effective patchwork of varied responses across a landscape, rather than a uniform response.

Land tenure security is a key factor that encourages people to protect and sustainably manage larger landscapes and forests on which their homes and livelihoods depend.

Closing

Over the past few decades, increasing emphasis has been placed on the practice of community-based approaches to sustainable use and management of natural resources. These include various approaches on social forestry, community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), joint forest management, participatory conservation, as well as specific approaches such as the Indigenous Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs). They all involve combinations of legal and policy reforms, and they emphasize decentralization, community organizing and mobilization, collective decision-making, equity and access, and resource conservation. However, **land tenure rights and security play a crucial/central role in ensuring the success of community-based approaches to biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management.**

It will be crucial to examine the specific State powers that are devolved to communities with regards to: (a) resource governance, (b) capacity for self-regulation, (c) the adjudication of resource conflicts; and, (d) the level of tenure rights given to local communities over their local domains. ■

References:

- ADB (2024). *Environment Action Plan 2024-2030: Towards Nature Positive Asia and the Pacific*. 22 August 2024 (Draft).
- De Vera, Dave (2018). “Recognition of Indigenous Peoples’ Ancestral Domains,” in *State of Land and Resource Tenure Reform in the Philippines 2018*. Quezon City: Asian NGO Coalition.
- De Vera, Ravanera and Quizon (2023). *Land, Life and Livelihoods: A Scoping Study on Land Tenure Issues in the Philippines*. Paper prepared for IFAD and the UN Country Team in the Philippines.
- IPCC (2019). *Climate Change and Land: an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems*. <https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2019/11/SRCCL-Full-Report-Compiled-191128.pdf>
- Quizon, Antonio (2013). *Land Governance in Asia: Understanding the debates on land tenure rights and land reforms in the Asian context*. Framing the Debate Series 3. Rome: ILC.

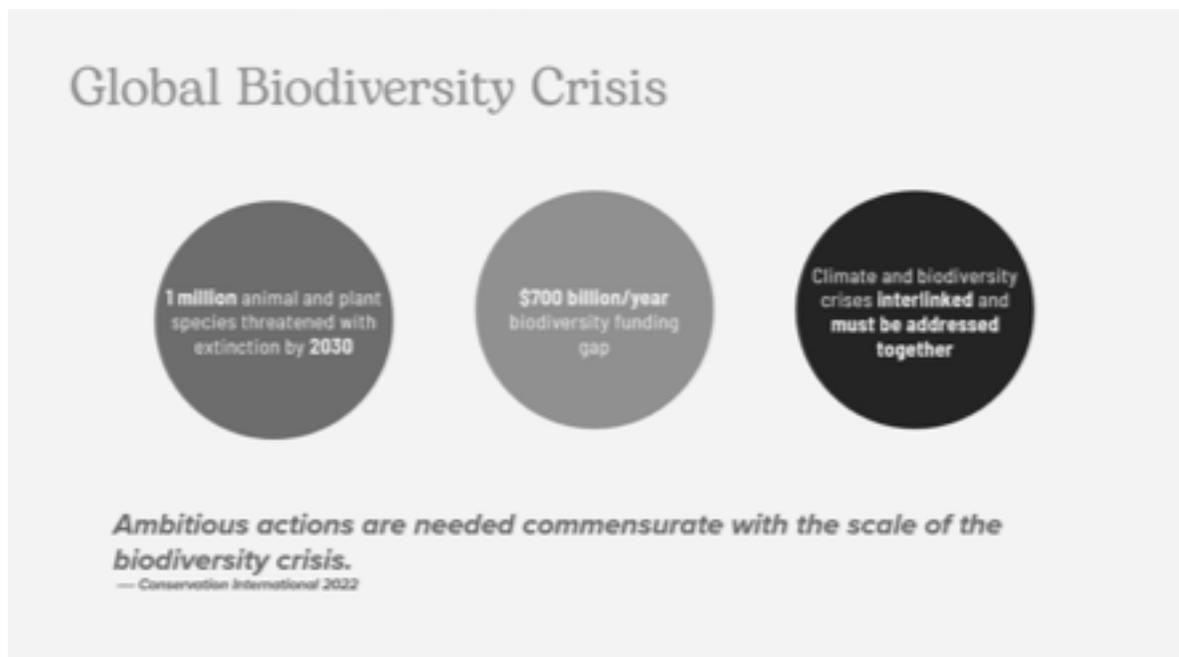
Unpacking global biodiversity frameworks: Pathways to empower community land rights and ecosystem resilience

Enrique A. Nuñez
ILC

THERE ARE MORE PEOPLE living inside the Asia-Pacific region than outside of it. The region is home to 60 percent of the world's population, or 4.8 billion people.

It also experiences a huge rate of biodiversity loss, with species extinction rates 100 to 1,000 higher than the global average. In India, for instance, three percent of bird species face extinction, 19 percent of amphibians are threatened or critically endangered, and over 12 percent of wild mammals are almost gone. In Australia, nearly three billion animals were killed or displaced during the devastating wildfires of 2019 and 2020.

More than 80 percent of East and Southeast Asia's wetlands are classified as threatened. This alarming rate of environmental destruction is driven by human activities, land use change, habitat loss, and degradation, including climate change, since the 1970s.



Source: ILC



The world is facing a global biodiversity crisis. It is estimated that more than one million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction by 2030. However, biodiversity efforts are hampered by USD 700 billion a year funding gap.

A 2022 Conservation International (CI) report revealed that ambitious actions are needed commensurate with the scale of the biodiversity crisis. Climate and biodiversity crises are interlinked and must be addressed together.

Biodiversity and community land rights in Asia

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs and LCs) play a vital role in addressing the biodiversity crisis. They have been frontline stewards of biodiversity for generations. Their lands hold around 80 percent of the world's biodiversity. Their traditional knowledge and sustainable practices contribute to biodiversity conservation. However, their efforts are under threat from land rights and development pressures, political marginalization, and climate vulnerability. Biodiversity is directly linked to land rights because Asian communities are deeply connected with nature. They have deep-rooted connections with their local environments. IPs and LCs take care or steward 25 to 30 percent of forests, which serve as critical carbon sinks.

Based on global statistics, 25 percent of the world's land surface are managed by IPs and LCs. Their traditional territories overlap with 40 percent of protected areas and ecologically intact landscapes (Garnett et al., 2018). For IPs and LCs, forests are their source of water, medicinal plants, and non-timber forest products. They rely on forests and coastal areas for subsistence agriculture, fishing, and cultural rituals. Land holds significant cultural and spiritual value, shaping community identities and traditional governance.

There is a very strong argument for secure land rights as a conservation strategy since lands managed by IPs and LCs experience lower deforestation rates and higher biodiversity protection. For example, the Dayak-led Customary Rainforest Protection program in Borneo recognizes indigenous land rights to prevent deforestation and maintain carbon sinks. They integrate trees with crops to restore soil health and biodiversity for sustainable food production. The Dayak also protect fishing rights and biodiversity through indigenous based practices and governance.

Secure land tenure underpins the ability of communities to sustainably manage their environments, supporting both biodiversity and cultural continuity. Legally recognized land rights enable communities to invest in sustainable practices that maintain habitat diversity and support ecosystem services.

Land is intertwined with cultural identity. Secure land rights help ensure traditional practices that support nature, food security, and economic well-being, contributing to climate resilience.

Global biodiversity frameworks

The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) aim to address biodiversity loss and climate resilience through international cooperation.

GLOBAL TARGETS FOR 2030

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework has 23 action-oriented global targets for urgent action over the decade to 2030. The actions set out in each target need to be initiated immediately and completed by 2030. Together, the results will enable achievement towards the outcome-oriented goals for 2050. Actions to reach these targets should be implemented consistently and in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Protocols, and other relevant international obligations, taking into account national circumstances, priorities and socioeconomic conditions.

1. Reducing threats to biodiversity

TARGET 1: Plan and Manage all Areas to Reduce Biodiversity Loss

Ensure that all areas are under participatory, integrated and biodiversity inclusive spatial planning and/or effective management processes addressing land- and sea-use change, to bring the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance, including ecosystems of high ecological integrity, close to zero by 2030, while respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

TARGET 2: Restore 30% of all Degraded Ecosystems

Ensure that by 2030 at least 30 percent of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and marine and coastal ecosystems are under effective restoration, in order to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity and connectivity.

TARGET 3: Conserve 30% of Land, Waters and Seas

Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 percent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.

TARGET 4: Halt Species Extinction, Protect Genetic Diversity, and Manage Human-Wildlife Conflicts

Ensure urgent management actions to halt human induced extinction of known threatened species and for the recovery and conservation of species, in particular threatened species, to significantly reduce extinction risk, as well as to maintain and restore the genetic diversity within and between populations of native, wild and domesticated species to maintain their adaptive potential, including through in situ and ex situ conservation and sustainable management practices, and effectively manage human-wildlife interactions to minimize human-wildlife conflict for coexistence.

TARGET 5: Ensure Sustainable, Safe and Legal Harvesting and Trade of Wild Species

Ensure that the use, harvesting and trade of wild species is sustainable, safe and legal, preventing overexploitation, minimizing impacts on non-target species and ecosystems, and reducing the risk of pathogen spillover, applying the ecosystem approach, while respecting and protecting customary sustainable use by indigenous peoples and local communities.

TARGET 6: Reduce the Introduction of Invasive Alien Species by 50% and Minimize Their Impact

Eliminate, minimize, reduce and or mitigate the impacts of invasive alien species on biodiversity and ecosystem services by identifying and managing pathways of the introduction of alien species, preventing the introduction and establishment of priority invasive alien species, reducing the rates of introduction and establishment of other known or potential invasive alien species by at least 50 percent by 2030, and eradicating or controlling invasive alien species, especially in priority sites, such as islands.



<p>TARGET 7: Reduce Pollution to Levels That Are Not Harmful to Biodiversity Reduce pollution risks and the negative impact of pollution from all sources by 2030, to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, considering cumulative effects, including: (a) by reducing excess nutrients lost to the environment by at least half, including through more efficient nutrient cycling and use; (b) by reducing the overall risk from pesticides and highly hazardous chemicals by at least half, including through integrated pest management, based on science, taking into account food security and livelihoods; and (c) by preventing, reducing, and working towards eliminating plastic pollution.</p>	<p>TARGET 8: Minimize the Impacts of Climate Change on Biodiversity and Build Resilience Minimize the impact of climate change and ocean acidification on biodiversity and increase its resilience through mitigation, adaptation, and disaster risk reduction actions, including through nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches, while minimizing negative and fostering positive impacts of climate action on biodiversity.</p>
<p>2. Meeting people's needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing</p>	
<p>TARGET 9: Manage Wild Species Sustainably to Benefit People Ensure that the management and use of wild species are sustainable, thereby providing social, economic and environmental benefits for people, especially those in vulnerable situations and those most dependent on biodiversity, including through sustainable biodiversity-based activities, products and services that enhance biodiversity, and protecting and encouraging customary sustainable use by indigenous peoples and local communities.</p>	<p>TARGET 10: Enhance Biodiversity and Sustainability in Agriculture, Aquaculture, Fisheries, and Forestry Ensure that areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry are managed sustainably, in particular through the sustainable use of biodiversity, including through a substantial increase of the application of biodiversity friendly practices, such as sustainable intensification, agroecological and other innovative approaches, contributing to the resilience and long-term efficiency and productivity of these production systems, and to food security, conserving and restoring biodiversity and maintaining nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services.</p>
<p>TARGET 11: Restore, Maintain and Enhance Nature's Contributions to People Restore, maintain and enhance nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services, such as the regulation of air, water and climate, soil health, pollination and reduction of disease risk, as well as protection from natural hazards and disasters through nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem based approaches for the benefit of all people and nature.</p>	<p>TARGET 12: Enhance Green Spaces and Urban Planning for Human Well-Being and Biodiversity Significantly increase the area and quality, and connectivity of, access to, and benefits from green and blue spaces in urban and densely populated areas sustainably, by mainstreaming the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and ensure biodiversity-inclusive urban planning, enhancing native biodiversity, ecological connectivity and integrity, and improving human health and well-being and connection to nature, and contributing to inclusive and sustainable urbanization and to the provision of ecosystem functions and services.</p>
<p>TARGET 13: Increase the Sharing of Benefits from Genetic Resources, Digital Sequence Information and Traditional Knowledge Take effective legal, policy, administrative and capacity-building measures at all levels, as appropriate, to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits that arise from the utilization of genetic resources and from digital sequence information on genetic resources, as well as traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources, and facilitating appropriate access to genetic resources, and by 2030, facilitating a significant increase of the benefits shared, in accordance with applicable international access and benefit-sharing instruments.</p>	

3. Tools and solutions for implementation and mainstreaming

TARGET 14: Integrate Biodiversity in Decision-Making at Every Level

Ensure the full integration of biodiversity and its multiple values into policies, regulations, planning and development processes, poverty eradication strategies, strategic environmental assessments, environmental impact assessments and, as appropriate, national accounting, within and across all levels of government and across all sectors, in particular those with significant impacts on biodiversity, progressively aligning all relevant public and private activities, and fiscal and financial flows with the goals and targets of this framework.

TARGET 15: Businesses Assess, Disclose and Reduce Biodiversity-Related Risks and Negative Impacts

Take legal, administrative or policy measures to encourage and enable business, and in particular to ensure that large and transnational companies and financial institutions:

- (a) Regularly monitor, assess, and transparently disclose their risks, dependencies and impacts on biodiversity, including with requirements for all large as well as transnational companies and financial institutions along their operations, supply and value chains, and portfolios;
- (b) Provide information needed to consumers to promote sustainable consumption patterns; and,
- (c) Report on compliance with access and benefit-sharing regulations and measures, as applicable; in order to progressively reduce negative impacts on biodiversity, increase positive impacts, reduce biodiversity-related risks to business and financial institutions, and promote actions to ensure sustainable patterns of production.

TARGET 16: Enable Sustainable Consumption Choices To Reduce Waste and Overconsumption

Ensure that people are encouraged and enabled to make sustainable consumption choices, including by establishing supportive policy, legislative or regulatory frameworks, improving education and access to relevant and accurate information and alternatives, and by 2030, reduce the global footprint of consumption in an equitable manner, including through halving global food waste, significantly reducing overconsumption and substantially reducing waste generation, in order for all people to live well in harmony with Mother Earth.

TARGET 17: Strengthen Biosafety and Distribute the Benefits of Biotechnology

Establish, strengthen capacity for, and implement in all countries, biosafety measures as set out in Article 8(g) of the Convention on Biological Diversity and measures for the handling of biotechnology and distribution of its benefits as set out in Article 19 of the Convention.

TARGET 18: Reduce Harmful Incentives by at Least \$500 Billion per Year, and Scale Up Positive Incentives for Biodiversity

Identify by 2025, and eliminate, phase out or reform incentives, including subsidies, harmful for biodiversity, in a proportionate, just, fair, effective and equitable way, while substantially and progressively reducing them by at least \$500 billion per year by 2030, starting with the most harmful incentives, and scale up positive incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

TARGET 19: Mobilize \$200 Billion per Year for Biodiversity From all Sources, Including \$30 Billion Through International Finance

Substantially and progressively increase the level of financial resources from all sources, in an effective, timely and easily accessible manner, including domestic, international, public and private resources, in accordance with Article 20 of the Convention, to implement national biodiversity strategies and action plans, mobilizing at least \$200 billion per year by 2030, including by:

- (a) Increasing total biodiversity related international financial resources from developed countries, including official development assistance, and from countries that voluntarily assume obligations of developed country Parties, to developing countries, in particular the least developed countries and small island developing States, as well as countries with economies in transition, to at least \$20 billion per year by 2025, and to at least \$30 billion per year by 2030;
- (b) Significantly increasing domestic resource mobilization, facilitated by the preparation and implementation of national biodiversity finance plans or similar instruments according to national needs, priorities and circumstances;

- (c) Leveraging private finance, promoting blended finance, implementing strategies for raising new and additional resources, and encouraging the private sector to invest in biodiversity, including through impact funds and other instruments;
- (d) Stimulating innovative schemes such as payment for ecosystem services, green bonds, biodiversity offsets and credits, and benefit-sharing mechanisms, with environmental and social safeguards;
- (e) Optimizing co-benefits and synergies of finance targeting the biodiversity and climate crises;
- (f) Enhancing the role of collective actions, including by indigenous peoples and local communities, Mother Earth centric actions and non-market-based approaches including community based natural resource management and civil society cooperation and solidarity aimed at the conservation of biodiversity;
- (g) Enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency and transparency of resource provision and use;

TARGET 20: Strengthen Capacity-Building, Technology Transfer, and Scientific and Technical Cooperation for Biodiversity

Strengthen capacity-building and development, access to and transfer of technology, and promote development of and access to innovation and technical and scientific cooperation, including through South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation, to meet the needs for effective implementation, particularly in developing countries, fostering joint technology development and joint scientific research programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and strengthening scientific research and monitoring capacities, commensurate with the ambition of the goals and targets of the Framework.

TARGET 21: Ensure That Knowledge Is Available and Accessible To Guide Biodiversity Action

Ensure that the best available data, information and knowledge are accessible to decision makers, practitioners and the public to guide effective and equitable governance, integrated and participatory management of biodiversity, and to strengthen communication, awareness-raising, education, monitoring, research and knowledge management and, also in this context, traditional knowledge, innovations, practices and technologies of indigenous peoples and local communities should only be accessed with their free, prior and informed consent, in accordance with national legislation.

TARGET 22: Ensure Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice and Information Related to Biodiversity for all

Ensure the full, equitable, inclusive, effective and gender-responsive representation and participation in decision-making, and access to justice and information related to biodiversity by indigenous peoples and local communities, respecting their cultures and their rights over lands, territories, resources, and traditional knowledge, as well as by women and girls, children and youth, and persons with disabilities and ensure the full protection of environmental human rights defenders.

TARGET 23: Ensure Gender Equality and a Gender-Responsive Approach for Biodiversity Action

Ensure gender equality in the implementation of the Framework through a gender-responsive approach, where all women and girls have equal opportunity and capacity to contribute to the three objectives of the Convention, including by recognizing their equal rights and access to land and natural resources and their full, equitable, meaningful and informed participation and leadership at all levels of action, engagement, policy and decision-making related to biodiversity.

Source: <https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets>

The most-recent framework, the KMGBF adopted in 2022, brings together all previous conventions and sets a goal to protect 30 percent of the world’s land and oceans by 2030 (30x30). The KMGBF recognizes the conservation governance and tenure rights of IPs and LCs.

The KMGBF adopts participatory approaches by promoting biodiversity conservation through National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), ensuring multi-stakeholder participation, and involving IPs and LCs in conservation planning strengthens biodiversity outcomes.



“Empowering and securing community land rights is not just a matter of justice. It is a practical solution to the biodiversity crisis. International biodiversity frameworks provide valuable mechanisms for advancing tenure security and emphasizing inclusion and participation of IPs and LCs to achieve conservation goals.”

The framework integrates Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) as traditional land management contributes to ecosystem resilience. The KMGBF has robust monitoring mechanisms to ensure that biodiversity commitments translate into tangible actions. The KMGBF has four goals and 23 targets for 2030, with Target 21 emphasizing indigenous and local community rights as a critical component of biodiversity conservation. The target strengthens land tenure, governance, and the integration of traditional knowledge.

There are several case studies leveraging global frameworks at the national level. In Palawan, Philippines, the Convention on Biological Diversity Ecosystem Expansion was leveraged into the National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAS) Act and the Indigenous People’s Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997. It emphasized participatory conservation and the IPRA’s recognition of the Tagbanua tribe’s ancestral domain rights to establish community-managed protected areas.

In India’s Western Ghats, the UNCBD’s Ecosystem Approach: Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework’s Target 3 (30 x 30 target for protected areas) was translated by India’s Biological Diversity Act (2002) and the Forest Rights Act (2006), which recognized IP rights to manage sacred groves – now recognized as biodiversity hotspots and cultural heritage sites.

In Papua, Indonesia, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and CBD’s Target 21 was translated by Indonesia’s Customary Forest Law (2013) in securing legal recognition of IP land rights to resist deforestation and mining activities.



The Philippines took the NBSAP model a step further by crafting the Indigenous Peoples Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (IPBSAP) – a framework led by IPs – integrating ancestral domain management with biodiversity conservation. The IPBSAP ensures that national policies align with customary land governance and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).

Pathways forward

Legal recognition of land rights enhances resource management. Thus, strengthening legal frameworks to recognize and enforce community land rights is essential for biodiversity management. Incorporating TEK into biodiversity conservation strategies leads to better outcomes.

The Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework provides a unique opportunity to align global conservation goals with local empowerment. Promoting participatory approaches centered on indigenous-led conservation greatly enhances biodiversity conservation planning and implementation.

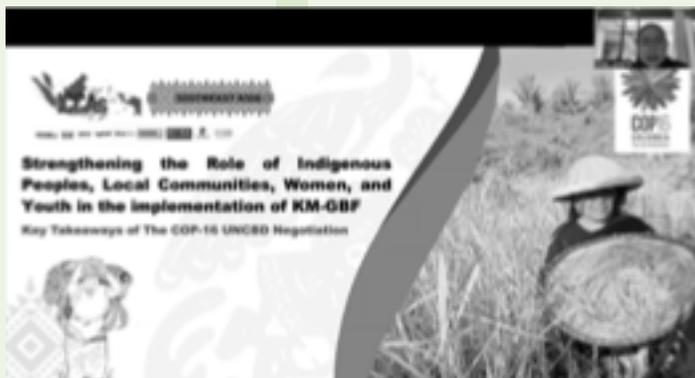
Conclusion

Empowering community land rights is a practical solution to the biodiversity crisis. Effective implementation of biodiversity conservation programs consist of strong advocacy, policy coherence, and community led action. Current biodiversity frameworks prioritize the inclusion and participation of IPs and LCs to achieve their conservation goals. ■

References:

- Case studies from the Tagbanua people, sacred groves in India, and community-led Conservation in Papua.
- Garnett, S.T., et al. (2018). A spatial overview of the global importance of indigenous lands for conservation. *Nature Sustainability*, 1(7), 369-374.
- Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997, Philippines.
- IPBES (2019). *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*.
- Walker, W.S., et al. (2020). The role of forest conservation, degradation, and disturbance in the carbon dynamics of Amazon indigenous territories and protected areas. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(6), 3015 to 3025.

Key takeaways of Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 16)



Photos from video presentations of Cyndi Julianti (ICCA SEA Consortium) and Lakpa Nuri Sherpa (AIPP)



Update on the Parties' review of the state of implementation of the KMGBF and alignment of NBSAPs within the Framework

Cindy Julianty
ICCA SEA Consortium

THE UNCBD CONFERENCE OF PARTIES (COP) 16 has been very pivotal in that there were many agreements associated with the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework. In particular, there was an agreement to submit updated NBSAPs.

Most of the countries are still in the process of finalizing their NBSAPs. Some Southeast Asian countries, like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines already submitted theirs, but other countries are still struggling, especially those under unfavorable political conditions.

This presentation looks into some of the negotiation items in the CBD that might be important for indigenous peoples and local communities.

The following were among the negotiation items in COP16:

- Resource mobilization and financial mechanisms to support the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework (as stated in Target 19).
- Planning, Monitoring, Reporting, and Review (PMRR) mechanism, which consists of specifically designed tools and establishes indicators related to each target of the KMGBF (There were intense discussions on how exactly the monitoring will be conducted).

One of the “victories” gained by civil society is the disaggregation of indicators – by gender, age, ethnicity, among others. This is important because we can now see a detailed profile of people living within the biodiversity area.

This is significant particularly to Target 3, which has protected areas and OECMs as headline indicators. Even if these two indicators are the main indicators that will be reported to the CBD, by disaggregating the data, we would be able to determine how IPs and LCs would actually be included in that target.



Disaggregation can strengthen the context of indigenous peoples' tenure rights. Whenever a government will pursue protected areas and OECM to be reported to the CBD, that government also needs to ensure that indigenous and traditional territories are also counted. However, operationalization of this strategy will still be discussed in the Working Group.

