



**iNCLUSIVE**  
**CONSERVATION**  
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# **SPEARHEADING INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION**

**Phase One Report**



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CONSERVATION  
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# SPEARHEADING INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION

## Phase One Report

December 2019 ideation to June 2023  
impact strategy development in review

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We dedicate our work through the Inclusive Conservation Initiative, and this report, to Gustavo A. B. da Fonseca, GEF's long-standing Director of Programs, who passed away in August 2022. Gustavo, a leading figure in the world of conservation for more than 30 years, was an ardent supporter and friend of Indigenous peoples and their role in the protection of the planet. He was instrumental in the development of the GEF Principles and Guidelines for Engagement with Indigenous Peoples and the establishment of the GEF Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG) to enhance global coordination between the GEF and Indigenous peoples.



# ABOUT THE INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

In 2019, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) decided to pilot a new initiative for increased access of financing to Indigenous and local community organizations to conserve biodiversity, deliver multiple global environmental benefits (GEBs) and support related cultural and economic development initiatives.

A part of the GEF-7 Programming Directions Strategy’s Biodiversity focal area, the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) was endorsed in January 2022 and is built upon the principle that inclusive conservation requires that Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPs and LCs) are the main authors and implementers. At the same time, the project does not aim to define the concept of inclusive conservation and recognizes that this is also determined by IPs and LCs. With over US\$ 22.5 million invested in project financing and over US\$ 90 million of expected co-financing, ICI is designed to support the leadership of IPs and LCs in stewarding lands, waters and natural resources. By combining substantial investments in specific locations, with support to magnify local results through global capacity building, policy influence, and demonstration of large-scale impacts, ICI will catalyze the transformational changes needed to secure and enhance support for the contributions of IPs and LCs to biodiversity and other global environmental benefits.

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**We cannot talk about environmental stewardship without recognizing and supporting the role of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs and LCs) as stewards of biodiversity and nature. Representing 5% of the world's population, they manage over 20% of the Earth's territory, meaning that there is no sustainable solution to the global environmental crisis without the full participation of IPs and LCs. Since Indigenous peoples' long-standing leadership as protectors of the environment needs to be supported, invested in, and scaled up, the GEF takes bold decisions to 'walk the talk'.**

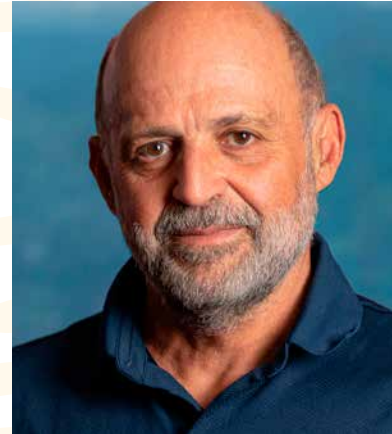
The GEF is committed to supporting Indigenous leadership in conservation through the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI), comprising 10 Indigenous-led initiatives in nine geographies across the world where IPs and LCs are taking action to protect and restore biodiversity in diverse ecosystems all around the world.

Phase one of ICI, summarized in this report, has continued to chart the course for a more inclusive GEF and more inclusive conservation. During the inception phase, ICI engaged over 200 stakeholders, started mobilizing GEF finance, and has been working in partnership with Indigenous-led organizations to design their impact strategies and kick-start their projects. Demonstrating that supporting IPs and LCs is an efficient and effective approach to the conservation needed to reach various global goals, the initiatives supported by ICI will improve a combined 7.6 million hectares of landscapes and seascapes with high biodiversity that three million Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities members call home. This is just the beginning, and much more is needed to support, enhance and invest in Indigenous-led conservation for the protection of the planet.

Earlier this year, the GEF Council approved our plans for the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) that will finance the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. One of the areas of the programming directions for the GBFF focuses on support for Indigenous-led stewardship of lands and territories, and the GEF's implementation of this area will build on the lessons we have already learned from the ICI. The creation of the new fund is a game-changer for countries' ability to protect, restore, and ensure the sustainable use of nature, and the approach of ICI is a game-changer for conservation.

To move from agreement to action, governments, funders and NGOs alike need to move to more inclusive conservation models that support IPs and LCs' leadership to continue to steward biodiversity. This means respect and recognition for Indigenous rights over lands and territories, access to financial and technical resources to manage their natural resources and value traditional knowledge. The new fund will provide an opportunity to receive funding from different sources and disburse it with enhanced access for IPs and LCs.

I firmly believe the GEF must provide more and better direct access to financing to women, youth and Indigenous peoples. ICI demonstrates a new way of working with civil society. My hope is that this approach and focus can be learned from, replicated and scaled-up.



## FOREWORD

**by Carlos  
Manuel Rodríguez,  
CEO and Chairperson,  
Global Environment  
Facility (GEF)**



## FOREWORD

**by Lucy Mullenkei,  
Chair, Indigenous Peoples  
Advisory Group (IPAG)**

**Indigenous peoples worldwide have faced many challenges which have made us look beyond our traditional perspectives. Climate change, increases in population, encroachment on our lands and territories, conflicts, natural disasters and environmental degradation all pose significant challenges for Indigenous Peoples. These have taught us along the way that protection and transmission of our knowledge is essential in protecting our lands, waters, cultures, values and traditions, which are continually at risk from both development and investment activities.**

Despite many struggles, as Indigenous peoples, we are not accessing financing to help us restore our lands, while protecting and conserving our natural resources. Obtaining funding from global environmental funding mechanisms, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), has not been easy, but we have taken a journey which finally brought us to an opened door. It is in this door that the GEF Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG) was established almost 15 years ago. We started to walk a very different path, with open dialogue and discussions to better understand the GEF, and to help the GEF understand us.

Walking this path together has been very positive and fruitful. Together, we were able to identify the main challenges facing Indigenous-led conservation. Also, strengthening Indigenous peoples access to financing, capacity building and key partnerships have brought us together to build a global family with focused goals on conservation from an Indigenous perspective.

Throughout our years at IPAG, we tirelessly advocated for more inclusive funding at GEF Council Meetings. I celebrate that our journey together has led to the approval and endorsement of the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI). The presentation of proposals to ICI demonstrated that there is an urgent need for funding for Indigenous peoples, with over 400 applications received.

Through ICI, we were able to provide almost US \$25 million to Indigenous peoples to support 10 projects in nine very different ecosystems. A milestone that has motivated us as IPAG members. To us, we are not stopping, we are just beginning. We challenge ICI partners to keep consultation, collaboration and conversations open, as they have been throughout the process so far, to make the ICI partnership even stronger and guarantee a second phase.

We commend the ICI team on the work done so far and challenge them to continue to work towards more direct funding access for Indigenous peoples. As ICI continues its implementation, IPAG will continue to support such initiatives, and continue to remind governments to recognize us, recognize our lands and our rights.

With the recent approval of the new global biodiversity fund to support the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework, we look forward to continuing working together with the GEF and partners to ensure that people understand Indigenous peoples and our issues, and that inclusive conservation can continue to be supported and expanded to ensure benefits, from the global to the local level, ensuring that everyone of us embrace living in harmony with nature.



# ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) began its first phase in December 2019 through to June 2023. During this phase, ICI undertook the project site selection process, inception and impact strategy development, building important learnings on the adaptations and challenges to increasing the access of biodiversity finance to Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPs and LCs). This report reviews the design and development of ICI from the period of December 2019 to January 2022 and provides an overview of the progress in 2022 to mid-2023 to establish the project, set up the project, documenting the lessons learned and challenges that emerged – as well as the innovations and adaptations needed to inform and drive improved inclusive conservation finance.



## Context

There is a continually growing information and evidence base which points to the effectiveness of IPs and LCs in protecting biodiversity, while generating diverse benefits for people and nature. Yet, IP and LC access to finance has remained limited. In recent years, commitments to address these gaps have increased. In 2021, at the 26<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP) for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), several governments and private funders pledged US\$ 1.7 billion in support of Indigenous and local communities’ tenure rights in recognition of their global contributions to climate change mitigation – committing to delivering funds directly to communities while ensuring decision-making and design roles in the creation of climate it’s programme in IUCN style and finance instruments ([Ford Foundation, 2021](#)). At the closing of the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in December 2022, the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was established, wherein 17 of 23 Targets specifically relate to and mention IPs and LCs.<sup>2</sup> There has never been a higher level of combined global commitments that place IP and LC rights at the forefront of conservation – and urgent finance and implementation is vital.

## The moment to review learning is now

Amidst these discussions, negotiations and agreements, it is high time to ensure key barriers and opportunities for increasing inclusive conservation finance to IPs and LCs are addressed. Recent assessments estimate that only 7% of the US\$ 1.7 billion in pledged funding is going directly to Indigenous groups ([Forest Tenure Funders Group, 2022](#)). In fact, as evidence mounts on the potential of IPs and LCs in improving conservation, the

funding landscape has not changed much, remaining stable from year-to-year – even though the volume of commitments has increased (Owen, 2023). In total, donors have directed less than 1% of climate change mitigation and adaptation funding to IPs and LCs (Owen, 2023). If the globe seeks to realize the rights and priorities of IPs and LCs, significant scaling is needed.

At COP-15, to spur the implementation of the GBF, Parties requested the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to establish a Global Biological Framework Fund (GBFF), which was approved by the governing body at the 64th GEF Council Meeting that took place in Brasilia, Brazil, on 26–29 June 2023. The fund will be launched at the upcoming 7th GEF Assembly in August 2023, which will take place in Vancouver, Canada, during which Canadian First Nations and Indigenous Peoples will play a key role in supporting the Assembly’s emphasis on IP and LC rights and priorities. Later this year, the UNFCCC COP-28 will conduct a Global Stocktake, reviewing progress to date on Paris Agreement pledges, and advance discussions about the historic COP-27 decision to create a Loss and Damage (L&D) fund to support vulnerable communities hit hardest by climate change ([UNFCCC, 2022](#)). IPs and LCs, severely impacted by climate change and environmental degradation, have long advocated for L&D but have had few opportunities to engage with decision makers.

If these multilateral funds are to invest resources in the most effective conservation approaches, while promoting human rights, there is much ground to cover. To date, in Latin America, for example, although national and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) implement 26% of disbursements, 41% of all funding are ascribed to Indigenous peoples’ organizations, indicating that local efforts are currently the central source of conservation funding (Owen, 2023).

<sup>1</sup> In an analysis by IIFB, the following targets of the GBF specifically address Indigenous peoples: Targets 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22 and 23.





