

Securing success for conservation and rights – perspectives from Indigenous Peoples on implementing Target 3

Summary

Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) commits countries to conserve at least 30 per cent of land, inland waters, and oceans by 2030, while also recognising and respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and of local communities in all forms of conservation.

The framework offers countries three pathways to achieving their target:

- protected areas
- other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)
- indigenous and traditional territories (ITTs).

In many countries, conservation approaches continue to be centred on state-run protected areas, of which many Indigenous Peoples and local communities remain wary. And regimes for protected areas often do not respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and of local communities. As yet, most countries do not have legal avenues to take forward OECMs – which also have a mixed record on respect for rights – or the emerging concept of ITTs.

If approaches to conservation do not change, there is a risk that implementation of the GBF will usher in a phase of renewal and expansion of the exclusionary conservation models that have, over many decades, harmed and marginalised communities and that, in many cases, have failed to achieve conservation goals.

The GBF is also an opportunity to move away from the harmful patterns of the past for good.

In this briefing, we offer governments, funders and civil society organisations tangible actions to ensure that Target 3 is achieved while securing the rights and governance systems of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and fostering sustained community-led stewardship. This is essential for aligning biodiversity goals with human rights, and so enabling both to flourish.



A Huay E Kang community map culturally divided into areas such as the Pgaz K'Nyau Women's Forest, Community Forest, and *Pgaj dei pau* Forest (Umbelical Cord Forest). GIS mapping conducted by the community in collaboration with public and private sector partners. Prepared by PASD and IMPECT

Introduction

Target 3 of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) commits countries to conserve at least 30 per cent of land, inland waters, and oceans by 2030. The so-called 30 by 30 target, outlines three pathways for implementation:

- **protected areas**, which are sites dedicated to the conservation of biodiversity
- **other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)**, which are sites recognised as conserving biodiversity outside protected areas
- **indigenous and traditional territories (ITTs)**, guidance on which is currently being developed under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Under the GBF, areas or territories contributing to Target 3 – under any of the three pathways – must be representative, well connected, effectively managed and equitably governed, and should recognise and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and of local communities¹.

How Target 3 will be implemented in practice, however, remains an open question. While conservation policies have evolved to be more respectful of rights in recent decades, particularly since the 2003 World Parks Congress in Durban, there are still significant and widespread gaps in practice.

Despite positive precedents in some countries moving towards more community-led conservation approaches – such as Indigenous Protected Areas in Australia and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in Canada – in many countries, conservation approaches continue to be centred principally on state-run protected areas. Many countries do not have legal avenues that can be used to take forward OECMs or the emerging concept of ITTs. In addition, regimes for protected areas often do not respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and of local communities, and the limited number of regimes for OECMs have a mixed record.

If these approaches to conservation do not change, there is a risk that implementation of the GBF will usher in a phase of renewal and expansion of the exclusionary conservation models that have, over many decades, harmed and marginalised communities and that, in many cases, have failed to achieve conservation goals.

Yet, the GBF is also a key opportunity to move away from the harmful patterns of the past for good. A defining feature of Target 3 is its recognition that Indigenous Peoples and local communities are longstanding stewards of biodiversity; that their territories, governance systems, and knowledge are critical to achieving the “30x30” target; and that their rights must be respected in all forms of conservation.

Combined with the broader obligations to respect rights within the GBF, particularly under targets 22 and 23 and Section C, there is now a strong impetus to adopt new approaches that can halt biodiversity loss in ways that respect rights, uphold equity, and deliver fair outcomes.

It is essential that Indigenous Peoples and local communities themselves are involved in the process of developing these new approaches.

In this briefing we bring together case studies from Indigenous Peoples in three countries – Kenya, Guyana and Thailand² – on rights-respecting approaches to implementing the three Target 3 pathways. Their experiences reveal barriers but also potential opportunities to diversify and strengthen rights-based approaches to implementing the pathways.

The reflections in this briefing aim to advance practical discussions on ways forward for Target 3 that achieve conservation outcomes while also respecting rights. And the conclusions aim to offer clear and direct actions that governments, funders and civil society organisations can take, together and separately, to achieve Target 3 via the three pathways.