Thus, it is very vital for CSOs to continue participating in the discussions. We need to take a look into our own national policies – which policies can fit in with what indicator – and how we can move forward and push the government to also adopt initiatives other than protected areas and OECM.

That is why we need to have a third pathway, which is the inclusion of Indigenous Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) as part of Target 3. We should look at how the government will interpret the concept of indigenous and traditional territories.

CSOs should also look at complementary indicators. If the main indicators are too rigid, and the complementary indicators provide some breathing room, then CSOs can push for complementary indicators to be counted by the government. For instance, ICCAs are adopted as complementary indicators of Target 22.

Target 22 itself has the headline indicator of land use change and land tenure, which can open spaces for CSOs to push the government to acknowledge efforts in recognizing land rights and land tenure at the country level.

There are many national laws that support land tenure and land rights. In Indonesia, there is legal recognition of indigenous peoples through regional regulations or subnational government decrees. Customary forests, *ulayat* lands or communal land rights of indigenous peoples can be reported as achievements for Target 22.

Target 23 has gender issues as a headline indicator. Thus, governments need to create a legal framework and administrative policy for women's participation and gender mainstreaming in the policy framework dedicated to implementation of the KMGBF.

Another positive result of COP16 is the agreement on the issue of community self-reporting or the non-State actors report (Item 10). This means that civil society can report directly to the CBD in the future.

The subsidiary body mentioned in Article 8A is a permanent body. It complements the other two bodies in the CBD – Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI). The subsidiary body in Article 8A (SB8A) will be focused on monitoring the implementations of the program of work on Article 8A.

There have been discussions on how to operationalize this new subsidiary body, which encountered resistance from some countries, including Indonesia. There will be a meeting in October 2025 in Panama City on SBSTTA and SB8A.



Source: ICCA SEA Consortium

In the national context, the most important part is the program of work itself. It should be implemented by countries that are parties to the CBD. An element of the program of work on Article 8J is “to promote, protect, guide, collaborate, and document traditional knowledge, practices, and innovations carried out by indigenous peoples and local communities related to conservation and restoration, sustainable use, benefit sharing design, and information on SDGs.”

It is about utilization of genetic resources and traditional knowledge, which means that it is related to customary sustainable use (CSU). Strengthening implementation of the monitoring framework on 8J also includes full and effective participation of IPs and LCs, using the human rights-based approach, and mobilization of funds. It would be a good opportunity for CSOs to push the government to also create an action plan for implementation of this element in the program of work on Target 8J at the national level.

There were intense discussions in Cali, Colombia on financial mechanisms. The main questions from governments are: what form will direct financing take, how will it be implemented, and what the government’s role will be?



The government is the implementer of the KMGBF, but as non-State actors, CSOs, IPs and LCs can support the implementation. In the context of current resource mobilization activities, it seems direct financing has been adopted. This also raises a lot of questions. For the financial mechanism itself, the parties agreed that they will continue with the GEF mechanism, even though there are other initiatives like the Cali Fund on BSI. However, it remains to be seen how the Cali Fund will be operationalized.

There has been some resistance, especially from Annex 1 countries or the Global North. However, they now want to focus on implementing Target 19 under the GEF mechanism. Thus, civil society has to vigilantly observe how direct financing will be carried out at the national level. With extensive experience in implementing direct financing projects, CSOs can even oversee the implementation of some initiatives under the CBD targets.

There has been some push to create a mechanism where 20 percent of the funds are given directly to IPs and LCs. But again, there is a question on how this direct financing scheme will be operationalized. Governments want all funds to go through their process, so CSOs should actively be involved in pushing for the 20 percent direct allocation to IPs and LCs.

At the end of the day, civil society should actively be involved in these conversations, be prepared for a lot of discussions, try to lobby with the working groups, and continue to push our respective governments to strengthen the full and effective participation of IPs and LCs by ensuring that there is disaggregation in the NBSAP.

Another option is to actually push governments to create multi-stakeholder fora on the NBSAP, not just for preparing the document but also for monitoring its implementation. Collaboration is the CBD's context right now.

However, for fruitful collaboration between civil society and government to happen, we need to ensure institutional arrangements at the national level. ■



COP16 outcome and COP16.2 outcome related to Article 8(j) and the monitoring framework of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

Lakpa Nuri Sherpa
Asian Indigenous Peoples' Pact (AIPP)

THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON BIODIVERSITY (CBD) Conference of Parties 16.2 (COP16.2)¹¹ saw the biggest celebrations of indigenous peoples in the history of the CBD with the institutionalization of Article 8J.

There were many decisions from COP16 and COP16.2. This presentation shall focus on decisions relating to Article 8(j) and the monitoring framework of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).

Article 8(j) specifies the parties' self-respect, to preserve, and maintain knowledge, innovations, and practices of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs and LCs) embodying traditional lifestyles. It also talks about the approval and involvement of holders of self-knowledge, innovations and practices. Finally, it mandates equitable sharing of the benefits derived from traditional land and waters.

In order to implement Article 8(j), an Open-Ended Working Group was established in 1998. However, the said Working Group was temporary in nature and was dissolved in 2023.

The Article was adopted in 2000 and has five elements and 17 tasks. It was later revised, then extended from 2010 to 2020.

There is a provision for indigenous peoples to co-chair the meetings of the working group. For Asia, it was Jenny Lassimbang, former Secretary General of AIPP, and myself who served as co-chairs. At COP16, we were focused on getting a new permanent subsidiary body established. As

¹¹ Not all agenda items were concluded during the COP16 in Cali, Colombia. Hence, a secondary session (COP16.2) was organized in Rome, Italy last October to November 2024.



Source: AIPP

part of the strategy, the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity organized a global summit on traditional knowledge in Bogota, Colombia, in collaboration with the indigenous peoples from Colombia and the Colombian government. We also organized an environmental conference in Pokhara, Nepal during the AIPP annual conference.

One of the key messages from this global summit and also the environmental conference of AIPP is that the new permanent subsidiary body has to be established at COP16. We were also very clear from the onset that we need to work closely with the COP presidency because they have tremendous influence in COP outcomes.

Despite strong opposition from some CBD parties, including some Asian States, we were eventually able to establish the permanent subsidiary body. This has never happened in the history of the UN system where a dedicated subsidiary body on traditional knowledge was to be established. Thus, this is something that we need to celebrate together.

The adoption of the new program of work in Article 8(j) was another decision that came out from the COP16. The objectives of the program of work includes the implementation of Article 8(j), an alignment of the tasks of the program of work in accordance with the KMGBF, and full and effective participation of IPs and LCs in all stages and levels of implementation.

The general principles of the new program of work include:

- full, equitable, inclusive, effective, and gender responsive participation;
- address specific challenges of indigenous peoples in developing countries;

- 
- address specific challenges on the program of work's implementation in developing countries;
 - respect and recognize traditional knowledge as equal to other knowledge systems;
 - holistic approach to biodiversity conservation;
 - ecosystem-based approach;
 - free, prior and informed consent; and,
 - human rights and gender equality.

Human rights and gender equality, and the specific challenges of indigenous peoples and developing countries, are additional principles to the old program of work.

However, we will not be able to look into all the tasks. The first element is on conservation and restoration. Let us look into one of the tasks under this element. Task 1.2 talks about identification and promotion of best practices to secure land tenure and governance by IPs and LCs. This is something very important for the ILC and its members because it talks a lot about land rights.

Element 2 is on sustainable use of biological diversity. Element 3 talks about the sharing of the benefits. Element 4 is on knowledge and culture. This is the element that actually has a lot of tasks. If we look into tasks 4.5, it talks about creating, strengthening, and supporting a global network of national focal points in Article 8(j).

As part of the implementation of Article 8(j), governments are supposed to appoint Article 8(j) focal points. But there have so far been a limited number of appointments from Asia.

Element 5 talks about strengthening implementation and monitoring progress. Element 6 is about full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities. If we look at task 6.2, it really talks about full and effective participation of IPs and LCs at the national level.

Element 8 is a new addition to the program of work. It talks about access, including direct access, to funding for IPs and LCs for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

We shall briefly discuss the monitoring framework for the KMGBF, a result of a process that began in 2015. As we know, the monitoring framework really helps us to track the progress towards the goals and targets of the KMGBF.

There are four goals and 22 targets of the KMGBF. There are headline indicators, component indicators, and complementary indicators. What we know is that the parties, meaning governments, are required to submit information about the progress towards the headline indicators.

The other indicators are optional in terms of the reporting. In terms of the emphasis on community-based monitoring systems, the preamble on paragraph 14 states the recognizance and emphasis on the need to strengthen community-based monitoring and information systems. I am sure many of the ILC members and network members are already doing this on the ground. Thus, it is very important for civil society to look into this as well.



Something that CSOs need to celebrate is the adoption of the headline indicators on land use change and land tenure of the traditional territories of IPs and LCs. That headline indicator has been made part of Target 22. Such a target, as we know, has a lot of elements, including land rights, full protection of environmental defenders, and access to justice, among others.

The International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity has been breaking its own records in the last 30 years in terms of influence on COP decisions. But what needs to be done now is to get those decisions implemented at the national level. How do we establish ourselves as partners in the implementation of the KMGBF? How do we establish ourselves as crucial partners in terms of reporting the roles and contributions played by IPs and LCs? That should be the key agenda and priority, not only for AIPP, but also for ILC members.

There are many windows of opportunity for engagement at the national level to influence the policy discussions because of the significant and unprecedented reference to the rights and human rights of indigenous peoples in the KMGBF. ■



The state of NBSAPs in Asia

AS THE OVERALL CONVENTION OF BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (CBD) framework was being negotiated, the idea of meeting the challenge of implementation by means of an integrated, multi-sectoral, participatory instrument for national biodiversity planning crystallized into the concept of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). Article 6 of the Convention requires contracting Parties to develop an NBSAP (or an equivalent instrument), and to integrate conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity into sectoral and cross-sectoral activities. Article 6 is one of the only two unqualified (i.e. mandatory) commitments in the Convention. (The other is Article 26, the obligation to submit periodic national reports on implementation).

The NBSAP is a process by which countries can plan to address the threats to their biodiversity. As such they are the principal instruments for the implementation of the Convention both at the national and at the global level, and they are increasingly relevant to other biodiversity-related conventions and agreements which contribute to the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011 to 2020 and its Aichi Targets.

The NBSAP is the primary tool for mainstreaming biodiversity and implementation of the UNCBD at the country level. It provides a framework for biodiversity conservation, enables focus on sustainable use of biological resources, and ensures fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from them.

NBSAP India

Pranab Choudhury, *Landstack*

INDIA's FIRST NBSAP was formulated in 1999. It was adopted in 2008, which was updated in 2014 to align with Aichi Biodiversity targets.

India unveiled its updated NBSAP for 2024 to 2030 at COP16 to the UNCBD, reinforcing its commitment to biodiversity conservation through targeted actions.

The country adopts a “whole of government” and “whole of society” approach, aligning itself with KMGBF to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, with a longer-term vision of living in harmony with nature by 2050.

There are 23 National Biodiversity Targets (NBTs) under India's NBSAP, focused on three themes – reducing threats to biodiversity; ensuring sustainable use of resources; and, enhancing tools for implementation.

India's NBSAP acknowledges environmental challenges. It outlines strategies to address them through ecosystem restoration, species recovery programs, and community-driven conservation efforts, among others.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) serves as the central agency responsible for coordinating biodiversity conservation efforts across India. It advocates a collaborative governance model and promotes a bottom-up approach engaging local communities and various sectors.

Architecture for implementation of the NBSAP exists on three levels. At the national level, there is the National Biodiversity Authority; State Biodiversity Boards and Union Territory Biodiversity Councils exist at the State level; and, Biodiversity Management Councils at the local level.

Capacity building for biodiversity conservation management is done through need and gap assessment, target group identification, identification of experts/environmentalists, and training for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, etc.

In terms of resource mobilization, India is recognized as among the leading countries for implementation of the Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) at the national level. BIOFIN is a global partnership launched by UNDP and the European Commission to support countries to enhance their financial management of biodiversity and ecosystems.

India's updated NBSAP adopts a comprehensive approach to biodiversity conservation, integrating traditional practices with modern governance and collaborative strategies while addressing contemporary environmental challenges. However, achieving the 23 NBTs and ensuring sustainable development will require continued efforts in capacity building, resource mobilization, and effective monitoring. ■

NBSAP Indonesia (IBSAP): What's going on?

Ahmad Jaetuloh, SAINS

THE UNCBD WAS RATIFIED BY INDONESIA IN 1994 but its first NBSAP was formulated covering 2003 to 2013. This was followed by the 2015 to 2020 Indonesia Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (IBSAP) version. Its latest iteration covers the period 2025 to 2045.

Indonesia claims to be a *megabiodiversity* country. Based on the Global Biodiversity Index (GBI), the country is only second to Brazil with 418.78. In addition, the country has a vision of a Golden Indonesia 2045, making its latest IBSAP not just good for 10 years but for 20 years.

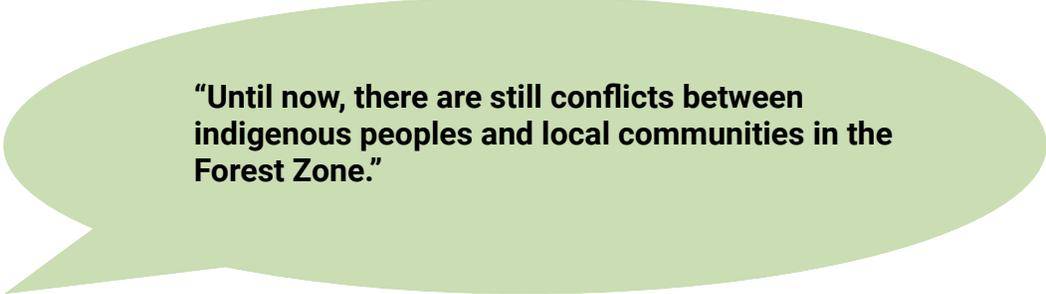
National Target (NT) or Target No. 3

The IBSAP has three goals, 20 national targets, 13 strategies, and 101 action groups. To comply with the 30 x 30 target, Indonesia aims to preserve 57.14 million hectares by 2045. It still has six million hectares to go since as of 2003, the country's Protected Areas cover 51.14 million hectares (26.85 percent of total land area). This is broken down into Protection Forest (15.38 percent) and Conservation Area (11.48 percent).

For marine conservation, Indonesia targets 68 million hectares by 2045. Currently, the country's total Protection Area and Conservation Area has a combined 29.20 million hectares (8.96 percent of the total area of Indonesia's seas).



Source: SAINS



“Until now, there are still conflicts between indigenous peoples and local communities in the Forest Zone.”

Protected Areas and conflicts

Until now, there are still conflicts between indigenous peoples and local communities in the Forest Zone. Indonesia’s National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) has explicitly stated that there are IP conflicts with forest areas in 40 locations, including National Parks and parts of Protected Areas. There were 32 cases of conflicts between IPs and local communities with National Parks which have yet to be resolved.

If National Target No. 3 continues without significant changes, conflicts between IPs and LCs and National Parks will certainly increase. Data from AMAN shows that 1.6 million hectares of Protected Area overlap with indigenous territories, affecting 2.9 million people.

OECM and Preservation Area

Indonesia Law No. 32/2024 defines Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECM) as Preservation Area. This is problematic because the purpose of preservation is to “preserve” (Article 11) without Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in the area designation process. Others who do not carry out preservation activities will be penalized (Article 9).

If the Preservation Area continues to be imposed, it is possible that new conflicts will arise, considering that the source of land for the preservation area comes from Protection Forest (HL), Production Forest (HP), and Non-Forest Estate (APL) (Article 8 (5) where many indigenous peoples reside.

Indigenous Territories and Customary Forests

Constitutional Court Decision No. 35 of 2012 states that Customary Forests are the rights of indigenous peoples, so that the Customary Forest is a scheme of forest management, including biodiversity based on the rights of indigenous peoples.

This situation gives the Customary Forest a more complete dimension. The push for Customary Forest requires a process of full community participation, including FPIC and inclusiveness. This is in line with KMGBF targets, especially Targets 1, 3, 5, 19, 21, 22, and 23.

Unfortunately, Law No. 32/2024 does not provide extensive opportunities for Customary Forest. Customary Forests must be subject to conservation and preservation rules set by the State without participation and FPIC (Article 8). ■

NBSAP Malaysia

Ricklend Gryst Bin Christopher, *PACOS Trust*



Source: PACOS Trust

THE REVISED NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN (NBSAP) MALAYSIA, launched on 23 October 2023, aims to strengthen biodiversity conservation efforts with an emphasis on Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs and LCs). However, concerns persist regarding insufficient participation of IPs and LCs, lack of clear indigenous rights protection, and potential conflicts between conservation policies and indigenous livelihoods.

The policy includes several key actions to empower IPs and LCs, enhance stakeholder participation, recognize traditional knowledge, and improve governance of protected areas. Despite these opportunities, IPs and LCs must continue advocating for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), fair benefit-sharing, transparent decision-making, and greater legal recognition of their conservation roles. Moving forward, efforts should focus on awareness-building, self-strengthening, and capacity development to ensure IPs are active contributors to Malaysia's biodiversity governance. ■

Status of NBSAP in Nepal

Sarita Kumari Lama, *NLC-Nepal*

SINCE 1994, NEPAL HAS BEEN A CONTRACTING PARTY to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), committing to its objectives. The Ministry of Forests and Environment leads Nepal's efforts through the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), aligning with the vision of "Happy Nepali and Prosperous Nepal" and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). The plan emphasizes biodiversity conservation, sustainable use, and equitable benefit-sharing.

Nepal's first Biodiversity Strategy, developed in 2002, was followed by an action plan for 2006 to 2010 and later revised as the NBSAP in 2014. The revised plan aimed to integrate biodiversity conservation into national policies and fulfill international obligations, including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. In 2018, Nepal submitted its 6th National Report (2014 to 2020), assessing progress through stakeholder consultations across all seven States and 26 districts. The findings highlighted both achievements and challenges in implementing the NBSAP.

Of the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets, three were fully achieved, reflecting progress in biodiversity awareness, habitat conservation, and protected area expansion. Twelve targets were on track, demonstrating advancements in sustainable resource management and integrating biodiversity into local and national policies. However, several targets remained behind schedule or were unlikely to be met by 2020, particularly in invasive species management, pollution control, and sustainable aquaculture.

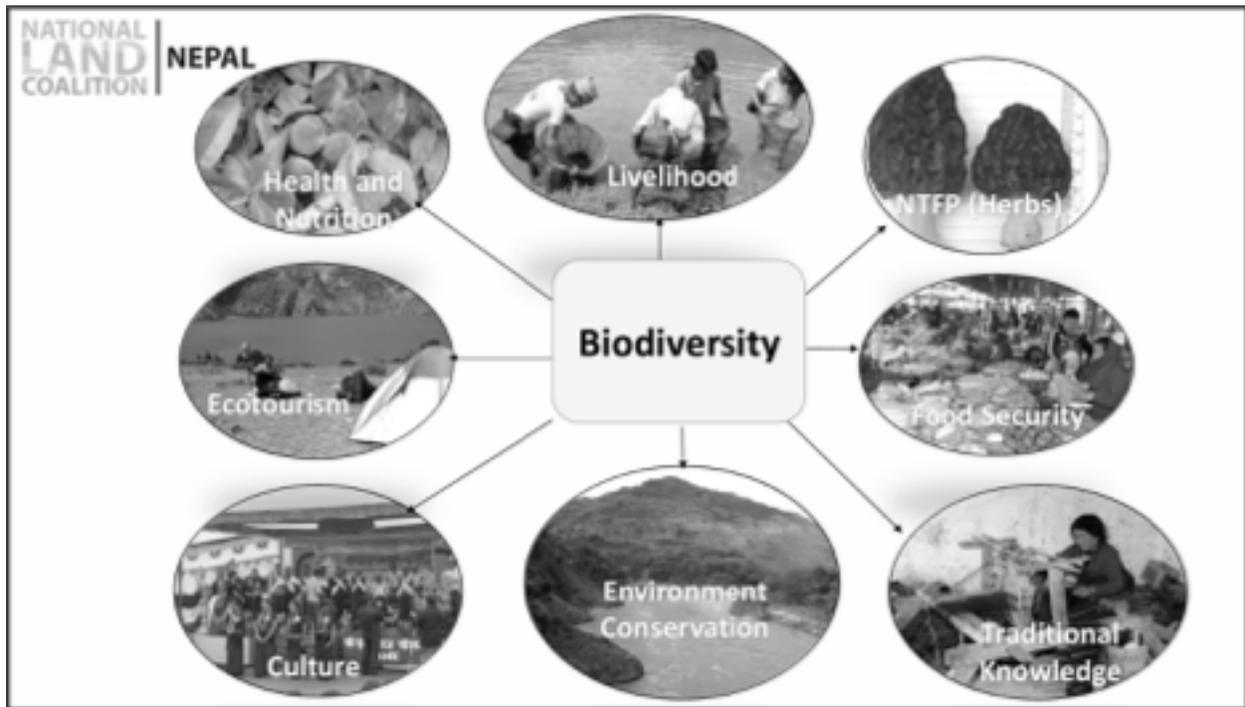
The report also identified broader challenges in integrating biodiversity across cross-sectoral ministries, contributing to slow progress. To address these issues, it recommended strengthening institutional mechanisms, revising management strategies, enhancing awareness, and promoting adaptive management. Additionally, it emphasized the need for regional collaboration and the integration of international biodiversity agreements into national strategies to improve conservation effectiveness and ensure long-term sustainability.¹²

Nepal's NBSAP revision (2024 to 2030): Progress, challenges, and way forward¹³

Nepal initiated the revision of its NBSAP in 2023, aligning with the KMGBF. The process, delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and bureaucratic inefficiencies, is now set for completion by April 2025. This revision integrates 23 global targets into 36 national targets, following extensive consultations in 36 locations with approximately 1,600 participants, including Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs and LCs), experts, and policymakers. Ensuring inclusive participation, the Steering Committee includes representatives from the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) and the National Indigenous Women Forum (NIW-Forum), while the Nepal Indigenous Forum for Biodiversity serves in the Technical Committee.

¹² Government of Nepal, Ministry of Forests and Environment. (2018). *Nepal's sixth national report to the Convention on Biological Diversity*. Ministry of Forests and Environment.

¹³ This is based on individual interactions with the NBSAP Revision Team Leader, IP and LC Expert, and GESI Specialist on March 16, 17, and 18, respectively, along with additional input from one of the IP and Youth participants of the consultation meeting and support from the following link: <https://globalvoices.org/2025/02/09/nepals-green-agenda-progress-and-challenges-in-revising-the-national-biodiversity-strategic-action-plan-nbsap/>.



Source: NLC-Nepal

Additionally, a subcommittee of IPs and LCs has been formed to reinforce a human rights-based approach. With financial support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and technical assistance from UNDP Nepal, experts are currently drafting the revised strategy, finalizing measurable indicators, and developing an action plan and budget.

Reflecting on the 2014 to 2020 NBSAP, Nepal successfully met 75 percent of its biodiversity targets, with 40 percent fully achieved and 46 percent partially met. Agricultural biodiversity improved by 60 percent, promoting traditional crops like foxtail millet, amaranth, and buckwheat. Forest coverage expanded from 39.6 percent (1999) to 44.74 percent (2021), mainly due to community forestry programs. The country's protected areas increased to 23, covering 23.39 percent of the total land area, comprising 12 national parks, one wildlife reserve, one hunting reserve, and nine conservation areas. Wildlife conservation saw notable progress, with the one-horned rhinoceros population rising from 534 (2011) to 752 (2021), and snow leopard numbers estimated between 350 to 500 in 2022. Eco-tourism flourished, with nearly one-third of foreign tourists visiting protected areas, boosting local economies. Community forest user groups also contributed through forest-based enterprises like herbal medicine and non-timber products.