As such, there is a significant need to accelerate inclusive and more direct finance to IPs and LCs. The first-year achievements and challenges in this report offer important lessons and insights on how multilateral finance can improve efficacy in reaching IPs and LCs.

## How this report is organized: a foundation of Indigenous values

As Indigenous values form the foundations of ICI, this report is organized around key values and principles of Indigenous and local communities, as recommended by initiative leaders during ICI's orientation period, and how ICI should advance and exemplify each principle in its activities. The following themes emerged as areas of consensus:

- Self-determined initiative and programming governance is the foundation of a rights-based approach to inclusive conservation – by strengthening self-determination, building a collaborative family across IP and LC organizations based on mutual respect and reciprocity, and driving IP- and LC-led project governance – that emphasizes a dialogue based on the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), as well as a full and effective consultation and decision making by consensus – will build unity within cultural diversity.
- Respect for nature is the basis for everything – and support to IPs and LCs to dismantle the barriers they face in its protection should be the core of ICI's contributions. By increasing access to finance,

supporting Indigenous stewardship of territories they inhabit and administer, and strengthening relationships with governments and civil society to support IPs and LCs can build harmony between human beings, Mother Nature and the cosmos.

- Traditional and local knowledge is recognized, supported and scaled globally as cultural conservation tools. Although there is a consensus that IPs and LCs are effective stewards and protectors of nature, their knowledge is frequently under-recognized and under-valued. Driving a paradigm shift will require the upscaling of effective local practices at global levels in a way that not only respects indigenous timeframes, models and worldview systems that consider nature beyond its economic value, but also respects the intellectual property of Indigenous science and ensures its transmission to future generations.
- The creation of a global community that respects FPIC, recognizes the synergy between Indigenous lifestyles and conservation goals, and supports IP and LC leadership, requiring policy change at national and global levels.

Each section of this Phase One Report is organized around these principles, demonstrating the achievements, adaptations, lessons learned and challenges in driving efforts towards inclusive conservation. Indigenous peoples, local communities, governments and conservation finance, all have much to learn from one another to change business-as-usual practices. This will enable our joint pursuit of collective and rights-based approaches to safeguard nature for all peoples.

# ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>AGM</b>	Accountability and grievance mechanism	<b>IPCC</b>	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
<b>ANAPAC</b>	Association Nationale d'Appui et de Promotion des Aires du Patrimoine Autochtone et Communautaire en République démocratique du Congo	<b>IPA</b>	Indigenous Protected Area
<b>CBD</b>	Convention on Biological Diversity	<b>IPs &amp; LCs</b>	Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities
<b>CI</b>	Conservation International	<b>IPO</b>	Indigenous peoples organization
<b>CITES</b>	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species	<b>ISC</b>	Interim Steering Committee
<b>CMS</b>	Convention on Migratory Species	<b>IUCN</b>	International Union for Conservation of Nature
<b>CO<sub>2</sub></b>	Carbon dioxide	<b>IWBN</b>	Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network
<b>CO<sub>2</sub>e</b>	Carbon dioxide equivalent	<b>KBA</b>	Key Biodiversity Area
<b>COP</b>	Conference of the Parties	<b>km</b>	Kilometer
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease 2019	<b>km<sup>2</sup></b>	Square kilometer
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization	<b>LCIPP</b>	UNFCCC Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo	<b>L&amp;D</b>	Loss and Damage
<b>EOI</b>	Expression of interest	<b>LINKS</b>	Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems programme
<b>ESMF</b>	Environmental and Social Management Framework	<b>Mt</b>	Metric tonne
<b>ESMS</b>	Environmental and Social Management System	<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and evaluation
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	<b>NAP</b>	National Adaptation Plan
<b>FPIC</b>	Free, Prior and Informed Consent	<b>NBSAP</b>	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan
<b>GEB</b>	Global Environmental Benefits	<b>NDC</b>	Nationally Determined Contribution
<b>GEF</b>	Global Environment Facility	<b>NGO</b>	Non-government Organization
<b>ha</b>	Hectares	<b>PA</b>	Protected Area
<b>ICCA</b>	Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas	<b>PMU</b>	Project Management Unit
<b>ICI</b>	Inclusive Conservation Initiative	<b>SC</b>	Steering Committee
<b>IMPACT</b>	Indigenous Movement for Peace, Advancement and Conflict Transformation	<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>IPAG</b>	Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group	<b>UNCCD</b>	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
		<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change



# FROM IDEATION TO START-UP BUILDING INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION



The Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) is built upon the principle that inclusive conservation requires the governance and leadership of Indigenous and local communities—who self-determine concepts of inclusive conservation—acting as the main authors and implementors of conservation finance investments.

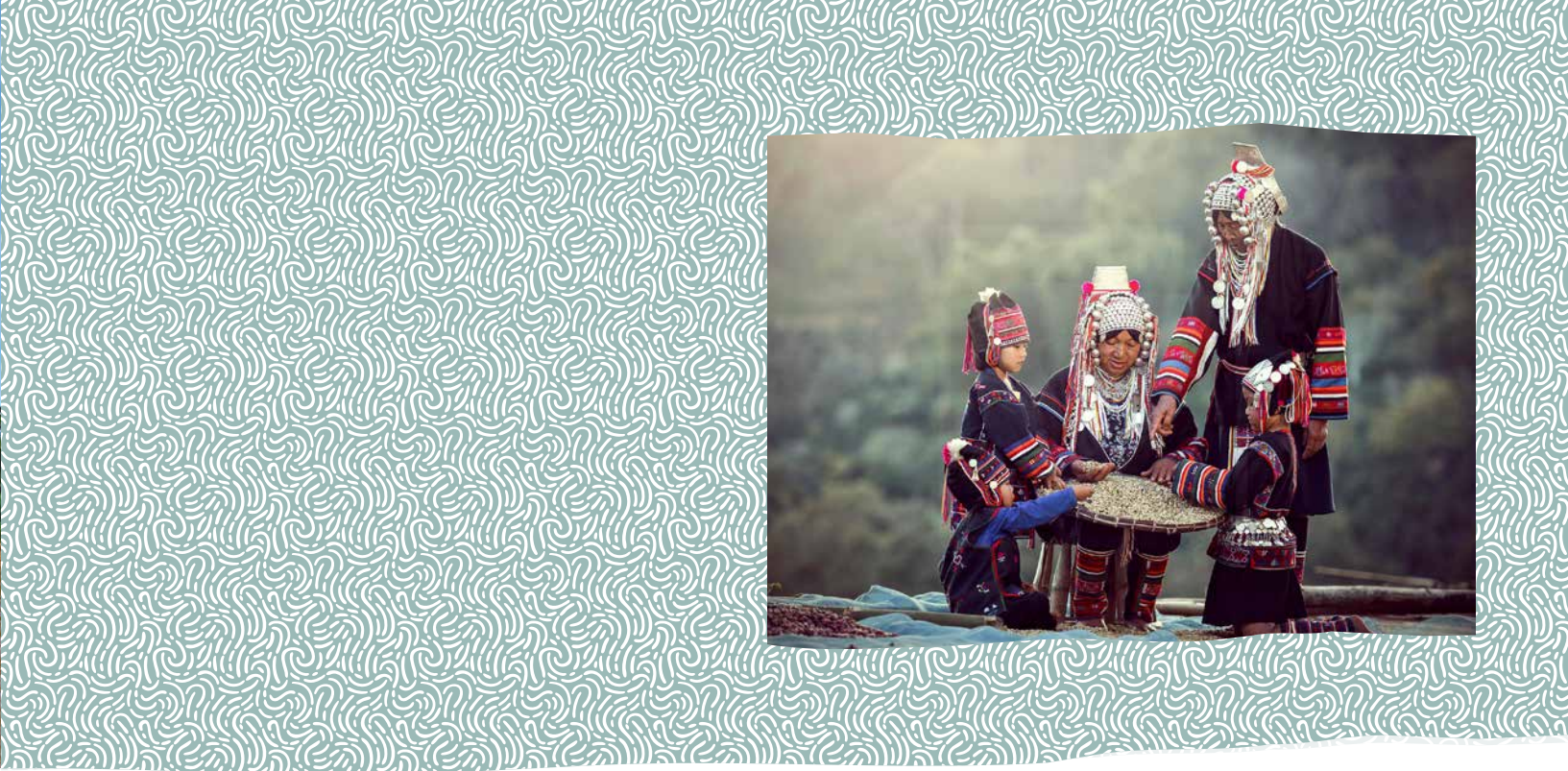
With over US\$ 22.5 million invested by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) into project financing, ICI is uniquely designed and led by IPs and LCs in a collaborative effort with Conservation International (CI) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as GEF Project Agencies. Endorsed by the GEF in January 2022, ICI provides inclusive financing at-scale to Indigenous and Local Community organizations to enhance the leadership of IPs and LCs and support scaling their stewardship of high-biodiversity lands, waters and natural resources to deliver global environmental benefits (GEBs), while promoting related cultural and economic development initiatives.

## Why inclusive conservation matters

Indigenous peoples own or manage an estimated 25% of the world's land surface, including 40% of terrestrial protected areas and 37% of ecologically intact landscapes (Garnett et al., 2018). It is estimated that over a third of the world's remaining irrecoverable carbon is managed by Indigenous peoples and local communities (Noon et al., 2022). Studies indicate the connection between linguistic and biological diversity in biodiversity hotspots and high biodiversity wilderness areas (Gorenflo et al., 2012).

Indigenous and community stewardship of lands and waters conserves biodiversity, sequesters carbon, supplies local livelihoods benefits and sustains cultures and traditional knowledge proven to effectively maintain both local and GEBs. A review of the experience from 14 forest-rich countries around the world concluded that the lands of IPs and LCs with recognized forest rights and government protection of those rights have lower deforestation, and correspondingly lower carbon emissions than surrounding areas (Stevens et al., 2014). Several studies have found that Indigenous land management has equal or greater impacts on reducing deforestation than state managed protected areas (Baragwanath et al., 2020; Nelson et al., 2011). The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on





Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment highlights that IPs and LCs are often better able to contribute knowledge on local biodiversity and environmental changes than scientists as well as the important and differentiated contributions of IP and LC women and men to biodiversity conservation at multiple levels (IPBES, 2019). The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report also emphasized that climate decision-making is enhanced by the inclusion of groups including women and IPs and LCs (IPCC, 2019).