Case studies from Kenya, Guyana and Thailand

Case study 1: The Aweer and Sanye peoples of Kenya

Author: Kenneth Laikong, Chepkitale Indigenous People Development Project

The Aweer (also known as Boni) and Sanye are Indigenous communities in Lamu County on the Kenyan coast. Their territory is overlapped by the Boni and Dodori National Reserves (created in the 1970s) and the Kiunga Marine Reserve, which together span about 6,273 square kilometres, and the Boni–Lungi forest (gazetted in 2016). Traditionally hunter-gatherers, the Aweer and Sanye have strong cultural ties to the Boni and Dodori forests, savannas, mangroves and surrounding coastal ecosystems, which form the core of their ancestral territory. Their livelihoods and identity are closely linked to the forest, land and sea, where they practice hunting, gathering, small-scale farming and fishing as well as other cultural and spiritual activities. Despite their deep-rooted connection to the land, these communities face challenges such as marginalisation, land-use pressures, and restrictions on forest access, which threaten their cultural heritage and survival.

Their territory in Lamu County forms part of the Eastern Africa Coastal Forests ecoregion, recognised as one of the world’s biodiversity hotspots, with the endangered dugong, sea turtles, Aders’ duiker, and diverse mangrove species. In protecting this territory – including through sustainable use – the Aweer and Sanye communities are contributing directly to global biodiversity conservation, climate regulation, and the safeguarding of migratory species. Their traditional ecological knowledge and sustainable practices strengthen local stewardship of these ecosystems, ensuring both their culture and the biodiversity survives and flourishes.

The Aweer and Sanye territories in Lamu are not formally recognised as either Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) or Indigenous Traditional Territories (ITTs); neither are they registered as OECMs. Instead, much of their ancestral land has been gazetted by the Kenyan state as protected areas. Being legally protected under state management does not mean they are actually being protected. The gazetting of these areas was done without the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) or effective participation of the Aweer and Sanye peoples, and led to their displacement from their territories, blocking them from protecting and sustainably using their lands.

However, their community organisation, the Lamu Minority People and Development Organisation (LMPD), is advocating for recognition of Aweer and Sanye customary governance and land rights. Such recognition could potentially open pathways for their territory to be acknowledged as their ITT and/or as an ICCA (territory of life), which could ensure biodiversity conservation and community rights are mutually supportive.

Government and conservation actors have engaged with the Aweer and Sanye communities in Lamu in limited or top-down ways. Conservation reserves were established on their land without community consent in the 1970s, and again in 2016 when the Boni–Lungi forest was gazetted on the advice of the Kenya Forest Service and WWF Kenya. Since then, government and other conservation agencies have sought to engage the communities, but mainly in awareness campaigns, anti-poaching patrols, and resource monitoring – not by granting them any decision-making power. Some recent efforts, often supported by NGOs and development partners, have tried to include the Aweer and Sanye in community conservancy programmes, biodiversity monitoring, cultural mapping and livelihood projects, reflecting a slow shift towards greater community participation and recognition of traditional knowledge. However, these engagements are still fragmented and have limited legal recognition, insufficient funding, and occur without full FPIC.

With the support of LMPD and others, the Aweer and Sanye communities are increasingly engaging in land rights and conservation advocacy. They are pushing for land registration and recognition of their traditional territories, potentially as ITTs or ICCAs. However, their involvement is constrained by a lack of legal recognition of their community land rights, restrictions on access to forests, and lack of meaningful participation in state-managed conservation programmes.

¹ “Local communities” in this briefing refers to local communities as understood within the Convention on Biological Diversity, that is “local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity” (article 8(j)); see also Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Glossary of Relevant Key Terms and Concepts within the Context of Article 8(j) and Related Provisions, 2019, p. 2, available at <https://www.cbd.int/doc/guidelines/cbd-8j-GlossaryArticle-en.pdf>; Conference of Parties to the CBD, COP 11 Decision XI/14.Article 8(j) and related provisions, para. 20, available at <https://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=13175>).

² It also draws on perspectives of Indigenous Peoples in Cameroon and Republic of Congo, as shared with Forest Peoples Programme in earlier stages of the project supporting this work, and more generally on conversations with other partners in the course of Forest Peoples Programme’s broader work.