Despite these achievements, Nepal faces several challenges in biodiversity conservation, including weak coordination and governance, as the National Biodiversity Coordination Committee (NBCC) struggled with convening and post-2015 federal restructuring left biodiversity responsibilities unclear. The loss of traditional knowledge, such as indigenous seed varieties and medicinal practices, has occurred due to migration, generational shifts, and insufficient documentation and legal protection. Climate change impacts, including rising



temperatures, forest fires, and droughts, have damaged ecosystems, caused crop failures, and forced migration, leaving lands fallow. Financial constraints have hindered efforts, with only 20 percent of the required USD 650 million mobilized. Water and wetland degradation is also a concern, as 42 percent of Nepal's wetlands face risks from urbanization and climate change, while the Ganges River dolphin population declines due to habitat loss and pollution.

Additionally, Nepal has not yet implemented the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS), limiting local communities' access to biodiversity resources, and weak biosafety laws prevent the regulation of biotechnology and GMOs. Land abandonment due to rural out migration has reduced productivity and increased the spread of invasive species.

To ensure sustainable biodiversity management, experts stress the need for massive awareness programs, including integrating biodiversity conservation and indigenous studies in universities. Strengthening ABS and biosafety policies, documenting traditional knowledge, and developing markets for biodiversity-based products with Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) are critical. A robust regulatory framework, effective coordination between government agencies, NGOs, and communities, and localized biodiversity strategies are essential. Gender inclusivity, reducing women's work burdens, and collecting disaggregated data are needed to ensure equitable conservation efforts. Nepal must balance conservation with development by setting realistic, context-specific targets that support biodiversity, environmental sustainability, and economic growth. ■

Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (PBSAP) 2015 to 2028

Roel Ravanera, XSF

THE PHILIPPINES IS GIFTED WITH NATURAL RESOURCES teeming with life. It has 228 recognized key biodiversity areas, which are home to 855 globally important species of plants, corals, mollusks, elasmobranchs, fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals. This rich biodiversity makes it possible for Filipinos to enjoy numerous benefits such as water, food, energy, disaster control, climate regulation, air quality regulation. Unfortunately, these rich natural resources have undergone years of exploitation compromising the ability of these resources to deliver the benefits that support the well-being of Filipinos.

Strategy and Action Plan

The inextricable link between biodiversity and human well-being is the heart of the aspirations of the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (PBSAP) 2015 to 2028. The government recognizes that genuine inclusive and sustainable growth cannot be attained without pursuing biodiversity conservation. Thus, PBSAP envisions that: *“By 2028, biodiversity is restored and rehabilitated, valued, effectively managed and secured, maintaining ecosystem services to sustain healthy, resilient Filipino communities and delivering benefits to all.”*

PBSAP is the third and latest update of the Philippines’ biodiversity strategy and action plan, which was first developed in 1997 as part of the country’s commitments to the Convention on Biological Diversity. It underwent extensive and participatory consultations with more than 800 individuals representing nearly 200 agencies and organizations from the government, private sector, media, and academe, including non-government agencies and people’s organizations. PBSAP identified 23 targets to address drivers of biodiversity loss, reduce biodiversity threats, improve biodiversity status, and enhance ecosystem services, all towards the overarching goal of improving human well-being.

Local efforts key to PBSAP success

While the PBSAP adheres to global targets on biodiversity and sustainable development, it also addresses local development needs. Local level actions are therefore critical in PBSAP implementation. Opportunely, PBSAP is still an evolving document, and the government is open for constructive inputs from diverse stakeholders. On the other hand, there is also a growing interest among CSOs to engage in the PBSAP process.

Current sectoral engagements include Indigenous Peoples (IPs) who have convened various consultations and formulated the Indigenous Peoples Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (IPBSAP). The fisherfolks are active in the submission of inputs and recommendations to the PBSAP Committee. The farming sector has come up with the initial plan to orient farmers on the PBSAP, review PBSAP with a focus on agrobiodiversity, and foster collaboration with key government agencies.

Localizing PBSAP where it will be appreciated and applied by local institutions and communities is also targeted. This will involve engaging regional and local institutions such as the Regional Development Councils. ■

Reference document: Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2015 to 2028: Bringing Resilience to Filipino Communities (Abridged Edition).

Engagement of indigenous peoples in Thailand in the revision process of the NBSAP

Renuka Pradabphuthong, *NIPT*

THERE ARE 46 MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS IN THAILAND, 11 in the upper north, 10 in the lower north, 11 in the northeast, 10 in the west, east and central, and four in the south regions.

The Thailand NBSAP was drafted by a diverse group of stakeholders. From the State are the country's parliament and the lead agency, the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP). International NGOs and funding agencies involved in the NBSAP preparation are UNDP, WWF, IUCN, OHCHR, UNEP, UNESCO, and BioFin. Also involved are academic institutions like the Chulalongkorn University-Institute of Social Research (CUSRI) and Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre.

Non-government organizations who were part of the NBSAP drafting committee are Raks Thai Foundation, Sustainability Development Foundation (SDF), RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests. The IP organizations involved were NIPT, IMPECT, PASD, IPF, WISE, HEM, IWNT, TKN, ECHA, IWNT. Technical support was provided by AIPP and FPP, with media supported by IMN.

Thailand CSOs weighed in on the previous versions (1st to 4th) of the NBSAP. Among these are limited engagement, inadequate data and monitoring systems, fragmented implementation, resource constraints, awareness and education gaps, policy integration challenges, weak evaluation mechanisms, and capacity building needs.

However, they also see the following opportunities: door opening for indigenous peoples, collaboration plans, involvement of young indigenous communicators, inclusion of NIPT and CIPT in the draft NBSAP as implementers and stakeholders, inclusion of Target 3 in the draft IP Bill, and parliament holding debates on the issue of IPs. ■



Localizing the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PHILIPPINES adopts a whole-of-nation approach towards achieving the country's commitments by mainstreaming biodiversity conservation across sectors. This comprehensive strategy aims to ensure that biodiversity conservation is embedded in all aspects of national development, fostering a collaborative effort to protect and sustain the country's rich natural heritage.

With the adoption of the KMGBF, the Philippines is currently undertaking its own process of aligning the **Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (PBSAP)** with this global framework. The PBSAP serves as the country's roadmap for conserving biodiversity, with a vision of restoring, rehabilitating, valuing, and effectively managing biodiversity to sustain ecosystem services that support healthy, resilient Filipino communities while delivering benefits to all.

Stakeholders have highlighted the importance of localizing the PBSAP as a direction to fully implement and concretize the outcomes and target indicators of the said plan. Seizing this opportunity, indigenous peoples view PBSAP as an arena to collectively advocate for effective and inclusive biodiversity policies and actions, while recognizing the rights, commitments, and contributions of indigenous peoples to biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and benefit sharing. Towards this end, several IP organizations and support groups have undertaken consultations leading to the formulation of an Indigenous Peoples Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (IPBSAP). On the other hand, fisherfolk organizations, support groups and some local government units organized a consultation to provide inputs on PBSAP. Similarly, the NLC-Philippines convened a national workshop for farmers to provide them a space to voice their concerns and articulate their contributions to PBSAP implementation – underscoring the vital role that farmers play in soil and water management, plant genetic resources conservation, sustainable agriculture, and the transformation of food systems.

At the same time, the Provincial Local Government Unit (PLGU) of Nueva Vizcaya in Northern Luzon, through its Sangguniang Panlalawigan (Provincial Legislative Council), passed the province's Indigenous Community Conservation Areas and Territories (ICCATs) Ordinance on 11 March 2024. This landmark legislation, the first of its kind in the Philippines, was principally

authored and sponsored by Hon. Samuel G. Balinhawang, the Provincial Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) at the time. The ordinance provides for the recognition, protection, and strengthening of ICCATs in Nueva Vizcaya, the establishment of the provincial ICCAT registry, and the appropriation of funds for this purpose. This achievement underscores the Provincial Government's unwavering commitment to combating climate change and exemplifies the critical importance of local actions in forging a sustainable future.





DENR-Biodiversity Management Bureau (DENR-BMB)

Angie Lou Alcantara and Jeffrey Mesias

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DENR-BMB and civil society organizations (CSOs) – particularly indigenous people's organizations (IPOs), farmers, and fisherfolk – is not always sweet. However, we did not see it as a challenge to engage these sectors in the PBSAP. We saw it as an opportunity.

While the DENR-BMB has a limited budget, the agency tried to connect with other organizations for the consultation to be conducted. The DENR-BMB supported the consultation so that the crafting of the PBSAP will be more inclusive.

However, there are still organizations that were not invited, so that is where the other sectors came in. The CSOs and IPOs helped the DENR-BMB cascade the PBSAP to groups that were not able to attend the consultations and secure their inputs.

The Philippines adopted all 23 targets; the PBSAP corresponds exactly with the KMGBF. This makes it easier for CSOs and other partners in aligning their activities or targets with that of the country.

Philippine ICCA Consortium

Giovanni Reyes

EIGHTY-FIVE PERCENT of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) in the Philippines coincide with indigenous peoples' territories. Thus, being at the epicenter of this dichotomy of environmental management, the contributions of IPs to conservation can be brought to the forefront of the dialogue between the government and IPs.

Earlier in the dialogue, we were invoking lands, rights, and resources. But the language of Target 3 indicated "indigenous traditional territories." We said that this is the epicenter of conservation because OECM and Protected Areas initially formed the language of Target 3. In our interventions in Montreal, we insisted that you cannot operationalize conservation without involving IPs because we have over 500 years of experience in biodiversity conservation.

So the language of Target 3 gave us impetus to participate in the PBSAP. We participated in four roundtable discussions and amplified our views that we have translated indigenous peoples' spiritual values and knowledge about their territories into its physical dimension, in the form of maps.



The Indigenous Peoples' Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (IPBSAP) is a collective commitment by the indigenous peoples in the Philippines about their roles, traditional knowledge, values, rights, and interrelationships with their territories and biodiversity. Initiated by Indigenous Peoples' Organizations (IPOs) and support NGOs, the IPBSAP consultation process aimed to cascade the gains made in the KMGBF global goals and targets for the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights.

IPBSAP contains an overview of the status of biodiversity in indigenous peoples' territories in the Philippines, their worldview on nature and culture, a summary of the relevant policy, governance, and financing landscape, an action plan in line with the 23 Targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework, case stories of indigenous peoples' contributions to biodiversity, and guidance for biodiversity actions and implementation in the Philippines.

This plan will continue to be enriched by ongoing and sustained efforts to localize the plan and move toward community-led implementation and monitoring.

The first iteration of the IPBSAP was formulated and officially turned over to the DENR Biodiversity Management Bureau for inclusion in the updated PBSAP on 6 August 2024, in Tagaytay, Philippines.

Among the key recommendations include:

- support skills training on negotiation on benefit sharing and IPs as main negotiators in benefit-sharing;
- ensure due diligence on where funding is going by undergoing cultural sensitivity training in designing projects;
- include needs as prioritized by communities;
- include a financial plan for IPBSAP in the implementation of PBSAP;
- enhance capability on ADSDPP formulation;
- lobby for the adoption of ADSDPPs in all local plans;
- clarify overlaps in areas and governance in Protected Areas and ICCAs;
- participatory survey and mapping of identified areas for restoration;
- documentation and dissemination of restoration initiatives of IPs;
- conduct of participatory resource assessments in ICCAs;
- lobbying of ICCA bill and local ordinances on ICCAs; and,
- document IKSPs on sustainable use, harvest, and management of wild species with set harvest, trade and use limits using multiple evidence-based approaches.

NLC-Philippines

Marie Joy Demaluan

NLC-PHILIPPINES WAS AMONG THE FIRST GROUPS from the agriculture sector who approached the DENR-BMB and expressed interest in engaging in the PBSAP implementation. NLC-Philippines saw the opportunity for its members engaged in agrarian reform communities to bring the perspective of smallholder farmers to the PBSAP.



Thus, NLC-Philippines co-organized a national consultation with the DENR-BMB to raise awareness of the PBSAP and the KMGBF among farmers because these were new to them. The coalition reviewed the 23 targets of the PBSAP and realized that there are 11 indicators in the targets that NLC can commit to. NLC-Philippines also identified community-driven initiatives of its partners.

The engagement of smallholder farmers in the PBSAP is important because even within the NLC, smallholder farmers are perceived as threats to biodiversity due to their farming practices. Farmers are not recognized as solution providers in the environment and conservation sphere.

Last December 2024, the National Land Coalition in the Philippines convened a national workshop which was participated by 50 representatives of farmers' alliances and rural development NGOs to familiarize them with the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (PBSAP), and discuss their perspectives and contributions to its enhancement and effective implementation. The said consultation was organized jointly with the Biodiversity Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR-BMB) which is the lead agency in updating the nearly decade-old PBSAP, aligning it with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The agriculture sector, particularly the farmers, is now striving to establish a platform to ensure their substantial and effective participation in the PBSAP process. Farmers need to recognize and expand the vital role they play in biodiversity conservation through their activities in soil and water management, plant genetic resources conservation, sustainable agriculture, and the transformation of food systems. The following are highlights from the workshop:

On the understanding of the participants from the farming sector on the KMGBF-PBSAP targets and its importance to farmers in general. KMGBF-PBSAP and their targets are fairly new to the participants coming from the farming and fisheries sector, as well as local officials supposed to help achieve the framework and targets. The link between agriculture, fisheries, and biodiversity needs to be better established and discussed with the farming and fisheries communities.

On threats to obstacles to farmers' efforts in biodiversity conservation. Farmers emphasized that addressing continuous land conversion and land grabbing must happen for biodiversity conservation to be sustained. Farmers must also own and control the use of their land and resources to practice sustainable farming (e.g., diversification, organic methods, etc.). Land ownership programs of the government for smallholder farmers must be completed. Other threats identified were: intensifying climate change affecting rice harvests and farmers' incomes, extinction of species, increasing invasive species, conflicted implementation (conventional agricultural programs vs. sustaining agricultural practices), among others.

On confusing government priorities between conservation and economic development. There are many conflicting policies and programs between conservation and economic development. Governments, both local and national, tend to develop programs that violate laws protecting the environment and promoting biodiversity conservation.

Among the initial recommendations include:

- formulation of comprehensive land use plans (CLUPs);
- tree planting, including mangroves;
- rehabilitation of abandoned fishponds;
- intercropping (vegetables/legumes);
- organic fertilizer production;
- lobbying of the National Land Use Act; and,
- revitalizing traditional and upland rice varieties through seed-banking.

RARE-Philippines

Dennis Calvan

FISHERS ALSO HAVE THE SAME MOTIVATION AS FARMERS to engage with the PBSAP. The coastal and marine sector has been doing a lot of work that complement the PBSAP. For instance, fisherfolks want the government and other stakeholders in conservation to recognize and value not only the nationally legislated protected areas, but also the locally managed protected areas.

Conservation efforts of fishing communities have long been taken for granted. However, several studies show that locally managed marine protected areas (MPAs), if done properly, can actually increase fish stocks and biomass that can help fishing communities improve their fish catch and increase their income from fishing.

Part of the KMGBF targets is to safeguard 30 percent of the Earth's land and oceans by 2030.

As a party to this convention, the Philippines has committed to this target. The country has protected areas under the Expanded National Integrated Protected Area System (ENIPAS), covering 3.14 million hectares of land and 1.42 percent of marine waters, including the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Additionally, there are locally managed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and MPA Networks outside NIPAS areas, covering approximately 6.83 million hectares or 10.05 percent of Philippine territorial waters.

To enhance marine conservation efforts, the DENR-BMB plans to identify areas contributing to the global 30 x 30 target. This includes existing and proposed NIPAS MPAs, MPA Networks (excluding NIPAS MPAs), locally-managed MPAs, and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) and indigenous and community-conserved areas.

At the same time, the DENR-BMB is currently in the process of finalizing the draft guideline on Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECM). Optimizing the opportunity of reviewing the draft OECM guideline as well as providing inputs on the PBSAP, RARE Philippines organized a workshop last June 2024.

Among the recommendations include:

- scale-up information-education-communication materials on Coastal Greenbelt Areas;
- complete delineation of municipal waters both with and without offshore islands;
- simplify the OECM guidelines for fisherfolk to easily understand;
- conduct inventory/audit and monitor aquaculture permits (including backyard aquaculture);
- complete inventory and mapping of the status of abandoned, undeveloped and underutilized fishponds to identify areas for reversion to mangroves;
- promote fisherfolk registration through community awareness;
- strengthen Bantay Dagat; and,
- lobby for the passage of Bantay Dagat Bill.



In discussions with the DENR, the agency actually acknowledged that locally managed MPAs, basically local conservation areas managed by fisherfolk organizations and local government units – actually contribute to the increase in fish stocks and fish biomass in several areas in the Philippines. Aside from that, the Philippine Constitution states that municipal or small-scale fishers have the preferential rights to use and utilize the municipal waters up to 15 kilometers from the shore.

We believe that municipal waters have ecological, as well as economic and social value. Thus, municipal waters should be protected and managed. We really wanted to integrate in the PBSAP the recommendation of putting a value on the contribution of small-scale fishers in terms of management and protection of water resources.

**Technical Working Group of
Indigenous Peoples
Mandatory Representative,
Nueva Vizcaya**

Pablo Paet, PAFID

THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT OF NUEVA VIZCAYA passed Ordinance 2024-241, “An Ordinance Recognizing, Protecting, and Strengthening the Indigenous Cultural Communities and Indigenous Peoples (ICCs/IPs) Community Conservation Areas and Territories (ICCATs), Establishing for the Purpose the Provincial ICCAT Registry, and Appropriating Funds Therefor” in March 2024.

Why pass a local ordinance for indigenous peoples when there is already a national law which is the IPRA? The Ordinance is inspired or caused to be passed by the presence of escalating issues of governance of IP areas, especially in terms of natural resources. These issues have been present for the longest time. Although there is the IPRA, there are many instances wherein indigenous ways of governance and management are no longer being recognized at the local level. This is the main reason behind the passing of such Ordinance.

Why was the Ordinance passed only recently? The reason is because of the absence of a champion at the provincial government, specifically at the provincial legislative council, before. It was only after PAFID’s partners, Samuel Balinhawang, was installed as the Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) of the province that the Ordinance gained traction at the local legislative council. This was inspired also by the failure to pass the Indigenous Community Conserved Areas Bill at the national level.

Samuel Balinhawang has been familiar with these issues, being part of the NGO community before assuming the IPMR role. That is why this became his main legislative agenda when he was installed as IPMR.

Salient features of the Ordinance Number 2024-241

- Establish a local registry for all community conserved areas and territories;
- The rights to land and self-determination include the full recognition of the traditional resources, rights, and practices of ICCs/IPs, as well as their right to access, maintain, protect, conserve, utilize, regulate ICCATs and exclude unauthorized intrusion into these areas;
- The ICCAs/IPs and/or communities shall define and declare the conserved areas within their ancestral domains and territories in accordance with their indigenous political structures, cultures, and traditions provided that the identified area is not earlier proclaimed or declared as a protected area under the NIPAS as amended and other presidential proclamations;
- Subject to the Constitution, the ICCs/IPs shall govern, maintain, restore, and sustainably develop the ICCATs key biodiversity areas in accordance with their customary laws, IKSP, and in a manner consistent with the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity found therein and in accordance with existing environmental rules, policies, and regulations;
- The Registry is the official information management system that contains records of all pertinent information regarding the ICCATs, voluntarily submitted by ICCs/IPs and/or communities;
- The Provincial Government through the Provincial Environment and Natural Resource Office (PENARO) shall be the main repository and administrator of the Registry;
- All information and data in the Registry shall be obtained from the ICCs/IPs and/or communities who registered and provided such information;
- The information and data submitted shall be considered as part of the community's intellectual property rights;
- A Steering Committee is created to define policy, provide directions, and perform oversight functions in the administration and maintenance of the Registry;
- The Steering Committee shall be composed of the following: the PENARO, a representative of the Provincial DENR, a representative of the Provincial NCIP, a representative of the Provincial DILG, the Provincial Planning and Development Officer, a representative from accredited CSO, one Ancestral Domain Owner representative with ICCAT from the South district, one Ancestral Domain Owner representative with ICCAT from the North district, the Chairperson of the Committee on Housing and Land Use Development; the Provincial IP Mandatory Representative, and the Chairperson of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan; and,
- Inclusion of ICCATs in the plans of the Local Government Unit.

The Ordinance should have been passed a long time ago to address the issue of governance of indigenous areas and territories at the local level. Thankfully, the Provincial Legislative Council was able to pass it last year.

The KMGBF was also instrumental in the passage of the Ordinance. One of the challenges before 2022 was the difficulty for the members of the Technical Working Group to come up with an enabling policy in support of the Ordinance. The approval of the KMGBF gave the group a global framework that became a solid enabling policy. ■

Challenges and opportunities for engaging women and youth in biodiversity conservation and resilience work



Some of the photos were sourced from SEI, IKAYO, and KAISAHAN



Building inclusive environmental policymaking: Women and youth shaping national and regional environmental policies

Dayoon Kim

Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)

AS A RESEARCH-TO-POLICY THINK TANK, SEI works on the following areas: air and water pollution, trans-boundary climate risks, energy transitions, locally-led adaptation, and climate-related human mobilities. SEI utilizes an intersectional gender, rights and justice approach with focus on climate and environmental policy-making and research communication.

Intersectional gender, rights, and justice

At the community level, indigenous peoples and local communities (and women within these) have both less voice in climate and disaster planning and less access to service. Tailored climate financing does not equitably or effectively reach and serve women, youth, and marginalized groups.

Maldevelopment increases risk of natural hazards turning into disasters and poses a huge risk to environmental defenders. Groups within communities with fewer social, human, and economic assets are less resilient.

At the national and subnational levels, gender and social inequities and gaps in policy and implementation increase vulnerability, including lack of secure land tenure and weak or gender-blind social protection. Climate decision-making, including shaping National Action Plans, is gender-imbalanced and may lack inputs of most vulnerable groups.

Human and environmental rights frameworks are being weakly implemented, and the low accountability of government and private sector exacerbates maldevelopment. The lack of ability to adapt in place drives migration, yet it feeds into human trafficking and poor and unsafe conditions for migrants.

Indigenous women and youth must be given venues to share their experiences, stories and knowledge, and their definition of environmental rights.

These sectors should be given the opportunity to engage in regional policy-making process and inputs emphasizing:

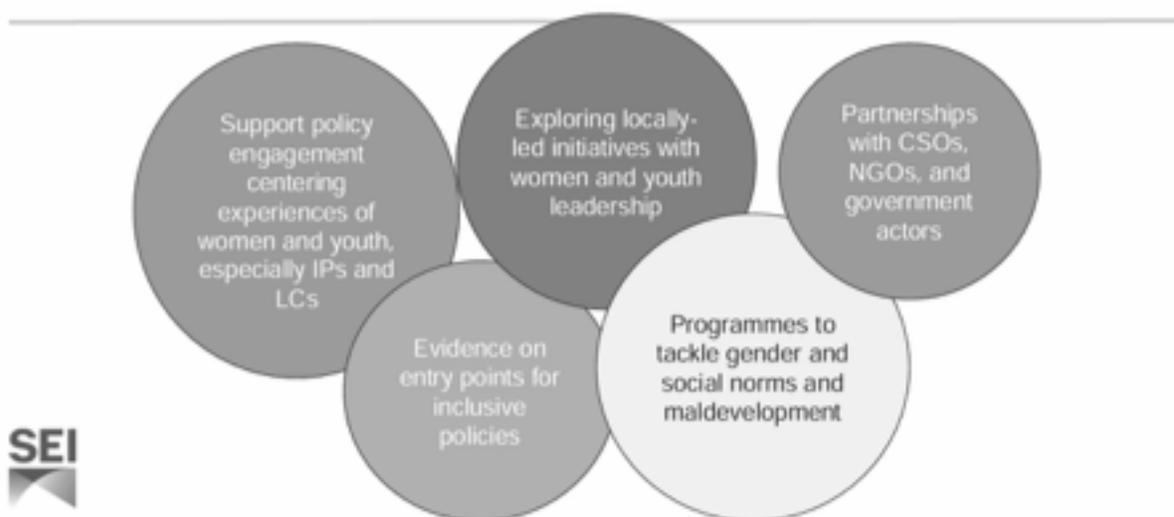
- Customary land tenure rights of IPs;
- Free, prior, and informed consent;
- Gender-responsive participation in decision-making;
- Full protection of social, economic, and political rights of IPs, including indigenous women, youth, persons with disabilities, and environmental and human rights defenders; and,
- Support and recognition of indigenous knowledge, e.g., through IP knowledge institutes.