Nature managed by IPs and LCs is under increasing pressure, including from resource extraction, commodity production, mining and transport and energy infrastructure. The IPBES Global Assessment documents that, while nature is generally declining less rapidly in IP and LC lands than on other lands, it is declining there as well. The negative impacts of these pressures include continued loss of subsistence and traditional livelihoods, impacts on health and well-being and loss of economic development opportunities from the sustainable use of natural resources. These impacts also impede traditional management practices, transmission of Indigenous and local knowledge, and the ability of IPs and LCs to effectively manage natural resources that are relevant to the broader society (Nelson & Chomitz, 2011).

IPs and LCs are also experiencing increasing violence and harassment as they seek to defend their lands

and environments in the face of these threats (Global Witness, 2022). Furthermore, national, regional and global decision-making processes continue to lack sufficient pathways for full and effective participation of IPs and LCs, resulting in decisions, policies, laws, strategies and programs that do not take their priorities or perspectives into account – severely undermining their conservation abilities.

Financing to IPs and LCs likewise fall short. For example, prior to ICI's establishment, an evaluation of GEF engagement with Indigenous peoples showed that most project executions are being conducted by globally accredited institutions, where two-thirds show 'limited' or 'moderate' involvement. Projects significantly driven by Indigenous peoples are in the minority.

A key ambition of ICI is therefore to also encourage other funders and governments to take note of ICI's lessons learned on how business-as-usual can and must be adjusted to adopt inclusive approaches that incorporate IP and LC leadership, innovation and governance. ICI contributes both on-the-ground and global experience and knowledge that supports IPs and LCs in defining and demonstrating what an inclusive model for conservation can look like – altogether helping the globe reimagine conservation at all levels.

# Designing pillars towards inclusive finance

As a pilot initiative, ICI provides resources, enhances capacities and supports 'hands-on' experiential learning that will support the recognition and empowerment of IPs and LCs as decision makers and key actors in conservation. From local action on the ground, to national policies that impact their rights, to global fora that define conservation and sustainable development targets and approaches for environmental action – ICI will demonstrate how inclusive collaboration and financing can turn the tide against biodiversity degradation, while improving GEBs, cultural preservation and sustainable economic growth and development. To accomplish these objectives, ICI is divided into four components:

- 1. Enhancement of IP- and LC-led environmental results:** invest directly in 10 Indigenous-led initiatives that deliver GEBs.
- 2. Strengthening of institutional capacities:** support IPs and LCs to strengthen and scale impact towards improved management of lands, territories, waters and natural resources, and increased access to public and long-term sustainable financing mechanisms.

- 3. Increased international policy influence:** build a pathway from local action to global impact through targeted IP and LC engagement in international environmental policy and relevant international platforms.
- 4. Amplifying knowledge to action:** expand support and advance the field of IP- and LC-led conservation by generating and disseminating ICI learning and results.

## Creating ICI

In 2018, the GEF Independent Evaluation Office published a report of GEF's engagement with Indigenous peoples, with the aim of making recommendations for GEF-7 programming.<sup>2</sup> Highlighting systemic challenges and operational constraints to increased IP engagement, the report was also informed by inputs from the GEF Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG). The resulting recommendation centered on the creation of a dedicated fund outside of the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) system, which led to the inclusion of ICI as a Programming Direction for Focal Area investment within the GEF-7 Biodiversity Focal Area.

<sup>2</sup> For further information, please see: <https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/documents/evaluations/indigenous-peoples-2017.pdf>



"

**ICI means leaving no one behind when it comes to conservation. It means IPs and LCs are an integral part of the conservation that this project takes into account and promotes. ICI is about IP and LC's contribution to conservation and how these efforts can be boosted.**

"

— **PAINE MAIKKO**, DIRECTOR, UJAMAA  
COMMUNITY RESOURCE TEAM (UCRT)

In mid-2019, the GEF launched a request for proposals from partner GEF agencies, where CI and IUCN were selected as the accredited agencies to support the GEF-7 Inclusive Conservation Initiative. During the Project Identification Form (PIF) stage, a set of Candidate Geographical Regions was identified, in consultation with the GEF IPAG and GEF Secretariat. These regions provided the scope of eligibility for a call for sub-project Indigenous-led initiative expressions of interest (EOI) during the project document (ProDoc) preparation. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, ICI received more than 400 EOIs from 80 countries. The high quality and value of each demonstrates the significant demand from IPs and LCs for inclusive finance models and direct access to climate and biodiversity finance. After an initial screening process, 140 EOIs were assessed by a Technical Review Committee of 35 experts, which comprised a balance of Indigenous leaders and broader biodiversity experts. In the project preparation grant (PPG) phase, the resulting shortlist was analyzed by the ICI Indigenous Interim Steering Committee, which agreed on nine pre-selected ICI investments,<sup>3</sup> ensuring a balanced geographical scope, levels of investment, cultural diversity and delivery of GEBs across the portfolio.

These areas relate to: seven Global Biodiversity Hotspots and one High Biodiversity Wilderness Area; 35 Important Bird Areas; 29 Key Biodiversity Areas; and four World Heritage Sites and five Biosphere Reserves. Located in

<sup>3</sup> One investment was later divided into two initiatives to account for national borders.

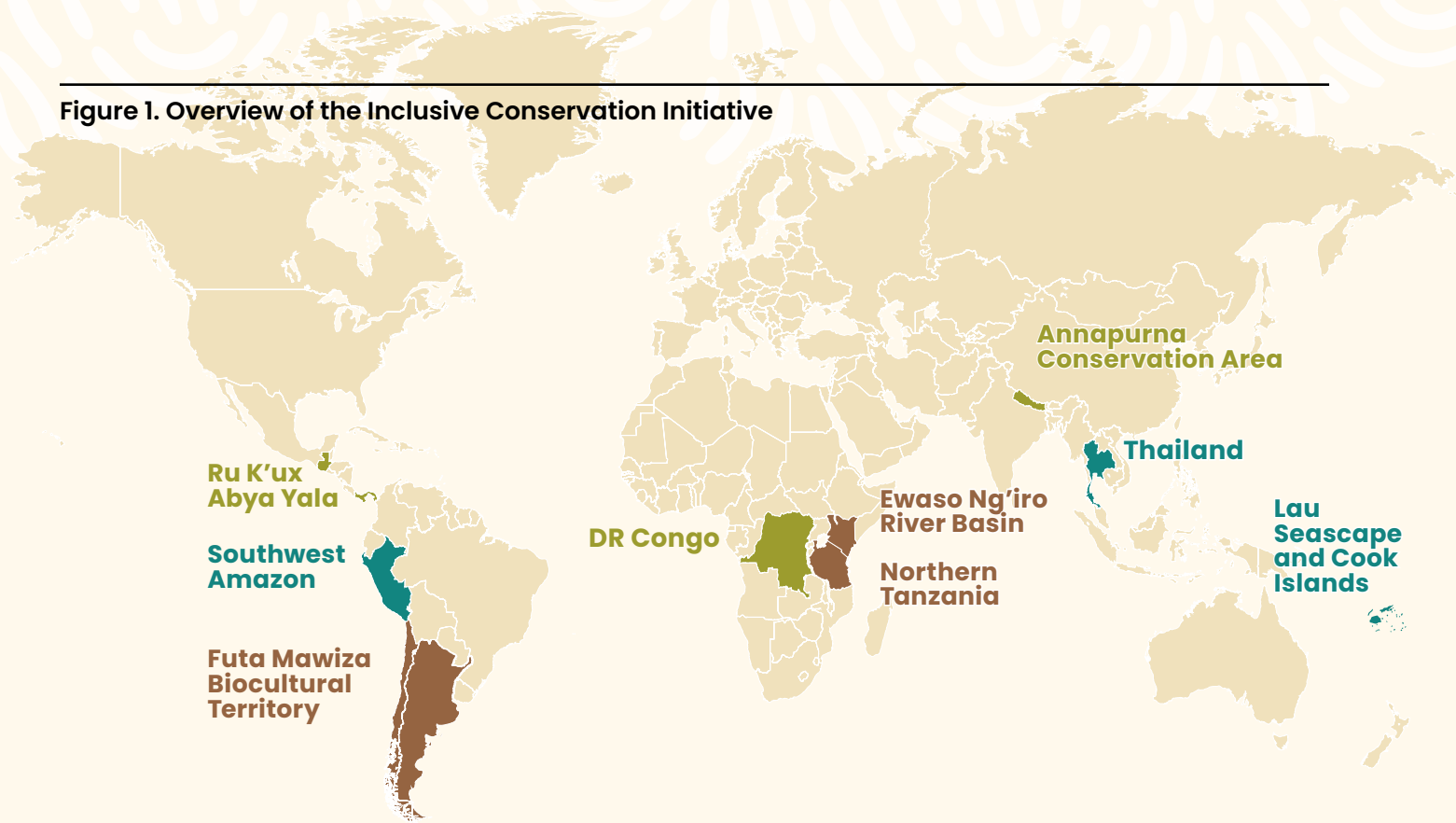
12 countries, collectively, these initiative sites are home to more than three million people from 40 Indigenous groups. Depending on the sub-project, economic activities of people in the sub-project Indigenous-led initiative areas include: farming, agroforestry and livestock; fishing and hunting; and ecotourism and livelihoods based on non-timber forest products. Together, IPs and LCs will enhance their stewardship of at least 7.5 million ha of landscapes, seascapes and/or territories with high biodiversity and irreplaceable ecosystems.

## Building inclusive conservation together: the ICI team





As GEF project agencies, CI and IUCN jointly support ICI Indigenous-led initiatives through a Project Management Unit (PMU), bringing decades of collective experience working with IPs and LCs, as well as local, regional and global expertise, on implementing multilaterally funded conservation action. Both organizations are working alongside IPs and LCs, their regional and local organizations, governments, NGOs, civil society and others to strengthen IP and LC leadership in conserving globally significant biodiversity and steward natural resources. Together, CI and IUCN provide project assurance and support project implementation by maintaining oversight of all technical and financial management aspects. They also monitor project outputs and manage fiduciary compliance of GEF funds.



Figure 1. Overview of the Inclusive Conservation Initiative



### Box 1. The ICI Team Executing Agencies

 <b>Futa Mawiza Biocultural Territory (Argentina)</b> Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (FARN), Confederación Mapuche de Neuquén, Observatorio de Derechos Humanos de Pueblos Indígenas	 <b>Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin (Kenya)</b> Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT)	 <b>Thailand</b> Indigenous Peoples' Foundation for Education and Environment (IPF)
 <b>Futa Mawiza Biocultural Territory (Chile)</b> Observatorio Ciudadano, Parlamento de Koz Koz, Mesa Txawun Winkulmapu	 <b>Democratic Republic of the Congo</b> Association Nationale d'Appui et de Promotion des Aires du Patrimoine Autochtone et Communautaire en République démocratique du Congo (ANAPAC)	 <b>Lau Seascape and Cook Islands</b> House of Ariki – Cook Islands The Bose Vanua o Lau – Fiji
 <b>Northern Tanzania</b> Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT)	 <b>Annapurna Conservation Area (Nepal)</b> Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN)	 <b>Southwest Amazon (Peru)</b> Federación Nativa del Río Madre de Dios y Afluentes (FENAMAD)

## Indigenous-led initiatives

ICI is an important step forward for IPs and LCs to secure and enhance their stewardship over an estimated area of 7.6 million ha of landscapes and seascapes with high biodiversity and irreplaceable ecosystems. Within nine geographies in 12 countries, an Indigenous-led initiative is working in consortium with partners to steward areas of high-biodiversity land under traditional governance systems managed by IPs and LCs (which may or may not have formal legal recognition). These territories include large areas of tropical forest, as well as mountain, temperate and boreal forests, drylands and grasslands, and coastal and marine ecosystems. Recognizing the continuing historical role of Indigenous peoples and Local Communities in safeguarding natural ecosystems, ICI is providing direct financial support to 10 Indigenous and locally led initiatives in Africa, Central and South America, and Asia and the Pacific:



### (Kenya) Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin

Through ICI, the Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT) works with Indigenous communities to document and seek recognition for the Upper Ewaso Territory River Basin as a Territory of Life. It is an area that supports more than 3.5 million people across 10 counties, whose majority are Indigenous pastoralists communities. IMPACT aims to restore, preserve, and promote traditional governance systems, as well as Indigenous knowledge and practices, secure Indigenous rights to land and natural resources, restore sacred sites and totems, and preserve Indigenous languages. It also seeks to foster inter-generational dialogues and gender inclusion.



### (Chile) Futa Mawiza Biocultural Territory

Similarly, an alliance of organizations in Chile is working towards the enhancement of the management and governance of their territories based on the Mapuche cosmovision, territorial planning to strengthen the management and governance of the Futa Mawiza Biocultural Territory, as well as the establishment of a Kimeluwün (school of knowledge) for the rescue, exchange and strengthening of the knowledge and practices of the Mapuche people. Efforts are also made to communicate internally and externally the process of the Futa Mawiza Initiative and make visible its achievements and contributions to the protection of the territory.



### (Argentina) Futa Mawiza Biocultural Territory

In the Andean Cordillera, an alliance of organizations dedicates its work to safeguarding the governance of the Futa Mawiza through a process of self-strengthening based on the Mapuche cosmovision, knowledge and traditional practices for the full exercise of Indigenous collective rights. Activities include territorial analysis and planning to strengthen the management and governance of the Futa Mawiza Biocultural Territory, promoting the kúme felen (collective well-being), advocacy for culturally appropriate recognition and support for the territory, exchanges on Mapuche knowledge and practices, and strengthening the role of the Mapuche traditional authorities and territorial leaders.





**(Tanzania)**  
**Northern Tanzania rangelands**

Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT) is working, through ICI, in northern Tanzania, a globally significant ecological system of rangelands extending south and east of the Greater Serengeti-Ngorongoro that supports a rich diversity of wildlife and people. UCRT’s goals are to: legally secure communal village lands for Indigenous communities in three key biodiverse landscapes through participatory land-use planning and land tenure mechanisms; train and coach village councils and natural resource committees to sustainably manage rangeland and forest resources through Indigenous governing structures; and develop sustainable natural resource-based income-generating activities. The project will address economic power imbalances in the community through village saving and credit groups to empower women and other marginalized groups.



**(Guatemala and Panama)**  
**Ru K’ux Abya Yala**

In Mesoamerica, a consortium of Indigenous organizations led by Sotz’il is working to foster the Indigenous use, management and conservation of natural resources, and to promote the Utz K’aslemal (*el buen vivir*, or living in harmony) as a model of Indigenous life. Working in an area composed of three biocultural territories and spanning more than 56,000 ha of land, through ICI, Sotz’il plans to strengthen Indigenous institutional systems, promote intergenerational exchanges and gender equality, bolster Indigenous-led natural and cultural resource management, and promote an Indigenous green economy for the benefit of all.



**(Nepal)**  
**Annapurna Conservation Area**

Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) advocates for the protection of Indigenous rights in the climate change context. Through ICI, NEFIN aims to strengthen IP and LC governance structures, and document and disseminate their knowledge and practices on environmental conservation, to enhance a global understanding of IP and LC contributions to GEBs, preserve cultural sites, and develop green enterprises and biodiversity financing mechanisms, to strengthen financial and economic sustainability and the role of women.



**DR (Democratic Republic of the Congo) Congo**

ANAPAC is working to strengthen and secure the areas and territories conserved by IPs and LCs in the DRC. Working in three biocultural landscapes encompassing the non-flooded forests in the east, the flooded forests in the west and the drylands of the eastern DRC, ANAPAC is identifying and documenting the presence of IPs and LCs and enhancing the capacity building of IP and LC institutions in natural resource governance and management. The project aims to strengthen IP and LC resilience to external threats, advocate for their legal recognition in the DRC, and develop local economic activities to support part of the costs of conservation, ensuring that women are adequately represented in forest governance and management bodies.



**Thailand**

The Thai consortium of organizations convened by Indigenous Peoples’ Foundation for Education and Environment (IPF) works to promote IP rights, including education, self-determined development, customary land use and natural resource management. Through ICI, IPF will work with 77 highland communities of seven IP groups in Thailand in an area encompassing more than 429,000 ha. The project will support good practices in resource, water and forest management by highland ethnic peoples, foster understanding and acceptance of rights in resource management, in accordance with traditional culture and customs, mitigate the impacts of climate change while preserving biodiversity, and increase community income and food security.



**(Fiji and Cook Islands)**  
**Lau Seascape and House of Ariki**

The Bose Vanua o Lau (the formal association of the traditional chiefs of Lau representing 30 inhabited islands and their 9,600 inhabitants) in Fiji and the House of Ariki (an association of ten 10 Indigenous chiefs) in the Cook Islands will work together to advance IP goals for sustainable resource use and management, including the strengthening of coastal and offshore marine protected areas management. This includes the restoration of degraded and terrestrial protected areas, and reinforcement of their resilience to climate change through delivery and revitalization of traditional farming skills and knowledge. The Vanua o Lau aims to develop the enabling conditions for the management of the Lau Seascape at scale by strengthening traditional governance at community and island levels across the Lau Province. The House of Ariki will work to integrate critical cultural considerations, including the identification of traditionally and culturally significant sites within the design of the Marae Moana Marine Park. The sub-project Indigenous-led initiative will also boost shared cultural traditions and stewardship approaches between Fiji and the Cook Islands, as well as Samoa, grounded in their shared ancestry as descendants of the Lapita people (ancestors of historic cultures in Polynesia, Micronesia and some coastal areas of Melanesia).



**(Peru)**  
**Southwest Amazon**

In the Madre de Dios River Basin in Peru, Federación Nativa del Río Madre de Dios y Afluentes (FENAMAD) advocates to represent and defend the collective will of all IPs of Madre de Dios, including those living in isolation and initial contact. Through ICI, FENAMAD aims to: improve the management of the territories and the conservation of their biodiversity, as well as the recognition of IPs as active partners in the definition of conservation policies; strengthen resilience in the face of environmental, climate and health crises; enhance the protection of the communities living in isolation and of women and defenders; and bolster participation in international conservation and human rights spaces and networks.

Figure 2.

# ICI TIMELINE DECEMBER 2019–JUNE 2023



Photo by CI



Photo by the Futa Mawiza initiative of ICI





# SELF-DETERMINED INITIATIVE AND PROGRAMMING GOVERNANCE

# 2



Self-determined initiative and programming governance is the foundation of a rights-based approach to inclusive conservation—by strengthening self-determination, building a collaborative family across IP and LC organizations based on mutual respect, and driving IP- and LC-led project governance—that emphasizes dialogue, consultation and consensus—and build unity within cultural diversity.

- ❶ The current governance structures and systems of IPs must be the heart and tied to the global governance structure of initiatives like ICI, to ensure a bottom-up governance of that respects and advances Indigenous and local governance principles.
- ✔ The process of taking stock and building meaningful actions based on feedback is important for cultivating trust and strong governance in IP- and LC-led and focused conservation efforts.
- ✔ Respecting diversity by planning inclusively around time zones and languages supports dialogue and consensus-building.
- ❓ Funding mechanisms that place final approvals with national governments may result in persistent challenges for IPs and LCs to access investments.

**“I like the Inclusive Conservation Initiative because we will be in the driver’s seat. We will be defining conservation in our own terms, in our own ways, and clearly linked to our way of life.”**

— ELIZABETH SILAKAN, IMPACT KENYA,  
ICI EXECUTING AGENCY

# 200

**STAKEHOLDERS REACHED  
DURING ICI INCEPTION WORKSHOPS—BUILDING  
GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT AND AN ICI COMMUNITY**





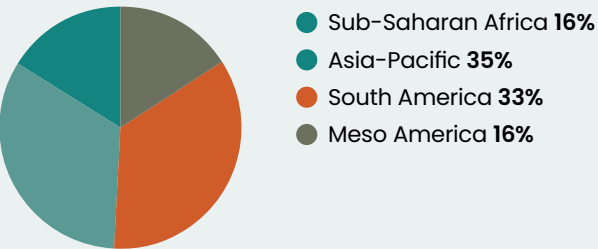
## A foundation for inclusive governance

Facilitating Indigenous-led planning, management and stewardship activities is fundamental to full and effective Indigenous participation in decision making on their lands, as recognized in a host of national and international frameworks such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. From its onset, a core principle of ICI is the promotion of self-determination of IP and LC initiative leads and Indigenous advisors to inform and lead the project's governance. For example, during the creation of ICI, IPAG provided guidance and advice on the design of the funding mechanism for what would later become ICI.