Enabling policies and programs for youth facing climate and environmental risks

A 2023 to 2024 study in Lao PDR and Vietnam to gather gendered perspectives of children and youth on migration in the context of climate and environmental changes and strengthen policies and programs yielded the following recommendations:

- Develop small grant programming that incentivizes youth to identify and implement locally-led solutions for climate and environmental issues;
- Undertake participatory action research with youth and children in climate-vulnerable areas; legitimize diverse forms of knowledge sharing on climate change and a healthy environment that enable children and youth to provide insights;
- Provide scholarships and fellowships along with capacity strengthening to promote youth engagement in policy-making and planning; and,
- Enable leadership of youth environmental human rights defenders by providing protection.

Key Opportunities



Source: SEI



Regional review of gender equality and climate change

UN Women determined that there is a need for evidence-based identification of promising practices to strengthen how human and environmental rights and gender equality can be addressed in relation to climate change in Asia.

An assessment of the state of gender equality and climate change in ASEAN provided recommendations to strengthen commitments for gender equality and social inclusion.

Key opportunities

A number of key opportunities have been identified for advancing women and youth inclusiveness in environmental concerns. First is the need to support policy engagement centering on experiences of women and youth, especially IPs and LCs. Next is to explore locally-led initiatives with women and youth leadership. Advocacy for partnerships with CSOs, NGOs, and government actors on women and youth should also be strengthened. There should be a program to look for evidence on entry points for inclusive policies. Lastly, there should be more programs to tackle gender and social norms related to maldevelopment. ■



Women and youth in biodiversity conservation and climate resilience in Nepal

Sarita Kumari Lama
NLC-Nepal Facilitator

NEPAL, COVERING AN AREA OF 147,181 SQUARE KILOMETERS, is home to extraordinary biodiversity. The country's varied elevations, from 60 meters in the *Tarai* to 8,848 meters at Mount Everest, support over 6,500 plant species, 181 mammal species, and 862 bird species, making it a global biodiversity hotspot. With over 6,000 rivers and significant agrobiodiversity, Nepal cultivates more than 400 crop species and 35 livestock breeds.

Nepal's rich cultural diversity is reflected in its 61 ethnic groups, which speak over 100 languages. Conservation efforts in the country have led to the establishment of 20 protected areas, covering 23 percent of Nepal's land area, and integrating eco-tourism and community-driven sustainability initiatives.

Role of women and youth in conservation

Women and youth are critical to biodiversity conservation and climate resilience in Nepal, but their participation remains limited due to various socio-economic and cultural barriers. Women comprise 57 percent of the agricultural workforce, yet own only 23 percent of the land, and less than six percent of this land is registered in their names. This significantly restricts their access to resources and their ability to engage in decision-making processes. Youth (ages 16 to 40) make up 43 percent of Nepal's population, but their involvement in conservation activities is still minimal, hindered by limited opportunities and high migration rate (35 percent of Nepal's youth workforce migrates abroad).

National and international policies supporting inclusion

Nepal has made significant strides in integrating gender and youth perspectives into biodiversity conservation and climate resilience through several national policies. The National Forest Policy (2015) and the Forest Act (2019) emphasize women and youth involvement in sustainable forest management and community-based conservation. The Climate Change Policy (2019) mandates 50 percent female representation in local climate programs, while the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) encourages gender-responsive



Source: NLC-Nepal

conservation and youth-led eco-tourism. The Buffer Zone Management Guidelines (2021) allocate 30 to 50 percent of park revenue to local communities, focusing on women and youth, though gaps in implementation persist.

At the international level, frameworks like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) emphasize gender and youth participation in conservation efforts. The Aichi Targets (2010) under the CBD advocate for benefits for women and youth, while the Paris Agreement (2015) stresses gender equality in climate action. Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – specifically Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 13 (Climate Action), and Goal 15 (Life on Land) – align with Nepal’s national policies, promoting inclusive and sustainable development.

Progress and achievements

Nepal has made significant strides in integrating women and youth into conservation and climate resilience

initiatives. About 35 percent of leadership roles in 22,266 Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) are held by women. Approximately 1,100 women-led CFUGs across the country contributed to a 15 percent increase in forest cover over the past five years. These women-led groups, particularly in districts such as Kailali, Dolakha, and Rasuwa, have played crucial roles in forest regeneration, biodiversity protection, and improving local livelihoods. Similarly, the Chure Buffer Zone has seen a 20 percent increase in biodiversity conservation activities driven by women.

Youth-led eco-tourism initiatives in Langtang and Chitwan have not only provided employment but also contributed to biodiversity protection. Agroforestry projects in Dhanusha and Sindhupalchowk have engaged youth in sustainable land restoration and ecosystem resilience efforts. More than 300,000 women have participated in Community-based Adaptation (CBA) projects, strengthening rural climate resilience. Furthermore, the REDD+ Strategy (2020 to 2025) prioritizes women and youth in carbon sequestration and sustainable land use.

In terms of political representation, women hold 34 percent of seats in the federal parliament and 34 percent in provincial assemblies. Locally, women occupy over 40 percent of seats in local governments, exceeding the 33 percent mandate set by the Local Governance Act (2017).

As a result, Nepal's forest cover increased by 0.75 percent from 2019 to 2022, now covering 45 percent of the country's total land area.

Challenges to full participation

Despite these achievements, significant challenges remain in ensuring the full participation of women and youth in biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. One of the primary barriers is limited land ownership, with only 23 percent of women owning land, and less than six percent of it registered in their names. This restricts their access to resources and decision-making power in conservation initiatives. Financial barriers, such as a lack of credit facilities and grants for women- and youth-led conservation projects, further limit their involvement in these efforts. Additionally, women's heavy domestic workloads reduce their capacity to engage in conservation programs. Youth migration decreases local youth participation in environmental conservation activities.

Furthermore, the limited availability of capacity-building opportunities for women and youth in technical training and leadership development poses a significant hurdle. Weak policy implementation at the local level, compounded by a male-dominated governance structure, hampers the effective participation of women and youth in decision-making processes. This is especially true in protected area management and climate adaptation planning, where governance structures often overlook marginalized women and youth.



Source: NLC-Nepal



The slow execution of policies, inconsistent enforcement, and lack of resources at the grassroots level further exacerbate these challenges. The growing impacts of climate change, such as erratic weather patterns and resource scarcity, disproportionately affect women and youth, particularly in rural areas, making their participation in conservation even more critical.

Recommendations for enhancing participation

To enhance the participation of women and youth in biodiversity conservation and climate resilience, several actions are necessary:

- Implement policies and strengthen gender-responsive governance mechanisms at the local level;
- Ensure women and youth are represented in CFUGs, buffer zone committees, and local climate initiatives;
- Ensure women and youth have access to land ownership and decision-making power in conservation efforts;
- Expand microfinance and climate funds for women- and youth-led projects; and,
- Offer technical training and leadership programs in sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism, and conservation.

By addressing land rights, providing financial support, and strengthening governance, Nepal can empower women and youth to lead biodiversity conservation and climate resilience efforts.

Conclusion

To achieve greater inclusion of women and youth in Nepal's biodiversity conservation and climate resilience efforts, it is necessary to address structural barriers, including land rights, financial access, and capacity-building. While significant progress has been made, the weak implementation of policies and resource constraints hinder progress. By improving land rights, expanding financial support, and strengthening governance frameworks, Nepal can foster inclusive and community-driven conservation efforts that enhance climate resilience and sustainable development. ■



Indigenous youth and biodiversity

Asami Segundo

Ikalahan Kalanguya Youth Organization (IKAYO)

IN 2023, OUR COMMUNITY FACED DEVELOPMENT AGGRESSION, such as land grabbing, more like land selling from the side of some of our relatives, and also the entrance of the national highway that cut across our Indigenous Community Conserved Area (ICCA) and our indigenous territory. The situation started conversations among the youth of the community – what is happening and what are the apprehensions of the young people.

In 2023, we were able to obtain a fund to conduct an intergenerational dialogue with our elders. We sat down, laid down all our worries, and shared our ideas. Our elders told us about their dreams for the next generations and how they will support us with the dreams that we have for ourselves and for the future of our community. The Ikalahan Youth Organization for Sustainable Development (IKAYO) was born from this dialogue.

The establishment of IKAYO enabled the conversation to continue on a regular basis. We met almost every quarter to talk about what are the things that are happening in our community from the perspective of young people. We talk about how we can help our elders for us to continue living as Ikalahan, for us to continue living and practicing our indigenous knowledge and practices, despite development aggression.

So in these dialogues, we were able to come up with opportunities and challenges facing young people from our indigenous territory. The first is that biodiversity work is not too savvy for young people to be attracted to it. Biodiversity work is not the first thing that would come to mind when young people talk about choosing a career.

Due to colonization and modernization, parents would always encourage their children to take courses that have nothing to do with land.

The second challenge is that biodiversity training in universities does not reflect the indigenous people's lens. Biodiversity training often focuses on the scientific method, rather than what people actually living in biodiversity areas are doing in their indigenous territories, and how this is helpful to biodiversity conservation. Biodiversity training does not have appreciation of the important work of indigenous people.



Source: IKAYO

The third challenge is that the small community of biodiversity workers who come from indigenous communities do not work together with their communities. We are not connecting with the people on the ground, not telling them that they are doing a great job so we will help them more, and we will teach our students that IPs are actually doing a great job in terms of conservation.

The last challenge is there are not a lot of jobs available for young people who take biodiversity or

conservation related courses. There are very limited opportunities.

Despite these challenges, we are now seeing the most number of indigenous youth graduates from college, which means that a lot of indigenous youth are now educated and quite knowledgeable about technology. Indigenous youth are actually innovative and very tech savvy, and this is actually a very strategic advantage and one that we should tap into to involve more indigenous youth to work on biodiversity conservation.

Another advantage for indigenous youth in biodiversity and conservation work is we do not just see biodiversity work as work itself. We see it as documenting and preserving our traditional knowledge and practices, our traditional territories.

When I became aware of the story of our ancestors – how they fought for land rights, how they lobbied the government for us to have a Memorandum of Agreement No. 1, how they continue to seek funding so that we can patrol our own land and regulate and manage our natural resources – it made me realize that the work that I am doing in biodiversity conservation is part of a greater story, and that I am contributing to that greater story. ■



Enabling mechanism and networking in pushing for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development agenda: The case of the Municipality of Tubajon, Dinagat Islands

Rolly B. Caballero

Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Officer

DINAGAT ISLANDS IS ONE OF THE PHILIPPINES' KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS (KBA) but it has been a mining reserve since 1939 by virtue of Presidential Proclamation 391. It became a province in 2006 (Republic Act 9355). Dinagat province has seven municipalities and 100 *barangays* (villages). Its total population of 126,803 mainly resides along the coastal areas of Western Dinagat.

The island-province has a total land area of 80,205 hectares, of which 17,611 hectares are classified as agricultural lands (22 percent) and 62,294 hectares (78 percent) are classified as mineral lands (DENR Caraga).

There are approximately 19 Mineral Production Sharing Agreements (MPSAs) and three joint operating agreements for large-scale mining operations in Dinagat, with mining claims encompassing over half of the island's land mass. This includes areas with both conservation and mining concessions, leading to potential overlaps.

The Municipality of Tubajon is located on the northwestern portion of the island, just below the Municipality of Loreto. Tubajon was a *barangay* of Loreto before it was created as a separate town in 1969. It has a population of 8,119 (2020 census), making Tubajon the least populated municipality in the province.

Considering the issues on mining and underdevelopment, and poverty incidence of 66 percent, the administration of Mayor Simplicia Pedrablanca made people's participation as one of the pillars of her governance program. Mayor Pedrablanca issued an executive order creating the Municipal Community Affairs Office, the first in the entire Dinagat Islands. The purpose of this office is to cater to all the issues and concerns of marginalized sectors such as LGBT, youth,



Source: KAISAHAN

women, senior citizens, PWDs, among others. To further improve people's participation, the mayor issued another executive order for the establishment of the Tubajon People's Council (TUPECO).

TUPECO is a mechanism wherein all sectors in Tubajon can be part of governance. The Council currently has 43 people's organizations (POs) as members. The women's sector is actively participating as there are six women representatives in the Council.

People's organizations are also part of the local special bodies in the municipal government. They are represented in the Municipal Development Council, Local Health Board, Local Education Board, Bids and Awards Committee, and Project Monitoring Committee. Through these mechanisms, the people gained interest in government affairs because they feel that the government recognizes their participation and their importance.

One of TUPECO's major activities is the annual People's Congress, which is also the venue for the mayor to make the State of the Municipality Address, in which the mayor reports to the people the local government's accomplishments, including the status of the projects that were prioritized and identified by the people themselves.

In 2023, Municipal Ordinance 117-2023 institutionalized the Tubajon People's Council. To further strengthen this mechanism, the local government unit (LGU) also established the Tubajon People's Hall where people can transact with the government regarding projects, how to strengthen their organizations or associations, and to engage with LGU and NGO programs.

The Council engaged the youth in the conduct of 3D mapping activities. This is the first time that the LGU has provided a mechanism where the youth can engage in government programs.

TUPECO is actively involved in the Dinagat Communities for Conservation (Dinagat C4C). Through the program, Tubajon declared around 6,000 hectares of local community watersheds/ local conservation areas through a municipal ordinance. Dinagat C4C also supported the first Tubajon Youth Congress. The program also provides small financial grants to partner women-organizations in conservation. ■

Biodiversity conservation initiatives and their contributions in meeting the global and national biodiversity targets





Local conservation area (watershed and forest conservation): Dinagat Islands Communities for Conservation (Dinagat C4C)

Anthony Marzan
KAISAHAN

DINAGAT ISLANDS IS A GROUP OF MEGA-DIVERSE SMALL ISLANDS in the Philippines that is home to critically important terrestrial ecosystems with unique endemic flora and fauna, more than half of which are found nowhere else in the world.

The island-province has been declared a mineral reservation by virtue of Presidential Proclamation No. 391 in 1939.

At present, based on the mining tenement map of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), about 82 percent of the province's total land area is already covered with approved Mineral Production Sharing Agreement (MPSA).

Dinagat has nine watersheds in five municipalities with a total area of 14,761 hectares. The Municipality of Tubajon has three watersheds – Sambunotan, Navarro, and Imelda – with a total area of 4,882 hectares. Loreto has two watersheds – Panamaon and Mt. Redondo – with a total area of 3,952 hectares. Libjo has two watersheds – Libjo and Mt. Palhi – with a total area of 3,432 hectares; Cagdianao has Manoligao watersheds at 2,109 hectares; and, San Jose has Cuarenta watershed at 387 hectares.

All seven municipalities are under the Dinagat Islands Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources, with a total area of 108,173 hectares (land and water). However, 66,251 hectares of the island are with Mining Tenements (78 percent of the total land area of 80,205 hectares). This is unfortunate since Dinagat is home to at least 100 bird species. The island-province's agricultural land is just 22 percent of its total land area (17,611 hectares).

As an island ecosystem, Dinagat is very fragile and prone to natural hazards such as typhoons, tsunami, and landslides.

Rainforest Trust is aiding efforts to protect at least 20,234 hectares (50,000 acres) of key biodiversity and watershed areas to support sustainable conservation in the province. This initiative contributes to the Philippines' global commitment to biodiversity conservation and species protection amid climate change (30 x 30).



Source: KAISAHAN

The project aims to establish Local Conservation Areas (LCAs) involving local communities in decision-making and management, empowering them to take active roles as conservation partners thereby improving security of tenure and resource governance, as well as the well-being of Dinagat communities, who rely on their natural environment for survival.

It is a partnership among NGOs (i.e, KAISAHAN, Balaod-Mindanao, PhilBio, and PAFID) with the municipalities of Cagdianao, Dinagat, Libjo, and Tubajon; and academic institutions (i.e., Caraga State University and Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology).

The project focuses on communities at the center of conservation efforts. A series of consultations with local government units (LGUs) and People's Organizations (POs) resulted in the creation of People's Councils in Libjo, Dinagat, and Cagdianao. The project also helped strengthen the Tubajon People's Council (TUPECO), which was established before the project.

So far, the project has influenced the declaration of LCAs. The LGU of Tubajon has passed a unified Municipal Ordinance for LCAs/LCCAs in the watershed areas covering all of its nine *barangays*. More than 6,200 hectares have been declared as watersheds and LCAs.

The Municipality of Libjo also approved a unified Municipal Ordinance of more than 7,400 hectares of LCAs of its watersheds. ■



Marine Protected Areas (Managed Access + Reserves) as a local fisherfolk-led conservation program

Dennis Calvan
RARE-Philippines

RARE IS A NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION that promotes community-led conservation and management of resources, particularly those of coastal areas. It has been working in the Philippines for more than 10 years now, in partnership with local governments units (LGUs) and communities in more than 90 cities and municipalities in the Philippines. RARE believes in community-led management, and has been implementing a program called Fish4Ever with partner LGUs and communities.

At the core of Fish4Ever are four fishing behaviors. RARE promotes these passive fishing behaviors to our fishing community partners with the help of our partner LGUs. The first of the core fishing behaviors is that people or fishers should follow fishing rules and regulations. Second, they should report their catch as data which can be used as inputs to decision-making and policy-making. Third, RARE also encourages and motivates local fishermen to register and secure licenses for them to be able to get their preferential rights as provided for in their ordinances and in the national law. Fourth, RARE also promotes and encourages them to participate in fisheries management expertise programs.

At the core of RARE's fishing behaviors is the establishment of managed access plus reserves areas. It is a model that combines protected areas with sustainable use. In one municipality, there can be several managed access plus reserves areas.

In each managed access plus reserve area, there are certain laws or ordinances or provisions in the ordinances that identify who can fish and determine when to catch fish in that area. For instance, there is a managed access plus reserve area in one municipality that allows registered fishers from other municipalities to fish. However, they are only allowed under certain conditions, e.g., when they use proper fishing gears.

Fisherfolk will not be able to go into a protected area or the fish sanctuary established in that area. In the Philippines, the establishment of fish sanctuaries and locally managed protected areas is a tool for fisheries management. In the database of the MPA support network in the Philippines, there are 2,200 plus MPAs in the county, 80 percent of which are locally established and managed.



Fish4Ever uses science-based decision-making in terms of establishment of MPAs and MPA networks in the Philippines, in partnership with other civil society organizations. For instance, there is a study on larval connectivity and larval dispersal of Rabbit Fish in the Leyte Gulf in central Philippines. It showed what areas in the Leyte Gulf get and provide larval of rabbit fish. In this instance, the network has identified parts of Guiuan in Eastern Samar in the Leyte Gulf as part of the reach of Rabbit Fish larval dispersal.

It means that they are very high in terms of larval export. They receive a certain volume of larval dispersal in the Leyte Gulf as far south as the municipality of Guiuan. Using this data, RARE is able to design and identify managed access and reserves and identify in Guiuan.

RARE also uses data on Parrot Fish and Snapper connectivity, using the larval dispersal model, in order to design and establish, together with our partner LGUs and communities, managed access plus reserves (or sanctuary) areas.

In designing managed access plus reserves areas, it is important to obtain the support and the participation of several stakeholders in the community. These include the fisherfolk themselves who eventually would be the ones to manage the area, the LGUs through the Municipal Agriculture Office or the Municipal Environment and Natural Resource Office.

A unique set up to the Philippines is the Municipal Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Council (MFARMC). It is composed mostly of fisherfolk and other community members that have a stake in the resources in a particular area. The Philippine Fisheries Code has provisions stating that there can be no program in coastal and marine areas without first consulting the MFARMC. Part of this consultation process is conducting stakeholder dialogue and participation in the mapping of coastal and marine resources.



Source: RARE



Thus, the managed access plus reserves is actually not a stand-alone strategy or tool. It has to be coupled with other management strategies as the initiative requires community engagement as well as behavior adoption. The MFARMC should become members of the management bodies. The community, not just the LGUs, should actively participate in managing the program, formulating and implementing policies, and establishing the governance structure in each area.

In Amlan, Negros Oriental, RARE has been able to map out where managed access plus reserves areas can be established. In Bais City, also in Negros Oriental, RARE has established managed access and reserves areas, with an ecotourism component.

In terms of governance structures, it is important to include and implement provisions in the law that regulate the use of fishing gear in certain areas of the managed access. Translating the law to the local dialect will guide the implementation.

RARE is able to monitor in its project sites the yearly increase in terms of fish biomass inside the MPAs. In Amlan, RARE has partnered with the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute in tracking the increase of fish biomass inside the MPAs from 2011 to 2016. Similarly, this approach has been undertaken in San Carlos City, Negros Occidental from 2015 to 2017. The increase of fish biomass proves that MPAs can contribute to economic growth and ecological preservation or improvement if these areas are properly managed.

As stated in the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, the government targeted 15.91 percent or 35.03 million hectares of potential marine areas for conservation by 2030. The contribution of the MPA networks, which is outside of the nationally legislated protected areas, is around 2,309,000 hectares. Thus, RARE's strategy of establishing fish sanctuaries and marine protected areas can contribute to this overall proposal programmed by the government. ■



Preserving Ecosystem Services in Mt. Kalatungan Range

Thieza Verdijo
XSF

RESIDENTS OF CAGAYAN DE ORO, Iligan City and nearby provinces are not difficult to convince on the threats of global warming. For a long time, they have enjoyed a pleasant environment with all the indulgences offered by its beautiful green mountains, flowing rivers, waterfalls, and beaches. With these delightful sceneries and their ecosystem services, the residents truly appreciated and treasured their interconnectedness with nature.

On 16 December 2011, steady rain fell in Cagayan de Oro City and nearby provinces. Water, in enormous volumes, surged from Mt. Kalatungan. In only a matter of hours, it flooded Cagayan de Oro and its nearby cities and municipalities. Typhoon *Sendong*, as it is locally named, claimed the lives of thousands of people and incurred more than two billion pesos worth of property damage. It was considered the world's deadliest storm for that year.

The massive depletion of forest resources resulted in heavy soil erosion, sedimentation of rivers and reservoirs, flash floods, and droughts. The environment has now become foreboding and threatening. Initiating adaptation and mitigation measures to restore forest resources and contribute to combating global warming is crucial. Everyone's contribution is indispensable.

Piloting Payment for Ecosystem Services

One of the projects identified for implementation was the Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) for Mt. Kalatungan. PES is an evolving tool on innovative financing for potential markets on natural resource management. It is defined generally as a voluntary financial transaction where a well-defined ecosystem service is being bought by a buyer from a provider (or seller) who is able to provide the ecosystem's services.

PES-Kalatungan is a financing scheme anchored on pricing intangible environmental products and services adapted into a funding mechanism to generate economic return and sustain the ecosystem services. The IP communities in Mt. Kalatungan have been identified as the "seller" allotting critical watersheds in their ancestral domain to be reforested. The buyers are individuals and organizations downstream who would benefit from this scheme and include cooperatives, civil society organizations, business groups and government agencies. Xavier Science Foundation (XSF) was requested to act as the intermediary between the buyers and the sellers.



Source: XSF

PES-Kalatungan was launched in 2014 with the support of relevant government agencies, local government units (LGUs) and CSOs under the guidance of the Cagayan de Oro River Basin Management Council. Overall, the PES was to strengthen Mt. Kalatungan's watershed to ensure sustainable water supply and mitigate the occurrence of flash floods.

Sustaining the PES initiative in Mt. Kalatungan

In 2021, XSF resumed the PES activities in Mt. Kalatungan. This time, it partnered with the Nagkahiusang Manobong

Manununod sa Yutang Kabilin (NAMAMAYUK) in Pangantucan, Bukidnon, with the support from One Meralco Foundation (OMF). OMF supported the PES initiative as it complements its *One for Trees Program*, promoting forest protection and preservation, community empowerment, and volunteer education and engagement.