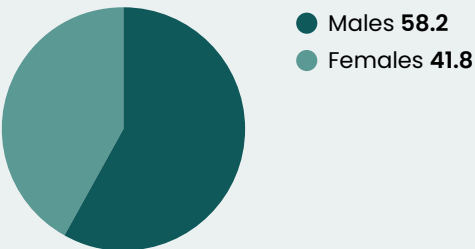
During the PPG phase of ICI, PMU facilitated the formation of an Indigenous Interim Steering Committee (IISC) composed of Indigenous experts to inform, advise and guide the initiative, including the selection of Indigenous-led sub-project geographies, pre-selection of sub-project Indigenous-led initiatives, and made the final decision for nine<sup>4</sup> selected initiatives to be implemented. In 2022, as

**Figure 3. Inception participants by region and gender**

### Participants per region



### Gender balance



ICI began its work, there was a transition period between the IISC and establishment of the ICI Global Steering Committee (GSC), which led to the creation of an Interim Steering Committee (ISC) to oversee the transfer of responsibilities. This transition was prepared by CI, based on feedback received from key project partners, who met alongside CBD meetings in Nairobi in mid-2022, to prepare for GEF's fall global policy season. It would include negotiations on Loss and Damage at the UNFCCC COP and the Global Biodiversity Framework and Fund at the CBD COP.

A process for nominating members was established, with IP and LC initiative leaders selecting their representatives. They met in October 2022 to reinforce the importance of intellectual and policy leadership of the upcoming ICI GSC in setting ICI governance and strengthening protocols. Other matters included an overview of the roles and tasks of the ISC, discussion of ICI communications and branding, planning for global policy events, and providing advice to the PMU on implementing ICI under IP- and LC-led governance. As ICI was to begin full implementations soon, a GSC based on these 2022 advancements was set up to govern ICI throughout its lifetime.

<sup>4</sup> As noted previously, one investment was divided into two initiatives later on.

## A global inception—building unity within cultural diversity

Upon GEF endorsement, ICI passed an inception phase which was composed of a series of 10 virtual workshops to build connective threads between 200 sub-project Indigenous-led initiatives leads and networks of supportive stakeholders. Held at different times in French, English, Spanish and Thai to accommodate diverse time zones, and with interpretation in different languages, the program of the inception workshops provided an inclusive space to discuss key issues and opportunities, identify synergies with partner organizations and advocate for a truly transformative initiative that can influence the international community in advancing global inclusive conservation efforts. Participants hailed from Mesoamerica, South America, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Asia-Pacific regions, with 41.8 % women and 58.2% men (86 women and 114 men).





Through ICI, we were able to provide almost US \$25 million to Indigenous peoples to support 10 projects in nine very different ecosystems. A milestone that has motivated us as IPAG members. To us, we are not stopping, we are just beginning.

— LUCY MULENKEI,  
CHAIR, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES  
ADVISORY GROUP (IPAG)



## Acknowledging and tackling challenges

ICI sought to address obstacles that IPs and LCs face in accessing multilateral funding from the GEF at the preparation phase. During the inception phase, at times, national sovereignty posed geographical and socio-political challenges that were not always surmountable. As a result, in certain instances, IP and LC partner organizations in some countries were ultimately unable to participate in ICI, once the initiative geographies were selected. In other instances, differences in how governments perceive the self-identification of the Indigeneity of communities resulted in concessions that potentially undermined Indigenous rights to their identity and the recognition of those rights enshrined within related global frameworks. These challenges demonstrate that although ICI is a pilot in helping the GEF explore ways to increase IP and LC access to inclusive conservation finance, more efforts towards compromise and adaptation will be needed if direct IP and LC financing at scale is to be achieved. At the same time, while GEF Agencies have a lot of experience working with IPs and LCs, collective work was undertaken to streamline, identify and define language and with the view of balancing support for IP- and LC-led processes, while fulfilling the GEF core objective: delivering global biodiversity benefits.

Around the preparatory and inception phases of ICI, an unexpected disruption appeared. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the difficulties of convening meetings virtually with IP and LC leadership, making it more challenging to build collective relationships in a virtual world.

## Moving to full implementation

The ICI Global Steering Committee (GSC), the project's overarching governance level acting as the expression of ICI's Indigenous leadership, will be established in the last half of 2023. As such, GSC will coordinate ICI's global components, serve as the 'face' of the initiative at the global level, and work with the PMU to ensure that the deliverables of the initiative meet the requirements, while ensuring that Indigenous values and rights are respected. Consistent with GEF requirements, an ICI Accountability and Grievance Mechanism (AGM) is in place at the global level, and under development at the level of each ICI initiative, to address potential breaches to GEF's policies and procedures as well as legitimate concerns of project-affected people. AGM is being designed to be independent, transparent and effective, and minimize the risk of retaliation to complainants. Each Indigenous-led initiative's context-specific AGM will be linked to the global ICI AGM, and comprise cultural and traditional existing norms from within their respective communities.

At the community and territorial level, ICI will support each sub-project Indigenous-led initiative to ensure there are designated IP- and LC-led governance structures on the ground as part of the enabling conditions for impact strategy implementation. In some cases, this may be an existing structure in the communities, whereas in others, the ICI lead organization may need to form some new arrangement to ensure accountable, transparent and representative management. Where needed, the ICI will provide targeted capacity building and technical support to ensure that the governance arrangements satisfy the organizational, managerial, administrative and fiduciary requirements for a successful implementation of a GEF project.





# TRANSLATING MULTILATERAL FUNDING INTO INDIGENOUS- LED CONSERVATION

3



Respect for nature is the basis for everything – and support to IPs and LCs to dismantle the barriers they face to protect nature should be the core of ICI’s contributions. By increasing access to finance, supporting Indigenous stewardship of territories they inhabit and administer, and strengthening relationships with governments and civil society to support IPs and LCs can build harmony between human beings, Mother Nature and the cosmos.

- ❶ Adapting conservation finance processes and procedures to be more streamlined and accessible to IPs and LCs is both necessary and efficient.
- ❷ Tailoring technical support that utilizes all modalities and opportunities, such as field visits and virtual spaces, provide the best support for IP and LC organizations in preparing impact strategy components, such as stakeholder mappings, environmental and social management framework (ESMF), gender action plans and more.
- ❸ Getting funding to IP and LC executing agencies quickly remains difficult due to complex and multilayered funding and implementation requirements.

**“We cannot reach global goals on marine and landscape protection without supporting the leadership of Indigenous communities. We hope that ICI will encourage other funders and governments to adopt more inclusive approaches.”**

— CARLOS MANUEL RODRIGUEZ, CEO AND CHAIRPERSON, GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY

ALMOST

80%

**OF ALL ICI PROJECT FUNDING IS PLACED WITH IPs and LCs TO GUIDE AND LEAD IMPLEMENTATION**





ICI is a pilot of the GEF to innovate adaptations and catalyze the transformational changes to increase multilateral biodiversity finance access to IPs and LCs at scale. It supports Indigenous-led conservation initiatives that enable IPs and LCs to continue stewarding nature and biodiversity, while strengthening their leadership, knowledge systems and governance.

Paving this pathway has required innovation and collaboration. Many obstacles required CI and IUCN to rethink and reshape their respective institutional systems to be more adaptable and responsive to processes that work better for IPs and LCs. Several funders have processes and procedures that pose significant barriers for IP and LC to access investment resources. From language barriers to technological limitations—to meeting multiple layers of requirements from funders, governments and implementing agencies—hurdles abound. For example, studies show that Indigenous peoples organizations experience gaps in access to knowledge about institutional language and templates to formulate projects and meet the rigorous financial management standards and review processes of funding organizations, which limit their direct access to finance (Norway, 2021). As a result, medium- and full-sized investments in IP- and LC-led projects have remained virtually out of reach. Such projects would have delivered GEBs at a scale commensurate with the amount

of land under IP and LC management. In addition, IPs and LCs continue to experience exclusion and marginalization in land and resource policy, decision making and management.

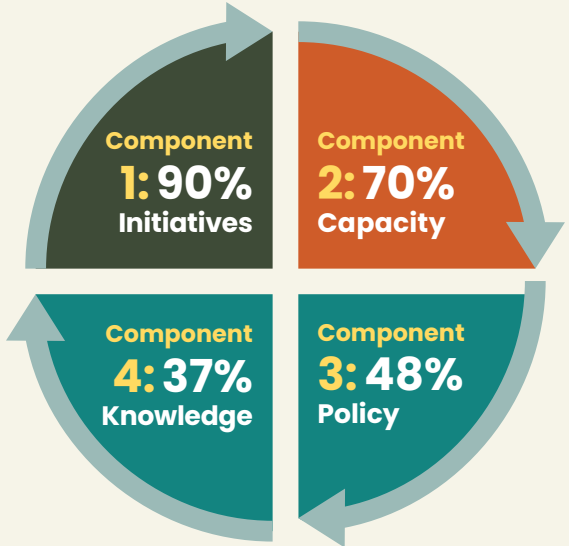
Under ICI, considerable work has been done to ensure that institutional finance, granting and legal systems are flexible, while meeting fiduciary and programmatic requirements. Such adaptations and resulting lessons learned have been embedded across ICI's DNA from the very beginning. For example, instead of putting out a call for full proposals for investments, the ICI team put out a call for expressions of interests in four languages (English, French, Portuguese and Spanish) to streamline the process and increase accessibility for applicants. In this respect, ICI was also established with a benchmark of at least 79% of project financing going to IP and LC implementers (see Box 2).

Since the establishment of ICI coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, more time was required to adapt to coordination complexities. Launching an initiative of this global breadth and importance with a reliance on virtual spaces that was not always available or stable for IPs and LCs required more frequent calls and meetings. In addition, project timelines were adapted to become more flexible to the realities and context of IPs and LCs.

### BOX 2. Growing conservation finance to scale to IPs and LCs

The ICI project is financed by a full-size GEF grant of US\$ 22.5 million – of which 79% is invested into IP and LC organizations. There is also complementary co-financing of over US\$ 90 million from GEF agencies, donor agencies, private sector, ICI IP and LC executing organizations and others. In addition, 79% of GEF granted resources are invested in grants to IP- and LC-led initiatives and/or IP and LC consultancies to build and drive ICI capacity building, policy advocacy and communications.