In its initial phase of implementation, 30 hectares were planted with endemic and coffee trees, involving 47 Lumad farmers with a survival rate of 99 percent. This commendable output has encouraged other IP communities to participate. It also inspired other partner institutions to assist, including the Mt. Kalatungan Protected Area Management Board (PAMB).

Call to serve and preserve Mt. Kalatungan

Sustaining PES in Mt. Kalatungan is an effective pathway in conserving its rich biodiversity. This will be a key intervention in maintaining ecosystem services in nearby communities as well as preventing the occurrence of another *Sendong* in Cagayan de Oro and downstream provinces. Globally, this will contribute in counteracting weather and climate extremes in every region across the world. ■



Indigenous and community conserved area: The spirit forests of the Mandaya and Mansaka ancestral domains, Maragusan, Davao de Oro, Philippines

Zhinal Kinoc
PAFID

PAFID, SUPPORTED BY RAINFOREST TRUST AND INTERNATIONAL LAND COALITION (ILC), is implementing the project ***Philippines: Mandaya and Mansaka Ancestral Domain***, in the Municipality of Maragusan, Davao de Oro, in Mindanao, Southern Philippines. The project is being implemented in the ancestral domains of the Mandaya and Mansaka indigenous communities in Maragusan and New Bataan, Davao De Oro.

These IP communities have Certificates of Ancestral Domain Titles (CADTs) approved by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), namely: CADT R11-PAN-0908-076, which was approved on 28 September 2017, and CADT R11-NEW-0204019 which was approved on 18 February 2004.

Specifically, the project sites are the Langgawisan-Bahi Ancestral Domain (LABATA) in Barangay Langgawisan, Maragusan, Davao de Oro; and, Sumpaw Nang Mangkatikadung Sang Maragusan Ancestral Domain (SUMPAAW), also in Maragusan, Davao de Oro.

The project shall assist in the enhancement of Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plans (ADSDPPs) and formulation of Community Conservation Plans. It shall also facilitate the identification, documentation, and mapping of Indigenous Community Conservation Areas (ICCAs) or the spirit forests in the domains of the two communities.

A concrete output targeted by the project is the formal adoption by the Barangay Local Government Unit (BLGU) or Municipal Local Government Unit (MLGU) through a Barangay Resolution or Municipal Zoning Ordinance. It shall provide technical and livelihood support in partnership with LGUs, youth and women organizations; and, establish linkages and partnerships with government agencies and other organizations to work towards conservation and protection.

The ICCA will be institutionalized in the zoning of the ADSDPP and through the adaptation of the local government via a local municipal ordinance.

The project's major partners are the MLGU through the Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office (MENRO). The ADSDPP will be presented to the MLGU for the preparation of a



Source: PAFID

Municipal Zoning Ordinance. The two IP organizations – LABATA and SUMPAAW – are regular members of the Maragusan Watershed Coordinating Council, chaired by the local chief executive (Mayor), with the Municipal IPMR (Indigenous People Mandatory Representative) as vice chairperson.

The BLGUs of Langgawisan and Bahi are also major partners in the project. The ICCA declaration was adopted through a *barangay* resolution. The BLGUs will also establish Potable Water Systems to ensure the sustainability and security of the project. The NCIP is the prime facilitator in the enhancement of the ADSDPP and assists in the presentation of the plans to the different concerned agencies. The Philippine Eagle Foundation (PEF) shared its expertise in the resource inventory of flora and fauna and the establishment of biomass plots.

Lastly, the Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO) serves as a partner in capacity building of the forest guards, whose duty is to monitor the status of the territory. In particular, CENRO provides training courses and orientation seminars regarding laws on environmental protection and conservation. It also provides planting materials for tree planting in the denuded areas within the ancestral domains.

The project is still currently being implemented, and is halfway through its targeted deliverables. ■



Customary forest protection: The Dayak Punan Tugung experience

Rahmat Sulaiman
JKPP

THE DAYAK PUNAN TUGUNG'S INDIGENOUS TERRITORY is 21,050 hectares. Of this area, the tribe's customary forest is 10,500 hectares. The tribe's total area, including their customary forest, is completely overlapped by production forests and forest concessions.

The goals of the project are to: (1) legitimize, through a law, the Dayak Punan Tugug's indigenous people status; and, (2) legitimize their rights to their forest lands, also through a law.

To achieve this, the project conducted capacity building interventions on mechanisms for recognition, for both the government and the community; initiated policy dialogues; and, conducted planning and management strategies and activities.

The multistakeholder intervention involved national NGOs (AMAN, HUMA Indonesia), local NGOs (Padi Indonesia, PW-PD, PLHL), and government agencies such as the *Komnas HAM* (National Commission on Human Rights), Ministry of Forestry, Forestry Service of North Kalimantan Province, Forest Management Unit-Bulungan, and MHA Committee of Bulungan Regency.



Source: JKPP



At present, the verification process has already been completed. Advocacy for the Policy Decree of Indigenous Peoples and Document Management Planning for *adat* forest is still ongoing.

The project faces several challenges. Among these are the limited capacity of the government apparatus about issues relating to recognition of indigenous rights, the lengthy process and complicated mechanisms in giving recognition to indigenous people, and political agenda – both national and local – that are in conflict with indigenous peoples' rights agenda.

In the course of the project's implementation, the implementers and community learned how to harness community participation, particularly in the process of validation and policy making. The partners also gained knowledge on how to protect biodiversity, and sustainable living with traditional knowledge based on local wisdom. ■



Role of local community in maintaining the values of biodiversity

Dr. Hong Ngo Van
CEGORN/LANDA

VIETNAM IS RENOWNED FOR ITS DIVERSE TROPICAL FORESTS, crucial for biodiversity conservation and national development. Forests provide vital resources for local communities (timber, non-timber products), and income, while also mitigating climate change through CO2 emission reduction and reforestation.

As a CBD member, Vietnam has committed to the 30x30 target, incorporating Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) into the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). Vietnam has identified nine potential OECM types, including protection forests and biodiversity corridors.

Despite their potential, challenges remain, including resource limitations and the need for stronger political commitment to achieve the "30 by 30" target and enhance biodiversity resilience.

Langur-based conservation model in Quang Binh province

In 2012, Nguyễn Thanh Tú, a retired border guard, discovered Hatinh Langurs (*Trachypithecus hatinhensis*), a critically endangered species, and began persuading local hunters to stop hunting. He founded a voluntary conservation group (VCG), which started with four members, grew to 12 members and has over 20 members by 2024.

Agricultural encroachment and quarrying in Dong Hoa threaten the forest (CIRD, 2020), highlighting the need to balance community livelihoods with conservation goals. In December 2018, some 509.4 hectares were designated as a special-use forest (SUF) for Langur conservation. In June 2022, the SUF area encompassed 13 villages across the four communes, with 2,577 households and 9,410 residents.

As a result of the VCG's efforts, the Langur population increased to 22 groups (156 individuals) by 2020.

Since 2018, the Center for Natural Resource Governance Research (CEGORN) and its partners have implemented a range of activities to advance biodiversity conservation, integrating community engagement, ecological restoration, and sustainable livelihoods. Among these are strengthening the VCG, establishing and maintaining community nurseries, supporting afforestation with native trees, developing community co-management plans, and improving the livelihood of local communities.



Source: CEGORN/LANDA

The project highlighted the role of the local community in conservation. The residents recognized that without the langurs, the forest might have been sold for quarrying, so protecting the langurs meant protecting the forest and human health, leading to a widespread change in attitude.

Before the project, the community hunted Langurs for fun, unaware that they were endangered. Since 2012, with government efforts to raise awareness, the community has become more conscious of their environment. The VCG coordinated patrols over 500 hectares, reported violations, and educated villagers. Despite initial resistance, the community gradually came to understand and cooperate with their conservation efforts.

Due to the difficult topography, there are many challenges in walking on the transects as well as observing the Langur population. The results of identifying the group size as well as the age/sex structure may be incomplete for some groups. Information on the ecology and behavior of the Langur groups is still inadequate due to the short period of survey time (which can only be conducted during the summer).

Recommendations

There is a need to develop short-term and long-term conservation plans for Hatinh Langurs, Assamese Macaques, and general biodiversity in the areas surveyed. Raising awareness of the community on Hatinh Langur protection and conservation, as well as biodiversity conservation, should also be a priority.

The VCG shall continue to monitor the size of groups over longer periods of time in different seasons of the year. There is a need to conduct further research and assessment of habitat quality and feeding ecology of the Langurs to ensure that there is a database for the conservation and development of the Hatinh Langur population.



Source: CEGORN/LANDA

There is a need to implement a monitoring program on population status and threats to the Hatinh Langur every six months to track population changes to be able to propose adaptive management solutions. The project also recommends to study and propose habitat corridors connecting the isolated mountains so that Langur groups can exchange to avoid the problems of small populations, as well as inhibit reproduction and inbreeding. The government should establish Langur viewing areas for tourism development. ■



Source: CEGORN/LANDA

Community forestry

Chetana Nand Jha
FES

ALARMED BY THE CONTINUED LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY and the threat that this poses to nature and human well-being, the 15th Conference of Parties to the Convention of Biodiversity (COP15) adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).

This is the first time that biodiversity loss as a threat to both nature and humans are recognized in the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity (CBD).

The Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) works towards ecological restoration and conservation of land and water resources, and establishes processes of coordinated human effort and governance to achieve this goal. This is the context why FES came into existence in 2001.

To date, FES has assisted in managing the commons of 41,880 communities, covering a total land area of 5.07 million hectares (12.52 million acres).

The FES core model involves securing community land rights, establishing resource management and governance plans, and providing access to resources and finance. The end objectives of these interventions are sustainable livelihoods and improved ecological health.

FES has implemented this core model for the past 25 years. Looking at all the 23 targets of the KMGBF, they fall into FES' strategies. If land is secured, and if communities are empowered to manage their land, then targets are met on collective actions, benefit sharing, rules and regulations, and appropriation.

Some of the areas where FES are working include Western India, once a heavily forested area that is now completely denuded. FES also works in Udaipur, which is one of India's tourism hotspots. The FES project tracked forest denudation in the area since 1972.

Based on the study, denudation is happening at an incredibly fast rate, just like in the rest of India. This is due to encroachment, eroding of traditional institutions, and weakening of community land rights.

The same thing is happening to another of FES' project sites, in the eastern part of India, which is on the fringe of Bay of Bengal.



FES uses a landscape approach which implies working in large areas (e.g., a large river basin or a tract of forest land, ranging from 20,235 to 24,280 hectares [50,000 to 60,000 acres]) over a long period of time (i.e., 15 to 20 years). Presently, FES is working in more than 100 landscapes all over the country.

Once the landscape is selected, FES analyzes the issues and determines the social unit within the landscape, which can be a tribe.

In Gujarat, FES defined the landscape on the basis of marriage radius because the people said that the distance a prospective bride travels to her place of marriage is their landscape. This means that the distance people travel is the landscape.

FES also conducts a baseline assessment: What is on the land? What is beneath land? How do humans interact with nature? What kind of flora is there? These are basic assessments that FES does across India.

After the assessment, FES plans on what to do for the village and the landscape. FES does not focus on plantation as its intervention. Plantation is the last resort for FES because the moment one starts planting a tree in a forest, then the person has started disturbing the biodiversity of the area. This is because plantation is like introducing an alien species to the area. So FES strategizes on how to restore the ecosystem without planting anything.

As an example, in one of FES' project areas close to Rajasthan, in the second oldest mountain range in India (Aravali hill range), the village's forest land is completely denuded on the top part, while the lower fringes of the forest adjoining to agriculture is relatively good. FES did not do



Source: FES



Source: FES

anything for the lower fringes, and just ensured that whatever the community is doing is not disturbed. However, FES removed invasive plant species from the land and helped the community strengthen their rules and regulations with regard to their forest area.

In terms of monitoring, FES conducts regular assessment with the community members at the forefront – through citizen science initiative. It starts by asking the community questions like “If the forest cover is like this now, what will happen in 2030? If the water level is like this now, what will it be in 2030?” Then the community proceeds to implement actions so that the future scenario can be changed or avoided. With this process, there is a larger likelihood that the community will be involved in the decision making and planning processes. This is also actually helping them to document their local knowledge. They also involve the community’s youth and children in the initiatives so that they learn about protecting and preserving biodiversity at a young age.

The KMGBF emphasizes not just biodiversity conservation, but also equitable sharing of benefits, sustainable development, and respect for indigenous and local communities’ rights. This leads to the next level of interventions that FES does – supporting communities in crafting rules and regulations to manage their area’s biodiversity, and preparing at least a five-year action plan. The community takes the lead and frames the rules and regulations. They document their existing norms and practices and based on these, formulate their plans. Fortunately, the Government of India has some large schemes for biodiversity conservation that augments the resources of FES.

With regard to rights, India has the Community Forest Rights law. It is the government’s largest flagship program on land rights. It recognizes the traditional rights of the community to land. In support of this, FES works with community to ensure that their rights are recognized, documented, and transferred to them in form of documented papers.

Education, investment, data, and technology are all important but if we forget about rights, then we miss seeing the bigger picture. FES believes in social-ecological system thinking approach rather than a linear thinking approach to restoration. This approach has served FES well in the past 25 years of conservation and ecological restoration work with communities. It is responsive to the needs and desires of the community, as well as reflective of their customs, knowledge, and traditions. ■



Community stewardship : An innovative and non-market strategy for inclusive and impactful climate finance

Pranab Choudhury
Landstack

INDIA's INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES (IPs and LCs) are the primary stewards of over 36 percent of the world's intact forests and 80 percent of global biodiversity. Despite their crucial role, less than one percent of global climate finance reaches these communities directly. Current climate finance structures, particularly carbon markets and REDD+ programs, largely exclude IPs and LCs, failing to recognize the reasons why they steward these forests and biodiversity – the value of their traditional knowledge and socio-ecological interactions, their local agency and rationale behind their motivation and conservation action.

Limitations of existing climate finance models

Many carbon finance mechanisms operate with a **"carbon tunnel vision"** focusing solely on maximizing carbon sequestration while neglecting local ecological, social, and cultural contexts. Studies reveal that REDD+ programs have had minimal impact on perceived well-being and income sufficiency of communities, with limited evidence of deforestation reduction. The rigid methodologies often impose external conservation frameworks rather than integrating with existing community-led stewardship practices.

Community stewardship as an alternative

Stewardship, grounded in care and knowledge, offers a holistic, locally adaptive approach to climate finance. IPs and LCs have stewarded their forests for centuries, employing ecosystem care economies that prioritize biodiversity, water conservation, and sustainable resource use. However, existing market-based mechanisms fail to integrate these practices, leading to the erosion of community stewardship ethics.

To shift from colonial and reductionist approaches to community-driven climate action, stewardship-based finance must:

- Recognize and reward bundled ecosystem services beyond carbon.
- Establish direct funding mechanisms to IPs and LCs to sustain their conservation action.
- Support community-led monitoring and verification (MRV) of socio-ecological outcomes.
- Reduce intermediary control to ensure just and equitable benefit-sharing.

Stewardship Fund: A path forward

A Stewardship Fund would channel financing into community-led conservation actions, allowing IPs and LCs to generate Stewardship Carbon units, integrating carbon, biodiversity, and social co-benefits. Participatory MRV systems would enable communities to document their contributions, securing direct market access without reliance on external actors.



Source: Landstack

By redirecting harmful subsidies (USD 270 to 540 billion annually) and leveraging private sector and market-based financing, stewardship models can be mainstreamed into climate finance. Aligning financial mechanisms with local governance structures ensures climate solutions are socially just, ecologically sound, and community-driven.

This paradigm shift is essential to making climate finance work for communities, not just carbon markets. ■



Rainforest Trust's support for community-led biodiversity initiatives rooted in securing land tenure

Juliana Rossi de Camargo
Rainforest Trust

RAINFOREST TRUST HAS FUNDED CONSERVATION EFFORTS SINCE 1988 to protect critical habitats and threatened species. It supports rights-based conservation, including: affirming Indigenous and Traditional Territories; recognizing Other Effective area-based Conserved Measures (OECMs); establishing/expanding and co-managing Protected Areas (PAs) with indigenous peoples (IPs) and local communities (LCs).

Since then, the Trust has assisted in efforts to have over 21 million hectares (54 million acres) of protected areas in the Americas, Africa, and Asia; with about 25.5 million hectares (65.5 million acres) currently in progress. This resulted in 8.4 billion metric tons of carbon stored and 3,851 threatened species protected.

This method clearly works because 97 percent of projects funded by the Trust achieve permanent legal land protection. In addition, 99 percent of forests that have been protected since 1988 are still standing.

Rainforest Trust focuses on the importance of lands and territories of IPs and LCs in biodiversity conservation. Enough evidence suggests that 91 percent of lands of IPs and LCs are in good or moderate ecological condition; over 25 percent of them are estimated to face high pressure from commodity-driven development; and, indigenous lands (ILs) across the global tropics had 17 to 26 percent lower deforestation than non-protected areas and performed comparable to Protected Areas (PA).

A concrete example is that there was a 66 percent decrease in deforestation of ILs in the Brazilian Amazon after formal granting of property rights.

Since its inception, the Trust has helped fund projects of over 150 local and national NGOs and 25 international NGOs.

In terms of project site criteria, the Trust supports projects that protect globally significant populations or Critically Endangered (CR) or Endangered (EN) species on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. It also supports projects that protect an Intact Landscape. Priority landscapes for Rainforest Trust include: Amazonia, the Congo Basin Forests, Southern African Miombo, and the islands of Borneo and New Guinea. Lastly, the Trust supports projects in sites that mitigate global climate change, those with high capacity for carbon sequestration or



Source: Rainforest Trust

substantially reduce CO2 emissions or store in perpetuity very large quantities of carbon at a reasonable cost.

Rainforest Trust has two types of funding. The first is in the form of Feasibility Awards, which can be used to prepare for full project proposals or to fund biological surveys, preliminary FPIC activities, and research enabling conditions. Then there is the Protected or Conserved Area Criteria Awards (full proposal/project), which is funding to support the establishment and early management costs of an Indigenous or Traditional Territory, Protected Area or Conserved Area, including funding to support sustainable financing mechanisms.

Projects aiming for support from Rainforest Trust should meet the following criteria:

- Projects must have a clear focus on a change in legal status of the site during the course of the project, to mitigate the critical threats to biodiversity.
- Proposed sites must currently be legally unprotected (poorly managed PAs do not qualify).
- Proposals must have endorsement from project stakeholders, especially local communities as rights holders.
- All projects to obtain Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of any impacted communities.
- Projects should seek to develop sustainable financing mechanisms for long-term management of the proposed protected area.

In addition to the above, prospective projects must also meet the added criteria of having the substantial governing authority of the area to be led by the IPs or LCs. Also, the prospective project should have land titles – or similar permanent land ownership or resource rights

designations – and governance authority will be granted to the IPs and/or LCs with the customary right to the land in question. In the absence of this, there should be a commitment that lands and/or waters will be designated as a multiple-use territory with management (or co-management) by the IPs or LCs.

Rainforest Trust funds everything that is needed to designate an area and lead to long-term sustainability, as well as other activities prioritized and self-determined by communities, to wit:

- FPIC-related costs
- Sustainable livelihoods strengthening
- Legal and policy development support
- Organizational strengthening
- Management planning and monitoring
- Local government collaboration and technical support
- Sustainable financing mechanisms, e.g. PES
- Equipment
- Infrastructure
- Knowledge sharing activities
- Governance strengthening
- Social enterprise development
- Civil rights and participation
- Personnel, consultancies

Some of the projects supported by the Trust include support recognition of their land rights of IPs, governance capacity and/or territorial co-management over the establishment or expansion of a PA, OECM, or Indigenous and Traditional Territory (ITT). Examples of these projects are: social forestry in Indonesia covering Customary Forests (Hutan Adat) and Village Forests (Hutan Desa). It also supports Indigenous Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) in the Philippines, land titling in Peru, Common Use Territories (CUTs) and indigenous land demarcation (ILs) in Brazil.

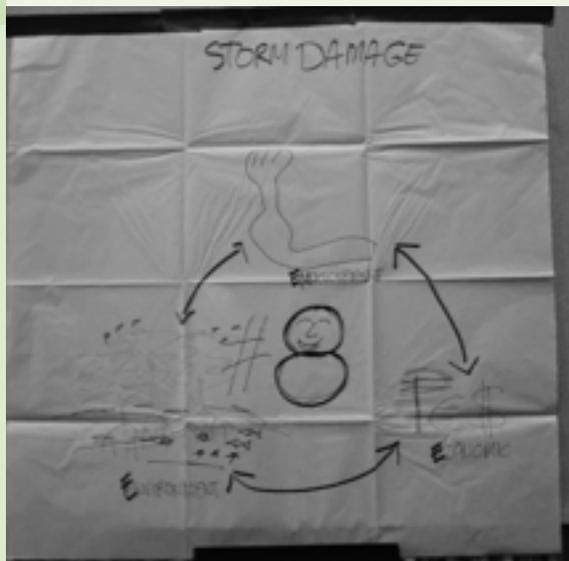
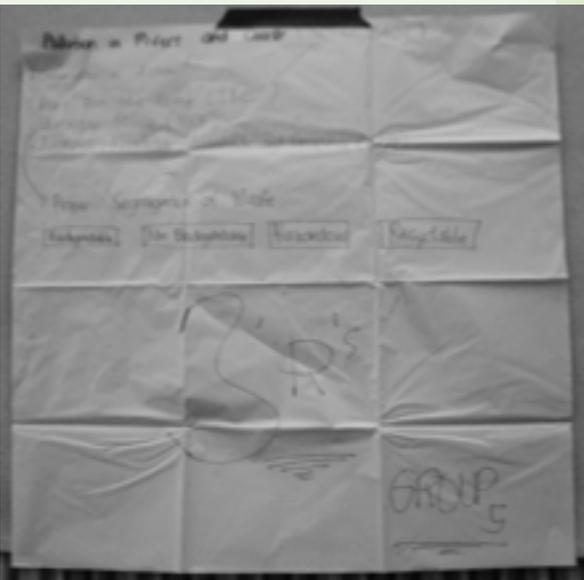
The Trust adopts the landscape approach in its project implementation as shown in the IP territories in Brazil, co-management between IPs and government of National Parks in Colombia, Community Forest Concession Licenses (CFCLs) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Community Conservation Areas (CCAs) in Mozambique, and Community Forests (CFs) in Liberia. ■

Core human rights principles for private conservation organizations and funders

- Principle One: Respect human rights
- Principle Two: Respect the rights of indigenous peoples
- Principle Three: Respect the rights of all communities, groups, and individuals
- Principle Four: Undertake human rights due diligence
- Principle Five: Engage in good faith consultation
- Principle Six: Prevent human rights abuses
- Principle Seven: Provide for effective remedies
- Principle Eight: Protect against human rights violations and abuses in relationships
- Principle Nine: Protect against human rights violations in law enforcement
- Principle Ten: Report regularly on human rights

Source: <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/46756>

Knowledge and skills sharing on frameworks and tools on conservation





Unlocking impact: Exploring conservation frameworks for sustainable agriculture

Marianne Saniano
WCS

WHAT IS CONSERVATION? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines conservation as “a careful preservation and protection of something, especially: planned management of a natural resource to prevent exploitation, destruction, or neglect.”

The Cambridge Dictionary is more specific. It defines conservation as the “protection of plants and animals, natural areas, and interesting and important structures and buildings, especially from the damaging effects of human activity.”

What is conservation of biodiversity? Science defines it as “protection, upliftment, and scientific management of biodiversity so as to maintain it at its threshold level and derive sustainable benefits for the present and future generation.”

There are a number of conservation frameworks.

The **Ecosystem-Based Approach (EBA)** is a holistic strategy for managing natural resources that considers the connections between ecosystems, the services they provide, and the people who depend on them. It recognizes farms and fishing areas as part of larger ecosystems, emphasizing biodiversity-friendly practices.

Concrete examples of EBA in farming are crop rotation, intercropping, and natural pest control. For fishing, examples include protecting mangrove areas from spawning habitats, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) or fish sanctuaries.

Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) uses natural processes to address environmental challenges such as soil degradation, water scarcity, and climate resilience. These consist of actions that work with and enhance natural ecosystems to address societal challenges while benefiting people and the environment.