Figure 4. Percentage of ICI funding going to IPs and LCs per component







**To move from agreement to action, governments, funders and NGOs alike need to move to more inclusive conservation models that support IPs and LCs' leadership to continue to steward biodiversity. This means respect and recognition for Indigenous rights over lands and territories, access to financial and technical resources to manage their natural resources and value traditional knowledge.**



— CARLOS MANUEL RODRIGUEZ,  
CEO AND CHAIRPERSON,  
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY

## **LEARNING BY DOING: adapting impact strategies to build streamlined funding processes for IP and LC access to conservation finance**

### **Roadmap**

In 2022, once ICI was launched, PMU began by establishing a clear roadmap to support the Indigenous leadership in identifying their priorities and key areas for investment via the development of their full impact strategies. From ESMF to GAP, to stakeholder engagement plans, PMU approached this challenge in an integrated manner, streamlining the requirements into one simplified model for sub-projects to ensure adherence to safeguards. This unified approach aimed to reduce complex procedures and break down potential silos that could have arisen from separate planning.

Once the single integrated model was in place, a participatory process was conducted in each initiative with the executing agency, bringing in communities, government agencies and partner NGOs, as appropriate, to develop an impact strategy, including contributions to GEF global targets. ICI encourages continued engagement with governments and national representatives, which helps to maintain the political will and support to IP and LC executing agencies as well as national support for ICI.

### **Impact strategy**

Impact strategy development has involved work towards refining assessments of threats, opportunities, as well as baseline conditions and projects specific to each geography, and identifying priority actions for ICI initiatives that complement existing interventions.

This entailed tailoring the ICI Theory of Change to the specific context of each Indigenous-led initiative. Importantly, each impact strategy will also explicitly consider how to respond to vulnerabilities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including opportunities that may arise out of a wider post-pandemic recovery plans.

### **Site visits**

To further support this process, throughout 2022, PMU conducted site visits to each Indigenous-led initiative, carrying out close and constant technical assistance and training on impact strategy development and supporting the implementation of customized capacity-building plans based on organizational capacity assessments conducted for each initiative. This support was instrumental for ensuring that initiative leads have all relevant information, tools and technical guidance needed to build capacities on developing strategies and plans in alignment to donor requirements.

### **Conversations about planning grants**

Furthermore, the planning grants model has been a key instrument in mobilizing funding during the first year of the project. Many of ICI's Indigenous-led initiatives required comprehensive engagement and consultation with many different IPs and LCs within each site; adaptations to the prolonged impact strategy development phase were thus necessary. Although typically unallowed or unaccounted for in many project grant modalities, ICI provided these planning grants to the Indigenous-led initiatives in each project site so that they had the financial resources to complete their full impact strategies and ensure that IPs and LCs can invest in capacities and resources needed to meet project objectives.





## Gender equality

Along with the integration of gender analyses and action planning, ICI impact strategies also promote gender-responsiveness by ensuring the key role of women in helping advance the paradigm shift put forward by ICI. They similarly support women's economic empowerment towards supporting the overall financial stability of IPs and LCs. ICI works collaboratively with each Indigenous-led initiative to advance gender equality between IP and LC women and men to help ensure the differentiated and complementary roles women and men play in resource governance, consider, and promote the priorities, roles and needs of all people in environmental decision-making. Otherwise, the neutral assumption about the visibility and accessibility of women's contributions can result in gender-blindness that risks the loss of knowledge IP and LC women bring into conservation and the diminishing of their rights and opportunities.

In 2022 and 2023, IUCN assessed each IP and LC organization's draft impact strategy to provide gender technical support to strengthen opportunities that increase the inclusion of women and girls in ICI governance and activities. Furthermore, a needs analysis was conducted with NEFIN to determine gender training needs, while in Thailand, a tailored

capacity building session assisted IPF in learning how to develop a gender analysis and indicators. In some organizations, such as UCRT and Ak'Tenamit, women also play important roles as organizational leaders, supporting the advancement of IP and LC women and men together.

## What's next

Although there were many areas of learning and adjustments across 2022 up to mid-2023 project start-up phase, some roadblocks continue to offer opportunities for problem-solving when it comes to improving and streamlining the flow of conservation finance to IPs and LCs. It has been a laborious collective effort to finalize impact strategies and get them ready for funding implementation in an expedient manner. Although the innovation of planning grants has supported this process financially, the implementation of activities is getting ready to start in a staggered approach, with some projects falling behind the original target timeframes. This learning demonstrates that there may be further needs to develop in both streamlined tools and templates on the part of donor and implementing agencies, as well as build up capacity for IP and LC organizations, to advance in closing this gap. The next phase of ICI, under Component 2 on training, capacity development and tools refinement, will address this issue.

The results to date of these adaptations demonstrate the value of taking time to consider Indigenous and local consultation practices. In their work to engage stakeholders and conduct targeted organizational capacity building, each Indigenous-led initiative is building an impact strategy that promotes Indigenous rights and FPIC. At the same time, these strengthen the management of natural and cultural resources in IP and LC territories by addressing the drives of environmental degradation affecting sustainable development. The following cases exemplify some of the approaches:

- In Thailand, community and inter-community consultations were held with 574 people (of whom 31.88% were women) – reaching 75% of the project's target areas.
- In Mesoamerica, Sotz'il carried out an FPIC process in five regions that provided information about ICI to participating communities, respected each community's distinct forms of governance and decision making, hence creating a regional governance body and related capacity building.

- In Chile, Futa Mawiza was consulted with around 50 Mapuche Indigenous communities. Their involvement and empowerment within the process was fundamental in enabling communities to embrace ICI and thus in generating inclusive governance.

## Baseline assessment

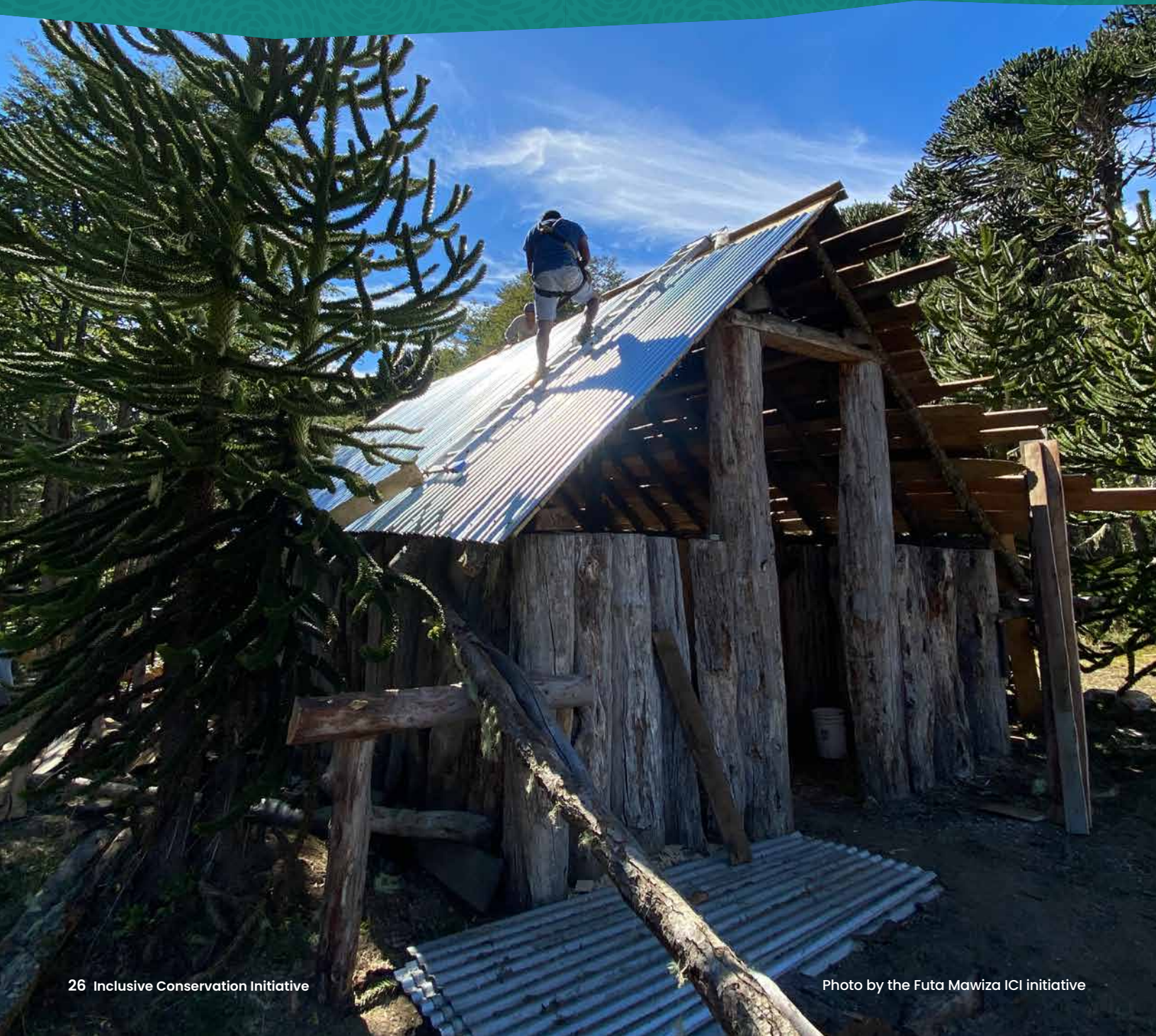
ICI also developed new tools to help create baseline assessments on the strengths and needs of each sub-project Indigenous-led initiative to not only identify areas for capacity building, but also track progress of each leading IP and LC organization that execute GEF funds over time. In Nepal, NEFIN's capacity assessments shed light on areas of improvement that ICI can support, while similar processes were conducted in Tanzania under the Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT).





# PRESERVING AND PROMOTING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

4



Traditional and local knowledge is recognized, supported and scaled globally as cultural conservation tools. Although there is consensus that IPs and LCs are effective stewards and protectors of nature, their knowledge is frequently under-recognized and under-valued. Driving a paradigm shift will require the upscaling of effective local practices at global levels in a way that not only respects indigenous timeframes, models and worldview systems that consider nature beyond its economic value, but also in ways that respect the intellectual property of indigenous science.

**i** The development of cultural indicators can measure the ways in which Indigenous-led conservation can not only improve conservation results, but also help ensure the survival and perpetuation of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems.

Building gender-responsive and youth-oriented cultural indicators can help ensure equity as well as support the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledge.

**✓** Allowing more time enables comprehensive consultation among IPs and LCs to co-create cultural indicators.

**?** Conventional performance indicators in multilateral finance do not tell the whole story of how Indigenous-led initiatives and rights-based approaches to conservation contribute to global environmental benefits.