NBS can be seen in farming as agroforestry, reforestation, and soil conservation; while in fishing it is manifested in sustainable aquaculture: seagrass protection for siganids and sea cucumbers, and mangrove protection for crab ranching.

Sustainable Land and Coastal Management (SLM and SCM) refers to the responsible use and stewardship of land and coastal resources to meet present needs without compromising the



ability of future generations to benefit from them. It believes that protection and restoration of habitats lead to increased biodiversity. SLM and SCM include promotion of eco-friendly tourism that supports local economies. It also leads to enhanced services such as clean water, carbon sequestration, and recreational opportunities.

SLM and SCM can be seen in farming as watershed management and use of organic fertilizers. In fishing, it means preventing destructive fishing methods and maintaining clean shorelines.

Climate-Smart Agriculture and Fisheries (CSA and CSF) consist of approaches that aim to sustainably increase agricultural and fisheries productivity, enhance resilience to climate change, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions where possible. It builds the ability of farmers, fishers, and ecosystems to adapt to climate change impact. CSA and CSF integrate climate adaptation and mitigation with agricultural productivity. They encourage practices like crop diversification, conservation tillage, and carbon sequestration; and, focus on adaptive farming techniques, such as drought-resistant crops, conservation tillage, and carbon sequestration.

CSA and CSF encourage cooperation between farmers/fishers, conservationists, and policymakers to balance food production with environmental goals. It is manifested in farming as drought-resistant crops and in fishing as early warning systems for storms and diversifying livelihoods.

Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) is a market-based approach where farmers and fishers receive incentives for adopting conservation practices that provide public benefits (e.g., watershed protection, carbon sequestration). It offers financial incentives to farmers who adopt conservation practices that benefit society (e.g., carbon storage, water purification, sustainable fishing practices). PES encourages sustainable farming/fishing practices that protect biodiversity and improve long-term productivity.

In farming, PES takes the form of incentives for planting trees and watershed conservation. It manifests itself in fishing as carbon credit programs for marine protection, and sustainable fishery certifications.

Brief overview of the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation

The Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation are a product of the collaborative work of the Conservation Measures Partnership (CMP). CMP members span a broad range of leading conservation actors, including NGOs, government agencies, and donors.

The Open Standards were initially based on the results of the Measuring Conservation Impact (MCI) Initiative, a 2002 study that reviewed experiences in seven fields – conservation, public health, family planning, international development, social services, education, and business – to determine common concepts of and approaches to good project design, management, and monitoring.

Building on these results, individual CMP member organizations contributed their experience in project implementation to refine the Open Standards and focus them more specifically on biodiversity conservation. Version 1.0 was released in 2004, with subsequent updates in 2007 and 2013.



Implementing the cycle itself involves using a series of tools that help teams focus, prioritize, and make key decisions. The steps themselves are iterative and part of an adaptive management approach in which teams regularly revisit prior steps as they go along, adapting and improving their planning, implementation, and monitoring based on new information and learning.

Several CMP members have adopted the Open Standards (or a close derivative) as their planning process. Examples are the Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, some branches within the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bush Heritage Australia, and the Puget Sound Partnership.

The Conservation Coaches Network (representing more than 500 individuals across the globe) promotes and supports Open Standards with a wide variety of organizations. Those using the Open Standards range well beyond CMP and CCNet. To get an idea of how many organizations use the Open Standards, it is useful to look at Miradi Adaptive Management Software statistics.

Miradi is a CMP-developed software that helps facilitate implementation of the Open Standards. Currently, there are over 10,000 users across 180 countries, and volunteers have translated Miradi into 12 different languages.

The Open Standards are intended to be a set of principles and steps that are updated collaboratively over time, as the Open Standards community gains new experience and insights. Releases to date include: 1.0 (2004), 2.0 (2007), 3.0 (2013), and 4.0 (scheduled for mid-2019). ■

The Open Standards are oriented around the following project cycle:

1. **Conceptualize**
 - Define planning purpose and project team
 - Define scope, vision, and targets
 - Identify critical threats
 - Analyze the conservation situation
2. **Plan actions and monitoring**
 - Develop goals, strategies, assumptions, and objectives
 - Develop operational plan
 - Develop monitoring plan
3. **Implement actions and monitoring**
 - Develop workplan and timeline
 - Develop and refine budget
 - Implement plans
4. **Analyze, use, adapt**
 - Prepare data for analysis
 - Analyze results
 - Adapt strategic plan
5. **Capture and share learning**
 - Document learning
 - Share learning
 - Create learning environment



Documenting ICCAs: A rundown of activities, tools, and methods

Dave de Vera
PAFID

IN DOCUMENTING ICCAs, we need to: (1) understand the nature of the traditional conservation governance of the territory; (2) map the extents of the ICCA; (3) assess the state of the biodiversity in the ICCA and formulate an ICCA Conservation Plan; and, (4) register the ICCA.

Understanding the nature of the traditional conservation governance of the territory. The following information are needed in order to understand the nature of the traditional conservation governance of the territory: history of the indigenous territory; the community; governance of the territory; local policies and enforcement mechanisms; and, value and importance of the ICCA.

Governance of an ICCA is unlike the usual organizational chart found in corporate and government settings. It does not consist of the general assembly, board of directors, officers, department heads, and so forth. The Agta-Dumagat's traditional governance structure consists of the highest leader of the clans occupying the topmost position. Under him or her are the Council of Elders of each clan, the clans themselves, and finally the families within the clans. Whereas, the Manobo governance structure has their supreme beings or gods on top, followed by the nature spirits, then the chiefs or *datus*, and the community members.

The methods in understanding the nature of the traditional conservation governance of the territory involve community dialogues, focus group discussions, and informal conversations. However, these activities should not disrupt the local daily schedules of the community and researchers should be respectful and conform to community norms.

Mapping the extents of the ICCA. In order to map the extents of the ICCA, the following information are needed: extents of the territory; traditional subdivisions and clan control of the territory; and, traditional land-use of the territory.

Methods and tools in mapping ICCAs include community mapping and participatory Geographic Information System (GIS). A ritual is conducted before the start of any mapping activity. After which, the location of the sacred spots in the ancestral domain are identified with the elders. A 3D-Model of the ancestral domain is constructed to make it easier for everybody to learn and understand how the community manages their land and where the sacred areas are.



Source: PAFID

Community mappers are trained to use GPS and other mapping tools to delineate the boundaries of the indigenous territory. Depending on the budget, mappers use traditional Transit and Tape or Real-Time Kinematic GPS. Apps or software for mapping ICCAs are also readily available, such as Atlas, QGIS, Google Earth Pro, Grass GIS, MapWindow GIS, Whitebox GAT, SAGA, Open Jump, and uDig Internet GIS.

In order to map areas that are difficult to reach by vehicle or on foot, mappers can utilize kite mapping, balloon mapping, or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV or drone) and photogrammetry software.

Community mappers are reminded to make sure that:

- a consensus is reached before marking or measuring the boundaries of the ICCA;
- ensure the maximum participation of all community members (youth, women, etc.) in the process;
- understand the minimum requirements of mapping accuracy of the country (i.e., survey grade or resource grade); and,
- identify a combination of appropriate mapping tools and methods.

Assess the state of the biodiversity in the ICCA using both the scientific process and IP lens, and formulate a community conservation or management plan. The following information are needed: the state of the biodiversity in the territory or ICCA; a local assessment of the territory's biodiversity; a scientific assessment of the territory's biodiversity; and a joint analysis with the community on the state of the area's biodiversity. There is also the need to establish a direct correlation between the state of the biodiversity and the traditional governance of the ICCA. Finally, a community conservation or management plan of the territory/ICCA should be formulated.

Indigenous peoples, biodiversity, and conservation

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY CONSERVATION AREAS (ICCAs) have existed since time immemorial within the ancestral domains of indigenous communities in the Philippines. ICCAs are the oldest form of conservation, at times acknowledged by the State, but most often not recognized.

Traditional governance of ICCAs has served as the main driver in protection and conservation of the environment and a venue for the assertion of traditional knowledge. However traditional governance of ICCAs is mostly unrecognized, support is limited, and very little is known regarding its status.

ICCAs are found in almost all ecosystems within IP territories. Motivations for establishing and sustaining conservation areas vary among indigenous communities (ICs). Many indigenous communities maintain conservation areas to sustain their nutritional needs.

The Palawan people for instance reserve certain areas of the forest for seasonal hunting which is regulated by traditional rules. Many ICs consider these parts of their ancestral domain as sacred, and should not be disturbed.

The Molbog of Balabac Island believe that substantial portions of the coral reefs play a significant role in the creation myth and oral history of their people. Harvesting of marine resources is regulated and some sections of the reef area are considered non-touch zones.

ICCAs in the world include sacred sites and natural features, indigenous territories, cultural landscapes and seascapes. They are found in both terrestrial and marine ecosystems in the country. The ICCA sites also represent different bio-geographic regions. They can be found from the mountain ridges to the coral reefs. They provide habitats to a high diversity of flora and fauna.

In terms of significance, ICCAs define the identity, coverage and extents of Indigenous territories, provide habitat for nature, host environmentally critical areas, and provide ecosystem services that sustain life.

ICCAs serve as habitat for rare, endangered, and endemic species. The *Ancyronyx Buhid*, a new type of spider, was discovered by researchers in the protected forests or the "Faganuon Furuwayo" within the ancestral lands of the Buhid tribe in Roxas, Oriental Mindoro. A Philippine Eagle Nest was found in the "Lapat" forests of the indigenous communities in Apayao.

As for carbon sequestration, the Ikalahan-Kalanguya Ancestral Domain in Nueva Vizcaya holds nearly three million tons of carbon in their land, which is equivalent to the yearly emissions of 2.3 million cars (Reytar, World Resources Institute).

The 10 pilot sites of the Philippine ICCA Project store 10.5 million tons of carbon or an average of 116.2 tons per hectare, equal to the emissions of at least seven million cars per annum.

In terms of disaster mitigation, the Batang watershed of the Talaandig Community in Miarayon, Talakag, Bukidnon mitigates the flooding in downstream areas including Cagayan De Oro City. A Payment for Ecosystem Services is in place where entities and institutions pay the *Talaandigs* for the conservation of their sacred forest.

However, ICCAs are continuously at risk. The biggest driver of biodiversity loss in ICCAs are extractive industries, since most of them sit on mineral reserves such as gold, copper, nickel, chromite, marble, and limestone.



Other drivers of biodiversity loss in ICCAs are land conversion and urbanization, incoherent and conflicting policies, and little or no recognition of the role and value of traditional conservation governance.

But perceptions are changing and paradigms are shifting. According to the Global Biodiversity Outlook 3 of the Convention on Biodiversity, 2010:

“In addition to officially-designated protected areas, there are many thousand Indigenous and Local Community Conserved Areas (ILCCAs) across the world, including sacred forests, wetlands, and landscapes, village lakes, catchment forests, river and coastal stretches and marine areas.(p.40)... Some studies show that levels of protection are actually higher under community or indigenous management than under government management alone” (p. 41).

Findings of a study on the levels of environmental degradation and effectivity of the different modes of forest protection and governance (strict protection, multiple-use and traditional governance of IPs) show that “traditional resource management practices of ICCs are more effective in protecting the forest than strict protection of the Government alone” (World Bank Independent Review, Nelson & Chomitz, 2009).

Through the constant vigilance and advocacy of IP groups globally, there has been a dramatic paradigm shift in the way “Protected Areas” are now defined. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) now considers Local and/or Indigenous-Traditional Community Conservation as valid type of Protected Area.

Methods and tools to assess the state of a traditional territory’s biodiversity include:

- establishment of transect lines and/or sample plots;
- use of biodiversity indices on richness and evenness (Shannon/Simpson);
- community workshop on local biodiversity indicators;
- community workshops assessing conservation governance effectivity; and,
- community planning workshop.

Resource assessment tools and methodologies are utilized to determine the state and condition of the biodiversity and environment of the identified areas of concern by the local indigenous community.

For data analysis, community members and partners are trained in basic mapping and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to support and complement traditional knowledge in biodiversity conservation and management. All data generated are analyzed by the community using their own point of view to assess the status of their biodiversity in their ancestral domain.

Traditional indicator species are identified by the local people which by their experience exist only in a particular type of forest or specific type of environment; species which according to local customs or beliefs provide services to a particular type or classification of the forest; and, species that are used by local people to define, name or identify a particular part of the forest.



For instance, almost all indigenous communities in the Philippines regard the “Balite” as an important species and an indicator that a forest is a Spirit Forest. The absence or presence of the Ficus (Balite) will have an impact on the presence of Spirits in the forest as this is their house and resting place. Spirit Forests are the “most healthy” forest as these are considered non-touch zones.

The role of the community in assessing the state of the biodiversity in their ICCA cannot be understated. The adoption of IP lens in the assessment of data shall ensure the ownership of the process, acceptability, and credibility of the whole exercise. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools and remotely-sensed data can be very helpful as it saves time. However, this should always be supported by locally generated information that shall serve as the calibration points to ensure accuracy and validity.

Declaration and registration. To ensure the recognition on the role of the ICC in conservation and of the ICCA, and to provide an additional layer of protection to the integrity of the ancestral domain, the community can register their ICCA in the Global ICCA Registry of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) Global Registry under the World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC).

The Global Registry serves as an International Notification of the ICCAs that are conserved by indigenous communities through traditional governance and IKSP. The Registry highlights the important and critical role that traditional governance of ICCs plays in conserving the biodiversity in the last remaining ecologically viable areas of the world. International policy along with conservation strategies, policies and priorities are guided by the information contained in the Global ICCA Registry.

Participation in the Global ICCA Registry is VOLUNTARY. Information from the community will only be accepted by the UNEP-WCMC upon the submission of a Community Offer and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) that the data being presented is being offered freely by the community. ■



Indicators in measuring biodiversity

Dr. Lisa Paguntalan-Marte
PhilBio

THE PHILIPPINES BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION FOUNDATION, INC. (PHILBIO) is a non-government organization based in Bacolod City, Negros Occidental. Its vision is the long-term conservation of the Philippines' native and endemic wildlife and natural habitats for the benefit of future generations of all peoples who may inhabit and share the natural resources of the country.

PhilBio believes in the strong link between biodiversity (wildlife and ecosystems) and people. Biodiversity is linked with food security. For instance, 186 tropical plant species of economic value benefit from fruit bats.

For measuring (monitoring) biodiversity, the presentation shares the case of PhilBio's work in Cebu Island in Central Philippines. Cebu Island is the most populated island province in the Philippines. It has 0.3 percent remaining tree cover, 0.1 percent natural forest, which is an increase from 0.03 percent in 1999.

In terms of biodiversity, Cebu Island has four single-island endemic birds (including the Cebu Flowerpecker and Cebu Brown Dove), 15 single-island endemic plants, and one endemic reptile.

PhilBio conducted a community-initiated biodiversity monitoring project in Nug-as in Alcoy municipality in Cebu, in partnership with the Kapunungan sa mga Mag-uuma sa Yutang Lasangnon sa Bulolacao Nug-as Alcoy (KMYLBNA). The KMYLBNA was awarded a Community – based Forest Management Agreement (CBFMA) in 1999, covering 2,400 hectares of forestland.

The organization has around 200 members, including 22 forest wardens. It is supported by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), NGOs, and the private sector.

The indicators selected for the monitoring initiative are the Black Shama (*Kittacincla cebuensis* or *Siloy* in the local dialect), Karst forest cover, and Cebu cinnamon. The focus is on population count (Citizen Science Count) of the endangered Black Shama, in coordination with DENR Region 7 and the Cebu provincial government. The activity was a landscape-level monitoring with multi-stakeholder participation.

The monitoring outputs of the project are: population density (island-wide), density of sub-populations, evidence of increasing populations, protection of habitats, habitat rehabilitation mainstreamed in local development programs, and conservation education and awareness.



Source: PhilBio

The project surveyed 11 forest patches from February 2018 to March 2020 to determine current distribution, habitat requirements, and population density of the Black Shama. A total of 111-point count stations were surveyed resulting in 93 Black Shama detections. Using point count distance sampling, the population density was estimated at 313 individuals per square kilometer for a total population of 11,839 individuals (9,160 to 15,415).

The largest sub-population (10,470) was in Alcoy, followed by Argao (711), and Dalaguete (325). The project's total population and sub-population estimates were higher than the estimate of 6,650 individuals made by BirdLife International for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. The species was found to survive in a variety of habitats in at least 20 localities covering roughly 37 square kilometers of Karst forest. The survey did not encounter the bird in seven areas of its former range. Protection of the remaining forests of Cebu and the establishment of plantations of native tree species in between forest patches are crucial to the survival of the species.

In terms of the Cebu Cinnamon, the count of mother trees revealed more than 40 percent decrease from 2016 to 2025.

PhilBio also conducted a landscape-level biodiversity monitoring in Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental, via a synchronized Hornbill count. The initiative was the first Negros Island population count of the endangered Visayan Tarctic Hornbill (*Penelopides Panini*).



The Citizen Science Count was done in Northern Negros Natural Park, Mt. Kanlaon Natural Park, and Balinsasayao Twin Lakes Natural Park (BTLNP). The result of the count yielded 3,107 individuals, which is higher than the IUCN estimate of 1,300 individuals on Negros and Panay Islands (IUCN, 2001). Since then, Hornbill counts have been mainstreamed in regular Protected Area monitoring of the Negros Island.

Hornbill counts have also been done in the City of Tayabas, Quezon via the project Synchronized Hornbill Count in Mt. Banahaw-San Cristobal Protected Landscape Protected Area. Every year, 80 to 120 citizen scientists count birds in partnership with LGU Tayabas City, *barangay* LGUs, local communities (Tapat Kalikasan), DENR Region 4A, and PhilBio.

The project results yielded a population density of 147.4 Luzon Tarictic hornbills per square kilometer (plus or minus 80). It also yielded the first sightings of Northern Rufous Hornbill (*Buceros hydrocorax*), totalling three individuals in 10 years.

During the 8th International Hornbill Conference, held in Bangkok, Thailand from 23 to 24 May 2023, the Tayabas City Environment Officer presented the 10-year biodiversity monitoring report using Luzon Hornbills as indicator species.

PhilBio also participated in the Conservation of Forests in Ancestral Domain project in Bukidnon, with support from the Provincial Development Fund of the Provincial Government of Negros Occidental through Provincial Environment Management Office.

For the indicator species, the project used the Apitong (*Dipterocarpus grandifloras*), Yellow-faced Flameback, and Visayan Tarictic Hornbill.

From its various monitoring initiatives, PhilBio learned that monitoring systems should be simple and practical (cost-effective). They should be aligned with the plans and interests of participating stakeholders. Indicator species should be determined based on ecosystems and people. Finally, it is important to share the outputs and outcomes of the project to as wide an audience as possible. ■



Human well-being indicators in OECMs and ICCAs

Femy Pinto
NTFP-EP

HUMAN WELL-BEING in environment and development circles is defined in many ways.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines human well-being as “people’s evaluations and feelings about their own lives.”

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) defines it as “A context and situation dependent state, comprising basic material for a good life, freedom and choice, health, good social relations and security” (UNEP, 2005).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “Wellbeing exists in two dimensions, subjective and objective. It comprises an individual’s experience of their life as well as a comparison of life circumstances with social norms and values.”

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2011 refers to subjective well-being that includes both cognitive and emotional well-being, i.e. how they are affected in and about life, and the emotional quality and intensity of one’s experiences. Examples are health and income as key determinants of subjective well-being or the quality of life.

Why should well-being be measured? For the OECD, “it is to help to monitor and measure societal progress beyond GDP and to inform policy making – making it *more people-centric and integrated across the many dimensions that matter for people, the planet and future generations.*”

The OECD well-being framework emphasizes people rather than economic systems and outcomes rather than inputs and outputs. The framework looks at both averages and inequalities, objective and subjective aspects, attributes of both individuals and communities, and both the “here and now” and “elsewhere and later.”

Biodiversity health and human well-being have a direct correlation since these are equated with rights, security, sustainability, and equity, leading eventually to happiness.

Human well-being is enshrined in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). Target 3 says that “sustainable use of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems should be consistent with conservation outcomes.” The



Headline Indicators of Target 3 are: a) Equitable governance in Protected Areas (PA) and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs); b) Recognition and respect of the rights of indigenous peoples and their traditional territories; and, c) Sustainable use in seascapes and landscapes.

In this regard, OECMs are vital as by definition they are “geographically defined areas other than Protected Areas, 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” (CBD COP Decision 14/8).

Targets 9 to 13 are all about meeting human requirements through sustainable use. Specifically, Target 9 (Manage Wild Species Sustainably to Benefit People) (Serving Humans) states “ensure that the management and use of wild species are sustainable, thereby providing social, economic and environmental benefits for people, especially those in vulnerable situations and those most dependent on biodiversity, including through sustainable biodiversity-based activities, products and services that enhance biodiversity, and protecting and encouraging customary sustainable use by indigenous peoples and local communities.”

Target 10 (Ecosystem Productivity) is about sustainable management of areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, and forestry for resilience and long-term productivity. Its Headline indicator is to “ensure that areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, and forestry managed sustainably, in particular through the sustainable use of biodiversity, including through a substantial increase of the application of biodiversity friendly practices, such as sustainable intensification, agroecological and other innovative approaches, contributing to the resilience and long term efficiency and productivity of these production systems, and to food security, conserving and restoring biodiversity, and maintaining nature’s contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services.

Target 10.1 is about the proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture.

Target 22.b is about “number of countries [promoting the full, equitable, inclusive, effective and gender-responsive representation and participation] and [recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities with respect to their traditional territories, cultures and practices as well as the rights of environmental human rights defenders, women, youth, and persons with disabilities].”

The Philippine Indigenous Peoples Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (IPBSAP) mentions human well-being in the form of violations against environmental human rights defenders and indigenous women-led biodiversity actions that are supported and promoted.



Indigenous people's territory and local community conserved areas, which are "natural and/or modified ecosystems containing significant biodiversity values, ecological services and cultural values, voluntarily conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities, both sedentary and mobile, through customary laws or other effective means" also figure prominently in the human well-being discourse.

An indicator example in defending ICCAs (Territories of Life) in the KMGBF is the "number and extent of recommendations, policies and ordinances on tenure (types), safeguards (FPIC, tenure, access to grievance, legal cases, and complaint mechanisms, EIA/SEA, land-use zones) are granted, enacted to protect lands and territories of IPs and LCs against EDIPP, and forest conversion, passed and/or implemented at local, national and regional levels."

Monitoring and measuring human well-being is intuitive; we count what affects us or what is within the scope of human experience and values held by the individuals and in communities. In indigenous and traditional territories and ICCAs, measuring biodiversity and well-being demonstrates their vital interconnectedness. ■

Community visits





The ancestral domain of the Aeta Magbubukun: An ICCA in Kanawan, Bataan

Documented by **Claire Demaisip, KAISAHAN**

UPON THE GROUP'S ARRIVAL at the meeting area, participants were welcomed with a cultural presentation by the Aeta children. This was followed by a ritual performed by culture bearer Allona Dollente to formally open the event and discussion.

Kapitana Bernabet Alejo initiated the sharing session by recounting the historical background of the land and the long-standing struggle of the Aeta Magbubukun community in Kanawan, Bataan. Dave De Vera of PAFID, along with community leader and Indigenous People Mandatory Representative (IPMR) Manolito Mowana, emphasized the importance of their ancestral land to their identity, traditions, beliefs, and survival. They also discussed their ongoing challenges in protecting, conserving, and reclaiming their ancestral domain from non-indigenous individuals and even the government.

The visit concluded with a simple yet hearty lunch and a tour of the nearby school where Allona Dollente teaches students about their culture and traditions.

Highlights of discussion

Both Kapitana Bernabet and IPMR Manolito shared the story of their struggles in securing their ancestral lands. In 1986, the government issued an eviction order against the Aeta of Kanawan for “purposely violating the Revised Forestry Code of 1975 by illegally residing within the Bataan National Park without the consent and approval of the Government.” A year later, with the help of a partner-NGO, the community members successfully appealed their case with the Office of the President and the village of Kanawan was segregated from the coverage of the Bataan National Park, and was later issued a Certificate of Community Forest Stewardship Agreement by the then Bureau of Forest Development of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

The application for a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT), covering an area of at least 12,000 hectares, was approved by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) last May 2018. The latest census of the Municipal Government of Morong put the estimated population of Sitio Kanawan at 167 Households. However, several Aeta families live in the deeper fringes of Mts. Natib and Kaikurong may not have been included in the conduct of the survey.



Importance of forests to Aetas

IPMR Manolito shared that the name of their place – *Kanawan* – means to “cleanse the hands” symbolizing purity and strength. He recounted the story of one of their ancestors, Apo Kalipun, who wished for all his children, who had scattered, to return and reunite as one community.

For the Magbukun Aetas, their forests are part of their identity, culture, and tradition. It is their source of life and survival. Apart from that the forests are sacred grounds they share with their ancestors and their gods. Beyond being a source of natural resources, the forests are seen as essential to their well-being, both physically and spiritually. The Aetas live in harmony with the forest's ecosystems, coexisting with the creatures within it and ensuring the sustainable management of its resources.

The Magbukun Aetas deeply value the abundance of nature, which provides them with food, livelihoods, and spiritual connection. Living in harmony with their environment, they observe and respect the natural cycles that sustain life. According to IPMR Manolito, their elders taught them the principle of taking only what is necessary, allowing nature the time and space to rest and regenerate. Overexploitation, in their view, is both senseless and self-defeating, as they themselves would ultimately bear the consequences of resource depletion. As he said, “*Ang kabundukan, parte ng buhay namin yan. Pag nawala ito, wala din kami.*” (“The forests are part of our life. If they are gone, so are we.”)

Honey gathering and hunting are traditional sources of sustenance. IPMR Manolito explained that they harvest honey only between April and May – when the queen bee has produced enough – out of respect for the bees’ natural cycle. Harvesting earlier, as outsiders often do, not



only disturbs the bees but also compromises honey production and quality. Similarly, hunting is done only during designated seasons and in rotation across different areas, ensuring that wildlife is not over hunted in any one place. However, due to increasing pressure from outsiders who hunt indiscriminately, the community has chosen to stop hunting wild boar (*baboy ramo*), which they have observed becoming increasingly scarce.

Traditional customs and land governance

When asked about their knowledge of forest use and natural resource management, IPMR Manolito consistently referred to the wisdom passed down by their elders and ancestors. Their understanding of their ancestral domain is rooted in oral tradition and lived experience. To determine the boundaries – or *metes and bounds* – of their land, they rely on natural landmarks such as distinct stone formations, mountain ranges, sacred sites, and hot springs. These physical markers, identified and remembered through generations, define the extent of their territory and reflect the deep connection between the land and their cultural heritage.

Despite the delineation of their boundaries, the indigenous peoples (IPs) have a collective respect for nature. IPMR Manolito shared that they allow members of other Aeta tribes to enter and use their forest, provided they do so responsibly and with respect for the environment. This holds true for them too. They take only what is necessary for sustenance and avoid any activity that could harm the forest. This system of shared access, governed by ancestral knowledge and cultural norms, helps ensure the sustainable use and protection of their natural resources.

The Magbukun Aetas also respect and recognize their allocated land uses handed down by their ancestors. These include designated areas and specific seasons for activities such as hunting and honey gathering. Certain sites, such as their burial grounds, are considered sacred. Speaking loudly or shouting is prohibited as it is believed to disturb the spirits of their ancestors. According to their belief, such disruptions can cause rain to fall, serving as a sign of disapproval from those who have passed on.

Land tenure and biodiversity

When asked what they want for their community, IPMR Manolito responded that they want to have a title issued on their ancestral domain. They believe that having a title on their land will give them the formal recognition they need to protect and defend their ancestral lands. At present, the Aeta's ownership of the ancestral domains is being challenged on many fronts. People ("outsiders") are coming into their lands, using and abusing their forests. As mentioned, they overharvest honey and hunt indiscriminately without regard for the customs and traditions of the Magbukun Aetas. Someone even discarded a dead wild boar in the forest – an act regarded as a bad omen in their culture.

They also feel that, while their municipality generally recognizes the Aeta's ancestral domain, other local government units and instrumentalities do not fully acknowledge their ownership. IPMR Manolito mentioned that "outsiders apply for and are granted certificates of occupancy and hunting permits by the *barangay* to access the forest." He stated that during his tenure in the municipal legislative body, he authored an ordinance requiring the *barangay* to obtain prior consent from the IPs before issuing certificates to non-IPs. However, the ordinance is not being



implemented, for reasons unknown to them. He also shared that the DENR has declared parts of their ancestral domain as protected areas, prohibiting them from entering and performing rituals in their sacred grounds. As it stands, the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) has already appropriated a large portion of their ancestral domain.

Without formal recognition of their ancestral domain, others are able to exploit their land – disrupting the balance of their forests, erasing their culture and traditions, and displacing them from their homes.

Women's role in the preservation of Aeta culture and tradition

Women in the community are generally involved in gardening and handicraft-making.

One particular Aeta woman stands out in her role as a culture bearer. Allona Dollente teaches Aeta culture and traditions to students in Grades 1 to 8, which are incorporated into the Department of Education's Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) curriculum. She has been fulfilling this role for the past five years.

Part of her duties is to ensure that the IPED modules are made and translated accurately and reflect their traditions, customs, and practices. Some of her activities include teaching the Aeta youth about their songs and dances, as well as their community practices. She also brings her students to the forests not just to appreciate its importance to their lives but to impart to the youth their connection to nature and heritage.

Recommendations

- **On provincial ordinance recognizing ancestral domain lands.** As mentioned, IPMR Manolito authored a municipal ordinance requiring the consent of the IPs prior to issuing certificates to non-IP individuals seeking access to ancestral domain (AD) forests. However, this ordinance is not being honored or properly implemented, especially at the *barangay* level, resulting in the unregulated entry and use of their forests. In this regard, a provincial ordinance is seen as a more effective measure, as it can mandate compliance from the municipality down to the *barangay* level, thereby reinforcing the authority of the IPs over their ancestral lands and forest resources. It was suggested that the Magbukun Aetas, through IPMR Manolito coordinate and communicate with the provincial IPMR on the formulation of and lobbying for the ordinance.
- **On representation in the Protected Area Management Board.** During the discussions, IPMR Manolito highlighted that their Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) currently lacks the mandated representation from the IPs. It was therefore recommended that the Aeta's advocacy and lobbying efforts prioritize securing the appointment of IP representatives to their local PAMB.
- **On formulation of the Indigenous Political Structure.** During the sharing session, some participants emphasized the importance of formally establishing the Indigenous Political Structure (IPS) and securing its recognition from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). Without official confirmation from the NCIP, any decisions made by the group – especially those involving formal agreements – may be subject to challenge or lack legitimacy. ■

Joint management agreement of forest ecozone between Aeta Ambala in Pastolan, Bataan

Documented by **Melissa Bolitres, PAKISAMA**

TATA PACIO (Bonifacio Florentino), founder and elder of the Aeta Ambala in the Pastolan community, warmly welcomed and personally accompanied the delegates and participants to their community.

Participants immediately engaged in friendly conversations with the indigenous people, exchanging stories and pleasantries. Others took the time to observe the various physical structures that reflected the community's culture and daily life. The Aeta elders, led by Tata Pacio, then brought out an old 3D map that showcased the entire ancestral domain of the Pastolan community.

Using the large 3D map of Sitio Pastolan, Tata Pacio shared that the map was developed with the assistance of the Philippine Association For Intercultural Development (PAFID). He proudly recounted that in 2004, their community was formally granted a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP).

An open forum was held next, allowing participants to ask questions and engage in dialogue. A key topic discussed was the tribe's partnership with the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA), particularly the Joint Area Management Agreement signed in 2010. Tata Pacio and his fellow elders explained the process leading to the agreement, its duration, the benefit-sharing arrangement, and how the community directly benefits from it.

They also discussed the establishment of Komite ng Sama-Samang Pag-unlad (KSSP), which includes indigenous representatives tasked with monitoring and implementing the terms of the agreement. The role of women and youth in the community's development was highlighted, as well as the continuing efforts to preserve their indigenous culture amidst rapid modernization and external influences.

The participants also shared their meaningful experiences from their own communities. The group then headed to El Cabayo Falls, where a communal lunch awaited. El Cabayo Falls is one of the community-based tourism sites being nurtured and managed by the Aeta Ambala tribe as part of their sustainable livelihood and cultural preservation efforts.



Before the meal, Tata Pacio led a prayer to bless the food that was prepared by the community. The menu featured traditional dishes such as rice cooked in bamboo, chicken *tinola*, *laing* (taro leaves in coconut milk), sautéed *pechay*, fried *tilapia*, *pancit*, and native rice cakes. Following lunch, the indigenous guides led the participants on a transect walk to El Cabayo and Tintingan Falls. The walk offered a deeper appreciation of the natural beauty and cultural richness of the Pastolan community, allowing visitors to witness firsthand how the Aeta Ambala live in harmony with their ancestral land.

Highlights of the dialogue

- ***In relation to the importance of forest for Aeta.*** The forest plays a significant role for the Aeta Ambala community as it is their primary source of livelihood, including non-timber forest products and handicrafts. It is also home to key biodiversity that they continue to protect, despite the ongoing projects under the SBMA. Their traditional practices and indigenous culture are deeply rooted in the mountains.

Pearl, the daughter of a tribal elder, shared the importance of medicinal plants, stating: "We have access to many types of medicinal leaves. These natural resources are valuable and should not be destroyed."

- ***In relation to the struggle of the Aetas in securing their CADTs.*** Tata Pacio shared that he led in starting the claim for their ancestral land from the 1980s until 1994, when the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) law had not yet been enacted. In 1997, the IPRA was passed, and the NCIP was established. However, the NCIP was unable to assist them in delineating and creating a map for their ancestral land. They reached out to the PAFID which helped them create and develop their 3D Map Model of Sitio Pastolan.



In 2004, they were awarded a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) for over 4,280 hectares of ancestral land in Pastolan, officially recognizing their right for their ancestral lands.

- ***In relation to the views/perspectives of the youth with regard to conservation.*** One of the challenges faced by the community is engaging indigenous youth to continue practicing their traditional customs and ways of life, despite the changes brought about by development projects under SBMA. Participation of both youth and women in community governance also remains limited.

Pearl shared that while discrimination was more common in the past as more indigenous youth today are able to access education. She added that she hopes more Aeta teachers will be given the opportunity to educate fellow indigenous youth, to ensure that cultural knowledge and environmental awareness are preserved and passed on to future generations. This brings hope that Aeta youth can become future leaders in the protection and assertion of their ancestral domain rights. She also encourages the younger generation to take part in preserving their traditional knowledge and natural resources.

- ***In relation to the Joint Management Agreement with SBMA.*** These words echo the frustration of Tata Pacio on speaking out against the Joint Management Agreement (JMA) with the SBMA – an agreement pushed forward without proper consultation or equitable benefit-sharing with their community:

“Here in the community, we just ask for a lambing (affection). We just ask for a lambing. Is lambing enough for you? You are losing your right to the land, said Tata Pacio.”

The agreement signed in June 2010 between the Aeta Ambala community of Pastolan and the SBMA was the first formal agreement between an indigenous community and an economic zone.

According to Tata Pacio and his fellow community members, the agreement has a duration of 25 years. Although the agreement originally stipulated that 30 percent of the total revenue generated from activities within the ancestral domain should go to the community, in reality, they have only been receiving five percent. While the exact amount they receive annually was not mentioned, the share allocated to the community is distributed among more than 330 indigenous members. These funds are used to support education, transportation, and emergency needs.

They shared that, if given the opportunity, they are determined to pursue a renegotiation of the agreement to secure a fairer share of the economic benefits from the zone’s operations, in alignment with what was originally promised.

Even though a Joint Monitoring Team was established through *Komite ng Sama-Samang Pag-unlad* (KSSP) – composed of nine representatives (three from SBMA, three from NCIP, and three from the indigenous community, including the *barangay* chieftain, a *barangay* council member, and a tribal advisor or elder) – many issues and concerns were raised by the indigenous community.



Among the concerns shared was the lack of genuine participation and voice of the IPs in crafting the key provisions of the agreement. The NCIP failed to conduct a proper Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) process. The agreement was presented to them as a done deal, with the only thing missing being the signatures of the indigenous leaders.

In addition, there was no consultation or integration of the Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP), which should have served as the basis for selecting and implementing projects within the economic zone. This plan is critical to ensure that development initiatives are culturally appropriate and do not cause harm to their ancestral lands.

Reflection of the participants

After the sharing and learning session with the elders and members of the Aeta Ambala, the participants were invited to share meaningful experiences from their own communities that they could learn from. Among those who spoke was Anu Verma from India, who discussed key provisions of the Forest Rights Act and its significant role in empowering indigenous communities in her country. Another participant, Datu Minyong from Mount Kalatungan in Bukidnon, shared how their tribe continues to preserve their indigenous culture and traditions. He emphasized the importance of teaching visitors to respect their beliefs and observe the proper protocols when entering their community.

The session concluded with expressions of gratitude to the Aeta Ambala leaders, followed by a group photo session. Participants also discussed possible next steps, including updating the 3D map model of Pastolan to reflect recent developments under the Joint Management Agreement with SBMA, such as the installation of solar panels in the area. ■



From poachers to Marine Turtle protectors: The Pawikan Conservation Center in Nagbalayong, Kanawan, Morong, Bataan

Prepared by **Jerome Dumlao, ANGOC**,
with inputs from **Angelica Paller, PAKISAMA**

UPON ARRIVAL AT THE PAWIKAN CONSERVATION CENTER, participants were welcomed by its management, a representative from the Bataan Provincial Tourism Office, and several volunteers. The participants then proceeded to explore the facilities of the center and were served snacks.

After snacks, it was time for the briefing on the Pawikan Conservation Center (PCC). The session kicked off with an audio-visual presentation on sea turtles, locally-called “*Pawikan*.” Five species of sea turtles are found in the Philippines, of which Bataan is home to three: Green, Hawksbill, and Olive Ridley, all endangered species.

The video went on to explain why sea turtles are important to maintaining a healthy ecosystem. Sea turtles act as a keystone species, impacting the health and balance of marine ecosystems. They help maintain coral reefs and seagrass beds which provide healthy habitat for other marine life. *Pawikans* also facilitate nutrient recycling and control the jellyfish population.

After the audio-visual presentation, a representative of the Bataan Provincial Tourism Office, which administers the PCC, gave an overview on the local government’s conservation programs, highlighting the importance of sea turtles to the health of the coastal ecosystem and ecotourism initiatives. She shared that while the PCC was the first initiative for sea turtle conservation in the province, there are now many similar conservation centers since *Pawikans* lay their eggs all along the beaches of Bataan peninsula.

Nikko Ibias, Executive Director of Bantay Pawikan Inc., which is responsible for hatchery management and conservation activities of the PCC, shared the story of their organization and the center. He is a second generation “*Pawikan* ranger,” his father being one of the center’s original community volunteers.

After the briefing and dialogue, the participants were shown around the hatchery and were treated to seeing Pawikan hatchlings ready for release. The participants were then treated to lunch before departure.



Highlights of the dialogue

The PCC is home to Bantay Pawikan, Inc., a community organization of local farmers and fisherfolk from Barangay Nagbalayong in Morong, Bataan. It was formed in 1999 in response to a plea from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). The initial activities of the organization was overseen by an NGO, with marine turtles that nest in Bataan.

Historically, the organization's members, like many in the community, collected turtle eggs and meat for consumption and trade. These activities significantly decreased the marine turtle population in the wild.

Bantay Pawikan, Inc. depends on donations and sponsorships. In 2008, former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo gave Php 800,000, which the organization used for constructing a two-storey building for tourist accommodation. The room rental income supported the livelihood of volunteers who patrol the shoreline during the nesting season, which lasts from September to February.

In July 2024, Bantay Pawikan, Inc. and the Provincial Government of Bataan signed a Memorandum of Agreement wherein the latter administers the operation of the PCC, while Bantay Pawikan, Inc. remains a non-government agency responsible for hatchery management and conservation activities.

Volunteers from Bantay Pawikan, Inc. begin their patrols in September. While there are occasional early nesters, these generally produce less healthy eggs, leading to lower hatching success rates. For the volunteers, patrolling the beach for eight hours each night from September to February involves enduring inclement weather, which does not deter the mother turtles from laying their eggs.

The patrol also requires crossing two small rivers at either end of the shore. These nightly patrols help ensure the safety of turtle nests from poachers, stray animals, and ghost crabs that feed on the eggs.

Egg harvesting reaches its peak in November and December. The eggs incubate in the hatchery for approximately 45 to 75 days. Once the hatchlings emerge, they are released immediately into the sea. Hatchlings that emerge during the day are released at sunset, while those that hatch at night are set free at sunrise. Three days after most eggs have hatched, volunteers rescue hatchlings that did not surface from the buried nests.

Visitors to the PCC can experience the hatchling releases, see nesting turtles during nightly patrols, and participate in rescue efforts. They may also witness emergence, where hatchlings struggle to reach the surface. By February, the long nights of patrolling begin to wind down, and restoration of the hatchery becomes their main task. As the sun is beneficial for sanitizing the sand bed of the hatchery, the volunteers dig up the sand to expose it to sunlight for the next nesting season.

The organization's members are basically volunteers. They are mostly fisherfolk and subsistence farmers who only get food packs for their invaluable efforts in saving Bataan's sea turtles. To help the volunteers with their livelihood, the provincial government will conduct a



series of training sessions to help them find suitable jobs within the area, mostly in the resorts along Morong's beaches.

The year 2025 marks the Center's 25th year, and to-date it has released more than 300,000 hatchlings in the wild. This nesting season also recorded the highest number of nests saved in the last 25 years. Nikko Ibias said that the reason for this is that the hatchlings 20 to 25 years ago are already returning to lay their eggs.

PCC volunteers also trained people in other turtle conservation centers in Morong and beyond, ensuring that efforts in saving sea turtles are done province-wide. They help initiate the Anvaya Cove Pawikan conservation center, a private-led effort by the Ayala Group. In return, Anvaya gives PCC regular financial support.

While turtle conservation efforts have yielded promising results, these gentle sea creatures are still endangered. Human activity remains the biggest threat to the *Pawikan*. Harvesting and illegal trading of eggs and butchering them for meat still occurs, albeit on a much smaller scale than before. But there are other threats as well – disruption of nesting areas due to uncontrolled tourism-related development, irresponsible fishing practices, destruction of coral reefs and seagrass beds, and irresponsible disposal of waste, particularly plastics.

Looking ahead, the Provincial Government of Bataan and Bantay Pawikan, Inc. envision the PCC to become a world-class conservation center educating the public, especially school children, saving marine turtles, and improving the lot of the people who take on the role of guardians of the *Pawikan*.



Reflections of the participants

On institutional collaboration. The success of Bantay Pawikan, Inc. is a product of collaboration between government, NGOs, and fisherfolk organizations. Instead of criminalizing poachers, the project has built relationships, provided education, and transformed these poachers into protectors of sea turtles. The government through DENR, strengthened this by providing some sort of a “tenurial instrument” which is the Pawikan Conservation Center. It allowed the community to manage conservation while continuing their livelihood activities like fishing.

This institutional setup empowered locals to see how protecting marine turtles protects their future. *Pawikans* are biodiversity heroes – they help propagate coral reefs, maintain seagrass beds, and balance the marine ecosystem. More *Pawikans* means a healthier sea, more fish, and secured livelihoods.

Pawikans are no longer food for the fishers of Morong and Bataan, but partners in sustaining marine life.

On community organizing. The long-term success of the collaboration for saving the *Pawikan* can be attributed to community organizing and its behavioral transformation of the community. The core of the program's success is people-centered conservation.

Bantay Pawikan, Inc., and the other partners immersed themselves in the community, lived with the people, understood their culture, and patiently worked on their behavioral change. The poachers, once reliant on fishing and selling *Pawikan* eggs, learned that protecting the turtles increases their income through healthier seas and sustainable tourism.

On women empowerment. Women also gained skills like cooking, hosting guests, and engaging in livelihood activities like selling snacks, merchandise. Volunteering in the PCC became a family affair. Children help carry buckets of hatchlings, and are oriented early on about the value of saving marine turtles.

On sustainability. While the Bantay Pawikan, Inc. program thrives, its future depends on sustainability. Volunteers are aging, some have passed on. The program still relies heavily on passion and limited voluntary contributions. There is a need to explore legislative support and government financing for the operation of Bantay Pawikan, Inc., including continuous capacity building and research.

While professional management is now being done by the Bataan Provincial Tourism Office, the Center still lacks dedicated funding for operational costs, which include compensation for volunteers who patrol nightly, monitor nests, and maintain the sanctuary. Dedicated funding will ensure that systems are in place for monitoring, research, visitor management, and community coordination, while allowing volunteers to continue their role without sacrificing their livelihoods. ■



Moving forward, key takeaways, and closing

Reflections

Chetana Nan Jha, FES, India

THERE are very important lessons that FES as an organization has learned in the course of our conservation efforts, which have been validated during this learning exchange.

First is the nexus among rights, biodiversity, and the food system as important components of our work.

The second is the importance of involving the youth in conservation efforts. The youth sector is going through major transitions in India. But it is important in India for us to involve the youth in conservation.

As for the takeaway from today's field visit, I was really inspired by how conservation rights and income are interlinked. In the site that we visited, it was clear to the community that more turtles lead to an increase in fish population.

In the course of the learning exchange, it became very clear how community land rights are important for biodiversity.

Opportunities for partnership are very possible because we can have a working group centered around the food system in Asia and it is a rallying agenda. Towards this end, we can host internships in our organization to enable increased understanding of the relationship between rights, biodiversity, and the food system.

Wahyubinatarra Fernandes, RMI, Indonesia

I AM HAPPY that we are putting land rights as the basis for biodiversity protection. This is one area that we should be following up as ILC in Asia – how to preserve biodiversity through land rights recognition.

From the field trip today, I learned that the Philippines is quite advanced compared to other countries within ILC Asia in terms of land rights, as shown in the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title, which we have seen in the Kanawan ancestral domain.



While the community still has problems with regard to encroachment, the fact that they are already recognized as indigenous people and have documented land rights is already an achievement.

We are lucky enough in Indonesia to have a partnership with ILC on land rights. We are pushing for one of our areas to exclude part of the customary forest, which is currently inside the national park.

Ricklend Gryst Bin Christopher, PACOS, Malaysia

BASED ON THE LEARNINGS during the past three days, there are three possible interventions needed for the NLC platform in Malaysia.

The first is to promote a human rights-based approach, especially in dealing with indigenous people's traditional territories. The second is to conduct policy review, develop case studies, and engage more with other stakeholders. The third intervention is to develop guidelines with the help of indigenous people. This is to help us to come up with a better framework so that we can provide a better platform for NLC in Malaysia.

As for opportunities, there are many national and international partnerships currently for Malaysia, and we hope we can strengthen them further.

Sarita Kumari Lama, NLC-Nepal

THIS LEARNING EXCHANGE has been an eye-opener for me since NLC members in Nepal are hardly involved in biodiversity related activities. I learned that NBSAP is very important for those of us whose work involves forests, water, land reforms, and food security. I do not think people in Nepal, even those in government, realize the importance of the NBSAP. My role will be to share this information to the NLC members in our country.

I also learned of the many international policies pertaining to biodiversity conservation, of which many are to some extent aligned with Nepali policies as well.

Not many NLC members in Nepal are involved in biodiversity conservation work, so the challenge is how to bring them together for this purpose. Most of the members are involved in land rights, but in terms of indigenous territories and customary lands, Nepal is lagging behind.

Since many of the members work in land rights, our learnings from this event is the importance of integrating land rights with biodiversity conservation, which provides a common starting point for discussion within the NLC Nepal network. Our partner people's organization, the National Land Rights Forum, will definitely welcome this development. They have more than 100,000 members in many villages nationwide. Land rights in the context of biodiversity conservation can be a major campaign, but we would need resources to mobilize this.