**“Traditional knowledge, innovations, practices and technologies of indigenous peoples and local communities should only be accessed with their free, prior and informed consent.”**

— TARGET 21, GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK

OVER  
50%

OF ALL EOIs RECEIVED BY ICI NOTE THE THREAT OF LOSING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS THAT HAVE PROTECTED NATURE FOR MILLENNIA





Although there is a large and growing body of evidence affirming the role of Indigenous and traditional knowledge systems and practices in natural resource management and sustainable governance of IP and LC territories, many relevant policies have yet to fully acknowledge and support these systems. In some places, traditional practices remain criminalized such as rotational farming in upland communities. The failure to recognize and incorporate traditional knowledge and practices leaves a management vacuum, which results in a reliance on approaches that are ill-suited to socio-ecological systems, potentially driving continued environmental degradation. Of the over 400 EOLs ICI received, over half noted the loss of traditional knowledge as a specific threat. In 2019, the IPBES Global Assessment strongly emphasized the need for “promoting education, knowledge generation and the maintenance of different knowledge systems, including in the sciences and indigenous and local knowledge, regarding nature, conservation and its sustainable use” (IPBES, 2019). ICI has a task to reconcile different systems of knowledge and reaffirm the critical role of Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems for the stewardship of nature.

By building more systematic evidence-based integration and application of Indigenous knowledge systems in overall land, resource and conservation management, ICI can support the sustaining of intergenerational knowledge transfer to preserve cultural heritage and nature alike.

## Developing cultural indicators

Under ICI, Indigenous-led initiatives will contribute to GEF-7 core indicators, such as those relating to estimated areas of landscapes, marine habitats, and territories (excluding protected areas) under improved practices. It will also measure the number of direct stakeholders engaged and supported by ICI. However, as ICI’s focus is on Indigenous-led conservation, each Indigenous-led initiative will also measure the cultural benefits to scaling, preserving, and transmitting traditional knowledge systems and Indigenous worldviews. During the start-up phase of ICI, many of these cultural indicators were explored in submitted EOLs, which are being refined in final impact strategies. These indicators offer insights on some of the ways inclusive conservation finance is envisioned to support the perpetuation of Indigenous knowledge, some examples include:

- In the Lau Seascape and Cook Islands, cultural indicators include measuring the number of chiefs and local leaders with improved understanding of national climate change and environmental policies and regulations.
- In Thailand, partners aim to measure the effectiveness in revitalizing and reviving rituals and ceremonies related to natural resources (e.g., the ordination of trees, forests, water, aquatic animals).
- In the Annapurna Conservation Area, NEFIN plans to measure the number of traditional IP and LC knowledge and practices that are documented and disseminated.
- In the DRC, ANAPAC aims to measure capacities to document, analyze, organize, and advocate for the institutions of IPs and LCs.

- In the Ewaso Ng’iro, IMPACT plans to measure the number of traditional governance systems restored, preserved, and promoted.
- In the northern Tanzania Rangelands, there are plans by UCRT to measure the number of community institutions with improved natural resource management capacity because of project activities (disaggregated by Indigenous and local governance type, for example, Village Council, Ward Grazing Committee, WRLF).
- In Futa Mawiza, there are plans to measure national and international advocacy for the recognition and culturally appropriate support for the protection of the Biocultural Territory.
- In the Ru K’ux Abya Yala, there are plans to measure how sacred sites and places are factored into the use, management, and conservation of natural resources.
- In the Southern Amazon, indicators intend to measure the survival of cultural values such as language use, land and resource use practices, and the use of medicinal plants.

These indicators also embed gender-responsive and youth capacity building efforts to sustain intergenerational knowledge transfer. Examples of planned related cultural indicators include:

- In the Pacific, the House of Ariki and Bose Vanua o Lau plans to measure the number of women benefitting from innovative sustainable natural resources-based livelihood opportunities and the number of youth with improved understanding and awareness of ecological traditional knowledge.

- In Thailand, IPF aims to build 16 schools and education centers to impart traditional knowledge.
- In Tanzania, UCRT aims to assess the number of villages with improved governance scores, including demonstrated improvement in representation and inclusion of women, youth, and traditional leaders in participatory processes, and decision-making, based on a village governance assessment tool.
- In Mesoamerica, there are plans to measure the formation of new young Indigenous leadership cadres.

By developing cultural indicators through ICI, IPs and LCs will influence the reporting systems of multilaterals by sharing what are the key elements they use for measuring success of projects in their cultural contexts.

## Enriching how we define and measure GEBs

All the 10 ICI Indigenous-led initiatives have created Results Frameworks that not only respond to the GEF common performance indicators but also include cultural indicators. These indicators will provide evidence of how conservation finance can support Indigenous knowledge systems, practices, and innovations for the benefit of nature and communities. ICI will also document and amplify this learning to provide support to other environmental initiatives and funds to take on promising practices and diversify the ways in which cultural indicators and provide a holistic approach to measuring and achieving biodiversity results while promoting IP and LC human rights.



# AMPLIFYING INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

5



30 Inclusive Conservation Initiative

Photo by the Ru K'ux Abya Yala ICI Initiative

The creation of a global community that respects Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), recognizes the complementarity between Indigenous lifestyles and conservation goals, and supports IP and LC leadership requires policy change at national and global levels.

- ✓ Amplifying IP and LC voices and contributions to environmental policy formation is essential to ensure that diverse perspectives of those who both experience the harshest consequences of environmental degradation and hold the best knowledge to address them are supported to self-determine solutions.
- ✓ It is crucial to ensure Indigenous women and youth have access to capacity building and support to engage in environmental policy discourse and influence.
- ⚠ Visa limitations and language barriers within many negotiation spaces continue to inequitably limit IP and LC engagement.
- ⚠ Meaningful progress has yet to be made on various commitments to scale inclusive or direct financing to IPs and LCs, much more is needed to realize them.

“When we ask for full and effective participation as Indigenous women, it is not a favor, it is a dignified right.”

— LOLA CABNAL, DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY, AK'TENAMIT

400

IP AND LC LEADERS  
WITH GREATER OPPORTUNITY TO INFLUENCE  
INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY  
WITH SUPPORT OF ICI





Continued reliance on exclusive conservation approaches means that IP- and LC-led initiatives continue to be overlooked by many national and sustainable development programs. For instance, in 2015, only 21 (RRI, 2016) Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) included community-based tenure or natural resource management strategies as a part of climate change mitigation plans. Similarly, only a handful of governments explicitly referenced IPs or LCs in their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). These exclusions have real-life implications, with less than 0.6% of reported protected areas in the World Database on Protected Areas governed by IPs or LCs in contrast to the 82% under governments. As long as IPs and LCs are barred from full participation in the processes to determine environment and development policies laws and regulations, they will fail to consider IP and LC rights, needs and contributions, which can result in continued insecure tenure arrangements, exclusionary conservation approaches and the neglect of traditional knowledge.

Nonetheless, in recent years, there has been progress. For example, at the national level, a 2018 study found that 73 of 100 countries surveyed had adopted legislation allowing

for some form of community tenure rights. Another study in 2022 of NDCs showed that there is slow but growing recognition of Indigenous peoples in submissions. The study also finds that 22% of the first round of 165 documents mentioned Indigenous peoples, while 38% of the second round of 130 documents did the same (Carmona et al., 2022). Furthermore, there was also progress in ways NDCs addressed Indigenous rights (see Box 3).

Similar trends are anticipated within NBSAP updates. In 147 plans received by 2017, “only five Parties<sup>5</sup> reported indigenous peoples and local communities participating on NBSAPs Committees”; “A total of 28 Parties<sup>6</sup> reported that indigenous peoples and local communities were consulted in the revision of the NBSAPs”; and “Four Parties<sup>7</sup> reported that indigenous peoples and local communities would be involved in the implementation of the NBSAPs” (Carmona et al., 2022). In 2020, over 50 IPs and LCs contributed to the Local Biodiversity Outlooks 2, which found that IPs and LCs play crucial roles in maintaining and enhancing biological and cultural diversity. And as highlighted in a statement by the Acting Executive Secretary of the CBD to the 22nd session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2023:

**“Indigenous peoples and local communities were active participants in the process of developing the new Framework. As a result, one of the most prominent features of the Framework is the recognition of the role and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities in rebuilding our relationship with nature. [...] Moreover, cross-cutting the entire Framework is a requirement that, in its implementation, the rights, traditional knowledge, worldviews and values of indigenous peoples must be respected in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other relevant instruments. The Framework also includes a safeguard statement that nothing in it may be construed as diminishing or extinguishing the rights that indigenous peoples currently have or may acquire in the future.”**

— DAVID COOPER, ACTING EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY, NEW YORK, 18 APRIL 2023

### BOX 3. Progress in acknowledging Indigenous peoples within NDCs

“In the first round of submissions, the most common reference was a superficial acknowledgement of the role of Indigenous knowledge within climate action (n=18), followed by references that highlight the impacts of colonialism by recognizing the unique vulnerability of Indigenous peoples (n=18). All reference categories increased in the second submissions; however, the most significant increase was seen in the promotion of ‘participation’ (n=24) where the number of references nearly doubled. Another significant increase was in the number of references to ‘jurisdiction’ – jumping from 2 NDCs in the first round to 14 in the second. NDCs mentioning ‘Indigenous knowledge’ in the second round of submissions only increased by 3, representing the lowest increase across all five categories. The most common reference in the second submission are references to the ‘impacts of colonialism’ (n=31).”  
Source: IWGIA (2022).

<sup>5</sup> Argentina, Ireland, Namibia, Paraguay and the Philippines. <sup>6</sup> Algeria, Brazil, Burundi, Cameroon, Colombia, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Finland, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Japan, Malawi, Mexico, Peru, Senegal, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Slovakia, Suriname, Thailand, Togo, Uganda, Venezuela and Zambia. <sup>7</sup> Australia, Austria, Belgium and Nepal.





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At IUCN's 2016 Hawai'i World Conservation Congress, members voted to amend its membership structure for the first time in its 70-year history, creating a category for Indigenous peoples organizations (IPOs). In 2021, at the World Conservation Congress in Marseilles, IPOs put forward resolutions and voted for the first time – with all IPO-endorsed resolutions passing into mandates.

Although policy progress is happening, many decision-making processes at national, regional and global levels continue to lack sufficient pathways for the full, effective and meaningful participation and engagement of IPs and LCs. Faced with social, political, cultural, language and financial obstacles, their limited participation is exacerbated when many systems do not include IP or LC perspectives as requisite voices towards decision making. It is essential that historical discrimination, exclusion and power imbalances are addressed – otherwise, opportunities to advance social justice and equity will flounder and continue to drive environmental loss.

Overall, 30 ICI leaders (of whom 50% are women) have been engaging with and providing technical support to national delegations at international policy meetings, such as the 2022 UNFCCC COP 27 in Sharm-El-Sheik, Egypt and the Kunming-Montreal UN CBD COP 15.

The Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) Facilitative Working Group (FWG) took place in the days preceding UNFCCC COP-27. During the LCIPP annual gathering with knowledge holders, participants raised the importance of having a more active engagement of Parties in LCIPP activities and commitment to continue supporting the work of the LCIPP. Strengthening the connection between local-national and regional-global climate actions of IPs and LCs therefore remains a priority.



At the same UNFCCC COP-27 in November 2022, ICI supported and hosted over 10 events that uplifted Indigenous leadership in advancing Nature-based Solutions that are meaningful, harness the experience of IPs and LCs and present alternatives to achieve climate goals. Ten women and eight men were supported to attend or engage in ICI events, including engaging with International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC). Indigenous ICI leaders called for progress and accountability on the COP-26 pledge of US\$ 1.7 billion in funding to IPs and LCs – of which an estimated 7% had reached them from 2021 to 2022 – as well as for increased scaled investments into inclusive finance mechanisms, such as ICI, and to make progress on facilitating direct climate and conservation financing to IPs and LCs.

In December 2022, the world gathered at CBD COP-15 in Montreal, Canada to decide upon the final text of the Global Biodiversity Framework. Another 10 ICI events were organized there, including the official launch of ICI, engagement with the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB), and participation from ICI initiative leaders in the CBD Open-Ended Working Group, Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA)-24 and Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI)-13 sessions. Five women and seven men were supported to attend or engage in ICI events at COP-15.

ICI's Indigenous initiative leaders from Chile, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Kenya, Panama, Tanzania and Thailand engaged in many dialogues to make the case for an inclusive GBF that incorporates a human rights-based approach to conservation, to ensure that agreements and targets adequately consider the ways policies can unfold. From sharing how exclusionary protected area practices can affect Indigenous rights and livelihoods, and result in forced removals of Indigenous peoples, to sharing how hydroelectric dams can negatively impact Indigenous communities, ICI leaders emphasized





#### BOX 4. Amplifying Indigenous women's voices and priorities

Indigenous women are powerful advocates for Mother Nature and are often at the forefront of climate action in their communities but are not guaranteed effective and full participation in international decision-making on climate. Recent studies show that of climate funds intended for Indigenous peoples and local communities, only 17% reach them – and Indigenous women are the most left behind, receiving 5% of funding (Lee, 2022). IUCN launched the Indigenous Women's Insights – Stewarding the Earth initiative in 2021 as a communications campaign designed to advance the visibility of IPO messages in global conservation policy. In 2022, IUCN adapted the campaign to support Indigenous women and girls' climate-leadership and reduce barriers to their full participation by supporting six Indigenous women leaders, three mentors and three mentees – including from the ICI sub-projects at UNFCCC COP-27 in Sharm-el-Sheik.

For some participants, COP-27 was the first time they left their home, or the first time they engaged with government representatives and international policymakers. As a part of preparations, the selected Indigenous women leaders participated in several virtual pre-COP-27 onboarding meetings, UNFCCC COP orientation and trainings on gender and climate policy, as well as trainings on negotiating gender under UNFCCC. With dedicated pre-COP engagement, the women shared their first-hand accounts about how climate change affects the rights and opportunities of Indigenous women and girls – and how their creativity, resilience and innovation is key for climate solutions on a global stage. In 2023, Stewarding the Earth will continue its work to amplify the priorities, voices and insights of Indigenous women and girls in international policy fora.

**“The life of Mother Nature is at risk and therefore the life of humanity in vulnerable conditions such as Indigenous girls and women who do not have opportunities for development and without alternatives to confront the climate crisis. Indigenous women want to be part of the solution, we want to be participants and included in the processes.”**

— LOLA CABNAL, STEWARDING THE EARTH MENTOR, AK'TENAMIT

**“Indigenous women carry the heaviest load in our community... I feel proud to be walking and taking a journey with the young Indigenous women in a process of advancing Indigenous women's leadership in global climate policy. Through “Indigenous Women's Insights – Stewarding the Earth” together we continue advocating forward.”**

— LUCY MULENKEI, STEWARDING THE EARTH MENTOR, INDIGENOUS INFORMATION NETWORK

**“This was my first time leaving Tanzania. I came to promote women's land rights to bring about an equal community in terms of land access, control, and ownership of other property by considering gender inclusion.”**

— NEEMA LEKULE, STEWARDING THE EARTH MENTEE, UCRT

Source: IUCN

that a human rights-based approach to global 30x30 targets requires the inclusion of IPs and LCs, and not their exclusion or expulsion. Leaders also advocated for traditional knowledge as a foundation of inclusive conservation as a part of the GBF. Indigenous leaders also urged the GBF to ensure that human rights approaches are integrated into its financing. Together, they called on policymakers to reimagine how finance, and the ways in which conservation results are measured, contribute to the upholding and advancement of IP and LC rights. By working with diverse stakeholders from across global policy, finance mechanisms, the private sector and others – all must work together to lay out a roadmap for translating pledges, commitments and human rights integration into the GBF. In Montreal, Indigenous leaders also collaborated with GEF to officially launch ICI in the global arena, inviting other funders to adapt or innovate models for increased inclusive or direct financing to IPs and LCs to tackle the concurrent climate and biodiversity crises.

These discussions support advocacy since several years from diverse groups to push for a GBF that goes beyond the recognition of IPs and LCs role in improved conservation and upholds their human and territorial rights to manage natural resources through traditional knowledge systems. Across each policy space, barriers continue to pose challenges for inclusive engagement. In many negotiation spaces, the operating language is English, and in some cases, interpreters are not allowed entry, thus limiting the inclusive participation of IPs and LCs who often speak many languages but may not have English fluency. In addition, long visa processes also posed accessibility problems, resulting in many IP and LC representatives canceling their participation.

Across both the UNFCCC and CBD COPs, ICI's Indigenous leaders also called to account for its financing pledges to IPs and LCs. The agreement on creating an L&D fund and the GBFF shows there are promising opportunities to accelerate a human rights-based approach to environmental finance. However, it remains to be seen whether the pace and scale of direct and/or inclusive investments will accelerate.

## Looking forward

With many policy achievements for IPs and LCs in 2022, the next phase of ICI will see dedicated efforts building upon them and helping ensure they are realized. Sharing ICI experiences to date, the ICI team will advocate for an inclusive GEF-8 at its next Assembly in August 2023 in Vancouver, Canada – particularly on how the GBFF and GEF-8 cycle can build towards increased inclusive finance as well as direct IP and LC financing. Indigenous leaders of ICI will also continue to amplify traditional knowledge and IP and LC territorial rights in the upcoming UNFCCC COP-28, hosted by the United Arab Emirates, specifically as they relate to the Global Stocktake and how its outcomes may inform a strong rights-based approach to the L&D facility. ICI will also start up the ICI International Environmental Policy Fellows Program which will recruit 15 IP and LC participants to focus on building the next generation of female and male leaders in IP and LC policy advocacy. The fellowship will include concrete deliverables, such as participation in ICI's Learning Academy training and global networks, reporting on community projects and policy engagement and contributions to advocacy.





# ADVANCING PROJECT COMPONENTS

# 6

## COMPONENT 1: Enhancing IP- and LC-led environmental results

The next phase of ICI will see project investments reaching the ground of each Indigenous-led initiative, which will require work on key tools and mechanisms for effective and inclusive governance of the project and the shift to full-implementation of IMPACT strategies. The GSC will also become fully operational, with ICI's rules of procedure and code of conduct based on IP and LC values and principles, the Accountability and Grievance and Mechanism and overall governance of ICI. Along the way, ICI will monitor progress and results.

## COMPONENT 2: Strengthening institutional capacities

Through this component, ICI will increase the sustainability of capacity-building investments and magnify their reach by creating culturally appropriate tools, knowledge resources and platforms to support and increase IP and LC access to learning at all levels. The ICI Learning Academy will be designed, and the curricula will be developed in consultation with the GSC and project partners to create capacity building modules for learning exchanges. To help ensure ICI project outcomes and the long-term sustainability of IPLC-led conservation from local to global levels, capacity building efforts will reach out to a wider global community of IP and LC organizations. The global capacity building program is also envisioned to help inform, assist and train IP and LC organizations from across the world to replicate and scale up ICI-supported activities.

## COMPONENT 3: Increasing international policy influence

International environmental policy spaces are key arenas for setting directions and establishing commitments that create either enabling or constraining conditions for IP- and LC-led conservation. ICI will scale and further enhance IP and LC voices in decision making within the Rio Conventions and other relevant fora to strengthen their provisions on IP and LC rights and roles in relation to conservation, climate change and other environmental issues. ICI will identify curriculum priorities and linkages between global to national policy engagement within the priority geographies and will design ICI International Environmental Policy Negotiations Curriculum. The ICI Indigenous Leadership Fellowship Program will also be launched and will be connected to project-level initiatives and international policy influence.

## COMPONENT 4: Amplifying knowledge to action

ICI leaders will generate, distil and disseminate results from ICI that show the impacts of their work, the application of traditional knowledge systems, lessons learned and potential for replication and amplification of Inclusive Conservation models through the ICI Knowledge Management Platform. The sharing of results and analyses generated by ICI will help shift conservation paradigms to embrace Indigenous-led conservation by contributing evidence of the large-scale effectiveness of IP and LC stewardship in achieving biodiversity and sustainable development goals. This sharing will be housed on a new virtual space that will serve as a learning and communications hub.



## A FOUNDATION FOR INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION

This initial phase of ICI laid the mindful foundations to pilot ways in which conservation finance can increase investments at scale to IPs and LCs by working to tailor financial requirements and supporting IP and LC organizations to meet them. Learning, adaptation, innovation, listening and collaboration – based on the Indigenous values and principles of ICI – proved to be the most powerful ingredients for navigating complex processes, the COVID-19 pandemic context and building bridges. These approaches will guide ICI implementation as it moves forward.

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