More than 1.5 million people in Nepal are landless, mostly women and informal settlers. So the challenge is how we can connect them with biodiversity conservation. Preserving the healthy biodiversity of their land so that it can continue to contribute to their livelihood is a great insight.

Ruth Canlas, NTFP-EP Philippines

IF THE KMGBF has its 30 x 30 strategy, NLC Philippines has its 3 x 3 strategic plan – three goals for three years.

The first one has to do with increasing OECMs and ICCAs by 2027 to contribute to the KMGBF goals. The second one is to determine and generate baseline data for nationally important agricultural heritage systems, as well as globally important agricultural heritage systems and other biodiversity areas. The third is, aside from determining and generating the baseline, we shall also optimize the data gathered.

These are the things NLC Philippines will be doing in the next three years. In terms of opportunities for partnership at the regional level, we are thinking of collaborating with all the organizations present here on agrobiodiversity food systems and land rights.

You have heard a lot of our colleagues from NLC Philippines talk about their insights and experiences on a number of things, and you can reach out to them to learn more about their initiatives. This body has a wealth of experience in implementing programs, producing publications, and organizing workshops and learning events, and is a great resource for collaboration.

Renuka Pradabphuthong, NIPT, Thailand

I **HAVE LEARNED A LOT** from this learning exchange, which I will be bringing back to our work in Thailand. Our NGO is a new member of the ILC, and we have been gaining a lot of knowledge since we joined in December 2024. We shall use that knowledge to help our indigenous people communities in Thailand.

Thank you for the statement of support to our IPs in their struggle to protect their ancestral land. This will encourage IPs in Thailand to continue protecting their forests because they know that they are a part of a bigger movement. They do not walk alone, but we have ILC Asia as a family.

Dr. Hong Ngo Van, LANDA, Vietnam

THIS WORKSHOP is more of an ecotourism experience, but with a lot of learning. We had a chance to visit a local community and learned of their struggles in protecting the biodiversity of their territory as well as their traditional values.



My biggest take-away from the learning exchange is that land rights and conservation go hand-in-hand. Land rights recognition translates to a lot of benefits to the community. We at the Land Alliance in Vietnam got a lot of motivation from this workshop, and I will share the result of this meeting to our colleagues.

From Vietnam CSOs' standpoint, we try to focus on the government to have very good policies under the land law. Our biodiversity law recognizes the role of local people and of the community in protecting biodiversity values in the country.

We try to promote the ICCA or OECM model in practice. We also promote cross-border climate resiliency and conservation biodiversity-based initiatives for local communities. We hope to develop a borderless model for biodiversity, through the local communities who are living in the border areas between Laos and Vietnam.

We shall be happy to share with other ILC members our practices and knowledge on biodiversity conservation gained from working with local communities in Vietnam.

Carlo Carlos, Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB)

AS AN INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION working at the regional level and with the diplomatic community, this learning exchange was a good experience for the Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) to get reacquainted with what is happening on the ground.

I think it is imperative for ACB to also serve as a bridge among governments, local communities, and CSOs. This learning exchange is one opportunity for regional cooperation, knowledge exchange, and capacity development that we can further develop in the future.

In terms of opportunities, ACB was recognized as a regional center in Asia for technical and scientific cooperation for biodiversity conservation. There are numerous organizations, including the CBD secretariat, that have reached out to ACB for dialogues. This is one entry point where we can collaborate with the local communities and CSOs on interfacing with the government.

There are ongoing discussions relating to Targets 2 and 3. These are still in the early stages of development but we will definitely be inviting CSOs in these discussions as an opportunity for us to further engage learnings and ideas. This will be participated in by nine ASEAN member-States, with India and Mongolia attending as well.

As for India, we are actually sub-granting one of their non-State actor engagements through mapping of stakeholders pertaining to access and benefit sharing. Hopefully, through these discussions, we will be able to contribute meaningfully to the implementation of the KMGBF, specifically on the regional biodiversity goals.



Dayoon Kim, SEI

AS A RESEARCH ORGANIZATION, the Stockholm Environmental Institute (SEI) is very much interested in how we can help further this group's efforts. How can we try to identify some of the solutions and bridge that gap in the implementation of certain policies linked to ancestral domain and community protected areas? How can those gaps be bridged through data and evidence?

Many speakers have shared certain avenues to support such efforts, such as funding and capacity sharing. SEI will explore opportunities for different sources of funding through research programs as well because, as a researcher, I think we are also trying to find what are the entry points from the different actors to support certain movements, utilizing funding, utilizing data, utilizing policy, utilizing governance so we can support how these dimensions can come together in a certain context.

SEI hopes to further explore these with the ILC, the NLCs, individual members, and other partners and very much look forward to further collaboration.

Ma. Kathryn Ann Cachapero, WCS

OUR REFLECTION is about the community visit to Kanawan. The deep relationship between IP rights and biodiversity was very evident in the community's way of life. The community actually explained how sustainable their practice is. This kind of traditional ecological knowledge should actually be shared and documented for everyone.

They were able to secure tenure security for their ancestral land, but they still have a long way to go to fully secure justice, as shown by the problems that they are continually facing.

In this gathering, we have our own different causes. Some are working on agrarian reform, some are advocating for IP rights, some are working on biodiversity, but we all share the same goal, which is justice for people and the environment. Thus, the World Conservation Society (WCS) looks forward to more meaningful sessions like this in the future.

Julianna Rossi de Camargo, RFT

I HAVE LEARNED A LOT here from all of you. The visit this morning to Pastolan village was very enlightening. It was also concerning that even though they already have their Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) community members still felt powerless with regard to their arrangement with the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA), with whom they have a Joint Management Agreement (JMA).

Despite having tenurial security, a major power imbalance in terms of governance and benefit sharing still exists. That is very important for me to hear because a lot of the time, conservation funders will focus mainly on the main result, which is obtaining the declaration, the title, the part



of just securing the land tenure itself, and not really invest a lot of funding in other aspects that are just as important.

Even more important sometimes is ensuring that the community members are really involved in the governance of the area, that the process by which the governance body was created considered the people's needs and desires, that everyone was aware of how it was developed.

The JMA demonstrates a level of collaboration, but the people do not feel it. This is one of the major learnings that I commit to bring back to the Rainforest Trust (RFT).

In one of the sessions during this learning exchange, it was mentioned by Tony Quizon that "there are no rights if they are not enforced." Apart from the preservation of the land and the environment, what conservation really comes down to is human well-being. I was fortunate to be a part of a project in Mozambique where they set up a community conservation area. Part of the project involved registering the community with the government, specifically the governing council, in order to be a part of the committee handling the project.

A lot of the women from the community said they also want to get registered and be able to have a say in the conservation project. So, everyone in the community was registered. One effect of this registration is that they were able to vote in the Mozambique elections.

A lot of the times, human well-being or improving people's lives is not being given importance in conservation work, but based on actual experiences shared in the past three days of this learning exchange, this is very, very important.

Stefano di Gessa, ILC Global

THIS LEARNING EXCHANGE showed the linkages between rights and biodiversity outcomes. Somebody said biodiversity is a responsibility. I agree that biodiversity is everybody's responsibility.

Who is everybody? The farmers, fishers, IPs, local communities, governments, funding agencies, all of us. We basically need a multi-actor and multi-sectoral approach to food systems, rights, and biodiversity. If we manage to do all of these, the global biodiversity targets may be much closer than we believe.

Today we were reminded again of the real complexity of biodiversity governance. By oversimplifying the governance of managing biodiversity and reaching outcomes in biodiversity, we commit a big mistake.

A variety of approaches have been shared these past few days. Community stewardship or landscape approach, ICCAs, and all of it testifies that you need a very open mind to work out a complex governance system that can make space for different actors to play a role in biodiversity outcomes. Land rights is maybe the glue that can keep all of these different actors together.



We cannot get any conservation outcome if the conservation governance behind it is broken.

There are three things I was asked to commit to, and let me go to them. The International Land Coalition (ILC) is a network, so number one is to amplify voices. ILC will continue supporting engagements within and beyond the network, with different sectors that can play a role in biodiversity. Some have been stepping up, but they still have some way to go and we will be there to make sure that those voices are where they should be.

Second is to document and promote. ILC will support more National Land Coalitions (NLCs) and more members of the network to get involved in biodiversity, to strategize among each other, and leverage members that already do work in biodiversity, so that they can help or inspire others in what they are doing. ILC will also continue to contribute in terms of building the right toolkit, by which we are recognized as a critical interlocutor in biodiversity arenas.

Third is to inspire and learn. I guess what we did here is what we usually do in the NLCs. We take a good experience from one or two of our members and we use it to inspire other members. We are a network, not a donor. We like to partner with donors, but we like to keep ourselves as much as possible on a horizontal and peer-to-peer level of engagement. Let us use good examples and good experiences to inspire each other.

Engagement is not only about sharing experiences, it is also about strengthening capacities. Engagement is also about defending those that defend biodiversity. We should stand by those who really are the stewards of biodiversity and whose rights are often at risk.

When we visited one community, we asked what are the biggest threats that they see looking ahead. This is a community with an 800-hectare solar plant investment and a very opaque Joint Management Agreement with the SBMA. One elder stood up and said that the biggest threat they see is that the young people of the community no longer want to be involved.

I guess we will not get very far if we do not find ways by which to link land rights and biodiversity work to livelihood strengthening strategies. If we want the youth to be there tomorrow, we need to build strategies around biodiversity and land rights that create income and incentives for the youth to be there. This could be nature-based employment or a payment scheme for environmental services.



Closing remarks

Mary Joy Demaluan, NLC Philippines (host) and CARRD

ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL LAND COALITION PHILIPPINES and its 10-member organizations, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of you for your active participation and valuable contributions over the past three days. Biodiversity is not merely a collection of species, nor is land just a resource.

They are the essence of life itself, the foundation of our cultures, our economies, and our very survival. And yet, across the globe, we are facing an unprecedented crisis on biodiversity and land inequality. Deforestation, land grabbing, and climate change continue to threaten our communities.

On this occasion, this learning event, we have gathered not in despair, but in hope. The work we did here and beyond, sharing knowledge, discussing solutions, and forging partnerships, has the power to rewrite our story. A story where people's land rights are secured, that indigenous voices are heard, and conservation upholds both people and nature.

Let us look to the examples of the indigenous communities that for generations have stewarded the forests, protected the rivers, and preserved knowledge. Let us recognize the farmers, the fisherfolk, and the local leaders who, despite great challenges, remain committed to safeguarding farmlands, forests, and our seas. May we leave this event not just with knowledge, but with renewed passion and an unwavering resolve to be the change we seek.

The lands, the seas, the forests, the indigenous peoples, and local communities call to us. Let us answer with action, unity, and hope. Our sincerest thanks to our community leaders and local organizations.

Your dedication and resilience in protecting both land and nature serve as a powerful reminder that meaningful change begins at the grassroots level. To our guest speakers, facilitators, and panelists, your shared knowledge, experiences, and insights have deepened our discussions and provided us with concrete strategies for action. To our partners and sponsors, the Rainforest Trust, Wildlife Conservation Society Philippines, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and its attached agency, the Biodiversity Management Bureau, the Global Environment Facility, the United Nations Development Programme, and the International Land Coalition, your support has made this event possible, and your continued commitment is instrumental in advancing both land rights and biodiversity conservation.

To ANGOC, AR Now!, KAISAHAN, and PAFID, thank you for your leadership within the NLC and beyond, and dedication in organizing this event. And finally, to all participants, thank you for your engagement. Your voices are crucial in shaping the way forward. Let us take what we have learned and turn it into meaningful collective action.



Anthony Marzan, KAISAHAN

THANK YOU VERY MUCH for the opportunity to share our experience from our biodiversity conservation work in Dinagat Islands. I hope that we are inspired to undertake conservation work.

We learned a lot from the experiences of other organizations, which we hope we can apply in our current and future work.

Dave De Vera, PAFID

ON BEHALF OF PAFID and the communities that we work with, we want to express our sincere appreciation for your participation these past three days. The schedule was packed, there were times that I worried if there was still anything going through our brains. Aside from the packed schedule, the issues were very heavy.

For many of us, English was not our first language. But we persisted and we are all taking home something from the first lectures up to the last community visit. That is the spirit of working together.

Many people at the start said that our region is at risk. The rate of destruction and deforestation is among the highest in the world. At the same time, we are the stewards of the most number of species of biodiversity. So that is a very, very big challenge.

Connecting the issue of tenure to the state of biodiversity is something that we have been pushing for decades. We always believe that conservation may only happen if the people are empowered to enforce the rules, by having tenure over their ancestral domains.

It is not yet too late. There is still time before 2030. This learning exchange can ignite some fire in our belly to continue our work.

Biodiversity conservation work is not easy. It is so easy just to give up. But there is no other way. We can just sit and let things happen, but we live on just one planet. There is nowhere else we can go.

Anu Verna, ILC Asia Regional Coordinator

THIS IS THE TIME when we say, let us start our journey again together for ensuring the land rights for harnessing biodiversity. This learning exchange was an immensely enriching experience for all of us. We must be taking home a lot of learnings from here, a lot of collaborations, a lot of friendships that have happened over the last three days. This will only help us to strengthen our journey together.

From ILC Asia, I would just like to highlight three takeaways.



First is to regionalize this learning process of conservation, because there are immense learning opportunities from initiatives of our members. It is also important to upscale these initiatives and reach other spaces and countries where there is a potential to invest more.

Second is to popularize Target 22, the indicator to ensure that the governments are accountable to support land tenures as a pathway to conservation. We need more advocacy on conservation.

Third, and very important, is to build a narrative on land rights are the key to biodiversity.

I would like to thank each and everyone of you who participated in this learning exchange, especially the indigenous peoples' leaders, farmer leaders, women leaders, and the youth, for sharing your wisdom, your knowledge, your initiatives, and for energizing and inspiring all of us.

Thank you to all the partners of NLC Philippines and ILC Asia for making this learning event successful. Our gratitude also goes out to Rainforest Trust for supporting this event, and special thanks to ANGOC, PAFID, and KAISAHAN for making this happen. ■

Annex A: Program Design

Day 0/23 March 2025/Sunday

Time	Activity	In-charge
10:00 AM	Travel to Subic	ANGOC
12:00 Noon	Lunch	
02:00 PM	Check-in at Hotel	ANGOC
05:00	Registration of participants, distribution of workshop materials	ANGOC, NLC
	Overview and safety protocols of Lighthouse Hotel	LJ Reyes, Lighthouse Hotel
	Overview on Subic Bay Metropolitan Area	Dave de Vera, PAFID
	Announcements	ANGOC
07:00	Welcome dinner	Participants

Day 1/24 March 2025/Monday

Time	Session	Description	In-charge
08:45 AM	Registration		ANGOC, Participants
09:00	Opening session		
09:00	Welcome remarks		Joy Demaluan, NLC-Philippines
09:05	Remarks		Anu Verma, ILC-Asia RCU Juliana Rossi de Camargo, Rainforest Trust
09:15	Objectives and flow of learning event	Background, objectives, and flow of activities	Nathaniel Don Marquez, ANGOC
09:35	Group Photo		Participants
09:50	Coffee/Tea Break		

Time	Session	Description	In-charge
10:20	Session 1: Promoting greater understanding of the nexus and interdependence of land rights and biodiversity		
10:20	Land rights, land use and biodiversity	Framing the link and debates between land rights and biodiversity	Antonio Quizon, ANGOC
10:45	"Unpacking Global Biodiversity Frameworks: Pathways to Empower Community Land Rights and Ecosystem Resilience"	Enhance understanding of key global biodiversity frameworks and their role in supporting land rights, highlighting the intrinsic link between biodiversity conservation and community land tenure in Asia	Enrique Nuñez, ILC
11:10	Key takeaways of Convention of Biological Diversity (COP 16)	Update on the Parties' review the state of implementation of the KMGBF and alignment of NBSAPs with the Framework	Cindy Julianty, ICCA Consortium SEA (recorded video presentation) Lakpa Nuri Sherpa, AIPP (recorded video presentation)
11:40	Plenary discussion		Moderator: Roel Ravanera, XSF
12:00 NOON	Lunch		
01:30 PM	Session 2: Global frameworks to local actions		
01:30	The state of NBSAPs in Asia	Awareness, status, key challenges, opportunities for CSO engagement	Moderator: Nathaniel Don Marquez, ANGOC Panelists: • Pranab Choudhury, Landstack, India • Ahmad Jaetuloh, SAINS, Indonesia • Ricklend Gryst Bin Christopher, PACOS, Malaysia • Sarita Kumari Lama, NLC-Nepal • Roel Ravanera, XSF, Philippines • Renuka Pradabphuthong, NIPT, Thailand
02:30	Plenary discussion		Moderator: Nathaniel Don Marquez, ANGOC
02:50	Panel discussion on the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (PBSAP)	Drawing inspiration from the experience of the Philippines, the panelists will reflect on the lessons and challenges in localizing the PBSAP (panel cum talk show format)	Moderators: Nathaniel Don Marquez and Roel Ravanera Panelists: • Angie Lou Alcantara and Jeffrey Mesias, DENR-BMB • Giovanni Reyes, Philippine ICCA Consortium (IPs)

Time	Session	Description	In-charge
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dennis Calvan, RARE, (Fisherfolk) • Marie Joy Demaluan, NLC-Philippines (Farmers) • Pablo Paet, Jr., TWG of IPMR, Nueva Vizcaya
03:20	Plenary discussion		
03:40	Coffee/Tea Break		
04:00	Challenges and opportunities for engaging women and youth in biodiversity conservation and resilience work		<p>Moderator: Dewi Kartika, KPA</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dayoon Kim, SEI • Sarita Kumari Lama, NLC-Nepal • Asami Segundo IKAYO • Rolly Caballero, LGU of Tubajon, Dinagat Islands
04:40	Announcements		ANGOC
05:00	End of Day 1		

Day 2/25 March 2025/Tuesday

Time	Session	Description	In-charge
09:00 AM	Overview of Day 2	Recap of and reflections on Day 1	Lanz Espacio, NLC-Philippines
		Introduction to Day 2, announcements	Nathaniel Don Marquez, ANGOC
09:15	Session 3: Biodiversity conservation initiatives and their contributions in meeting the global and national biodiversity targets		
09:20	Local conservation area (watershed and forest conservation)		Anthony Marzan, KAISAHAN
09:30	Marine protected area as a local fisherfolk-led conservation		Dennis Calvan, RARE Philippines
09:40	Payment for Ecosystem Services		Thieza Verdijo, XSF

Time	Session	Description	In-charge
09:50	Indigenous and community conserved area		Zhinal Kinoc, PAFID
10:00	Question and Answer		
10:15	Coffee/Tea Break		
10:30	Customary forest protection		Rahmat Sulaiman, JKPP
10:40	Role of local community in maintaining the values of biodiversity		Dr. Ngo Van Hong, LANDA
10:50	Community forestry		Chetana Nand Jha, FES
11:00	Question and answer		Moderator: Anu Verma, ILC Asia RCU
11:10	Community stewardship: An innovative and non-market strategy for inclusive and impactful Climate Finance		Pranab Choudhury, Landstack
11:25	Rainforest Trust's program for community-led biodiversity initiatives		Juliana Rossi de Camargo, Rainforest Trust
11:35	Question and answer		Moderator: Anu Verma, ILC Asia RCU
12:00 Noon	Lunch		
01:30 PM	Session 4: Knowledge and skills sharing on frameworks and tools on conservation		
01:30	Unlocking impact: Exploring conservation frameworks for sustainable agriculture		Moderator: Nikka Rivera, AFA Input: Marianne Saniano, WCS
02:30	Question and answer		Moderator: Nikka Rivera, AFA
02:50	Documenting ICCAs	Conservation planning, governance	Moderator: Nikka Rivera, AFA Input: Dave de Vera, PAFID
03:50	Question and answer		Moderator: Nikka Rivera,
04:10	Coffee/Tea Break		
04:25	Measuring biodiversity		Moderator: Roel Ravanera
04:25	Indicators in measuring biodiversity		Input: Dr. Lisa Paguntalan-Marte, PhilBio

Time	Session	Description	In-charge
04:55	Human well-being indicators in OECMs and ICCAs		Input: Femy Pinto, NTFP-EP
05:25	Question and Answer		Moderator: Roel Ravanera
05:45	Overview of community visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of communities visits • “Do’s and Don’ts” 	Dave de Vera and Ricky Nuñez
06:00	Announcements, End of Day 2		ANGOC

Day 3/26 March 2025/Wednesday

Time	Session	Description	In-charge
08:00 AM	Travel to communities	Community 1: Ancestral Domain of the Aeta Magbubukun – An ICCA in Kanawan, Bataan	Local facilitator: Dave de Vera Documentor: Claire Demaisip, KAISAHAN
		Community 2: Joint Management Agreement of Forest Ecozone between Aeta Ambala in Pastolan, Bataan	Local facilitator: Giovanni Reyes Documentor: Melissa Bolitres, PAKISAMA
		Community 3: Pawikan Conservation Center, Nagbalayong, Kanawan, Morong, Bataan	Local facilitator: Enrique Nuñez Documentors: Jerome Dumlao, ANGOC and Angelica Paller, PAKISAMA
09:00	Community visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrival in area • Introduction, overview of host community • Transect walk to area • Dialogue with community members • Lunch • Reflection 	
01:00 PM	Return to hotel		
03:00	Closing Session		
03:00	Recap of Day 2		Lanz Espacio, NLC-Philippines
03:10	Key take-aways from the community visits	One presenter per site visit group	Moderator: Nathaniel Don Marquez
03:25	Ways forward and opportunities for partnerships	One representative per country	
04:30	Closing remarks from organizers	NLC-Philippines, KAISAHAN, PAFID, ILC-RCU, ANGOC	
07:30	Dinner and solidarity night		



**RAINFOREST
TRUST**

Rainforest Trust is a US-based nonprofit environmental organization focused on the purchase and protection of tropical lands to strategically conserve threatened species. Its mission is to save endangered wildlife and protect our planet by creating rainforest reserves through partnerships, community engagement and donor support.



WCS Philippines
A Wildlife Conservation Society Program

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt charitable organization. WCS's goal is to conserve the world's largest wild places in 14 priority regions, habitat for around 50 percent of the world's biodiversity and a wide range of charismatic megafauna.



The Philippines' Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is the primary agency responsible for the conservation, management, development, and proper use of the country's environment and natural resources, specifically forest and grazing lands, mineral resources, including those in reservation and watershed areas, and lands of the public domain, as well as the licensing and regulation of all natural resources as may be provided for by law in order to ensure equitable sharing of the benefits derived therefrom for the welfare of the present and future generations of Filipinos.



The DENR's Biodiversity Management Bureau (DENR-BMB) aims to conserve and sustainably manage the country's biodiversity. Towards this end, the Bureau shall prevent species extinction; strengthen the implementation of NIPAS and foster other effective area-based conservation measures; promote biodiversity-friendly practices; and, mainstream biodiversity across local, sectoral and national development plans and programs.



The Global Environment Facility (GEF) includes several multilateral funds working together to address the planet's most pressing challenges in an integrated way. Its financing helps developing countries address complex challenges and work towards meeting international environmental goals. Over the past three decades, the GEF has provided more than USD26 billion in financing, primarily as grants, and mobilized another USD148 billion for country-driven priority projects.



The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is a United Nations agency tasked with helping countries eliminate poverty and achieve sustainable economic growth and human development. The UNDP emphasizes on developing local capacity towards long-term self-sufficiency and prosperity.

This publication features the highlights of *Harnessing Biodiversity through Enhanced Land Rights of Communities: A Learning Exchange*. The initiative brought together diverse stakeholders from the Philippines and CSO partners in six Asian countries to explore the vital connection between land tenure security and biodiversity conservation. Held in Subic, Philippines from 24 to 26 March 2025, this exchange facilitated meaningful discourses on localizing biodiversity frameworks, strengthening indigenous and community-led conservation efforts, and advancing policy mechanisms that integrate land rights into sustainable environmental stewardship. Participants likewise shared practical tools, experiences, and strategies towards inclusive biodiversity governance and empowering communities as custodians of their ecosystems.