Community outreach meeting on 15 July 2025 discussing peacekeeping, cultural preservation, and land advocacy.
Photographer: CIPDP



The Aweer and Sanye communities want conservation within their territories that respects their self-determined priorities, rights, and cultural identity. They seek:

- recognition of their communities’ land and resource rights, potentially as an ITT and/or as an ICCA, so they can sustain and be sustained by their ancestral forests, rangelands and coastal ecosystems
- inclusive decision-making so that they can determine the forms of conservation and development on their lands
- support for traditional knowledge systems so that their practices – such as sustainable honey harvesting, medicinal plant use, and seasonal forest management – shape their conservation strategies
- community-led conservation and development initiatives, such as recognition as eco-cultural tourism, and support for their small-scale sustainable livelihoods
- capacity building and empowerment, especially in education, healthcare, and climate resilience, to strengthen their ability to protect their environment in part through safeguarding their cultural heritage
- justice and redress for historical marginalisation, including recognition of past injustices tied to forced relocation and restricted forest access.

In essence, they want their community tenure rights, enabling them to be custodians of their territory while improving their wellbeing.

This would ensure secure land and resource rights for marginalised peoples, and improve livelihoods through sustainable forest use, fishing, eco-cultural tourism, and other community-led enterprises. It would also strengthen cultural heritage and identity, preserving traditional knowledge and practices for future generations. Socially, it would bring greater inclusion, equity and empowerment, and give the communities a meaningful role in decision-making. Such community-led stewardship would enable the protection of the Boni-Dodori forests, mangroves, coral reefs and marine reserves.

If, instead, conservation and development initiatives in Aweer and Sanye territories continue to be implemented without respecting the rights of the communities, this will continue to fuel conflict and mistrust between the communities, government and conservation agencies, undermining social outcomes, community cohesion and conservation goals. Exclusion perpetuates historical injustices tied to forced relocations and restrictions, and leads to degradation of social life, cultural practices and the ecosystems they are connected to. In short, ignoring proper engagement undermines both human rights and biodiversity conservation, creating long-term challenges for rightsholders, and all stakeholders.

The Aweer and Sangye communities consider that ITTs offer them opportunities in that they directly reflect the Aweer and Sanye aspiration for community tenure and custodianship of their lands. OECMs could enable communities to conserve and govern areas without being excluded by the imposition of formal protected areas, provided these are grounded in FPIC and community governance. However, the recognition of ITTs under the global framework, and Kenya’s recognition of them, could expand Kenya’s conservation landscape in a way that acknowledges Indigenous Peoples’ contributions while fulfilling Target 3. An ITT approach is the safest way of ensuring social and environmental protection and justice. The danger with an OECM approach is that it could easily be applied as a top-down mechanism without addressing tenure security, and so risk reinforcing exclusion and dispossession. For the Aweer and Sanye, OECMs would not be acceptable where they substitute for, or dilute, recognition of full community land rights. Similarly, any mechanisms that prioritise conservation outcomes over community wellbeing – rather than enabling them to be mutually supportive – would replicate historical injustices rather than resolve them.

Ultimately, while OECMs could complement community-led conservation in certain contexts, the primary and most desired pathway for the Aweer and Sanye is recognition of their ITTs, as this ensures justice, rights, and enduring stewardship of biodiversity.



Community discussion on options for the recognition of indigenous-led conservation in July 2025.
Photographer: CIPDP

Case study 2: The Wapichan Wiizi Conserved Area (Guyana)

Author: Don Antone, South Rupununi District Council

The Wapichan people of the South Rupununi in Guyana have lived in and cared for our traditional lands for countless generations. Our territory, known as Wapichan Wiizi, spans about 2.9 million hectares of tropical rainforest, rivers, mountains and savannah. In 2012, we developed a territorial management plan as a tool to secure legal recognition and protection of these lands, which are central to our identity, culture and survival. The South Rupununi District Council (SRDC), which represents our communities, has since built on this foundation by developing wildlife and headwaters management strategies, and by publishing studies documenting our cultural heritage, including our relations with biodiversity, shamanic customs and sacred mountains, underscoring the interwoven ecological and cultural value of the territory.

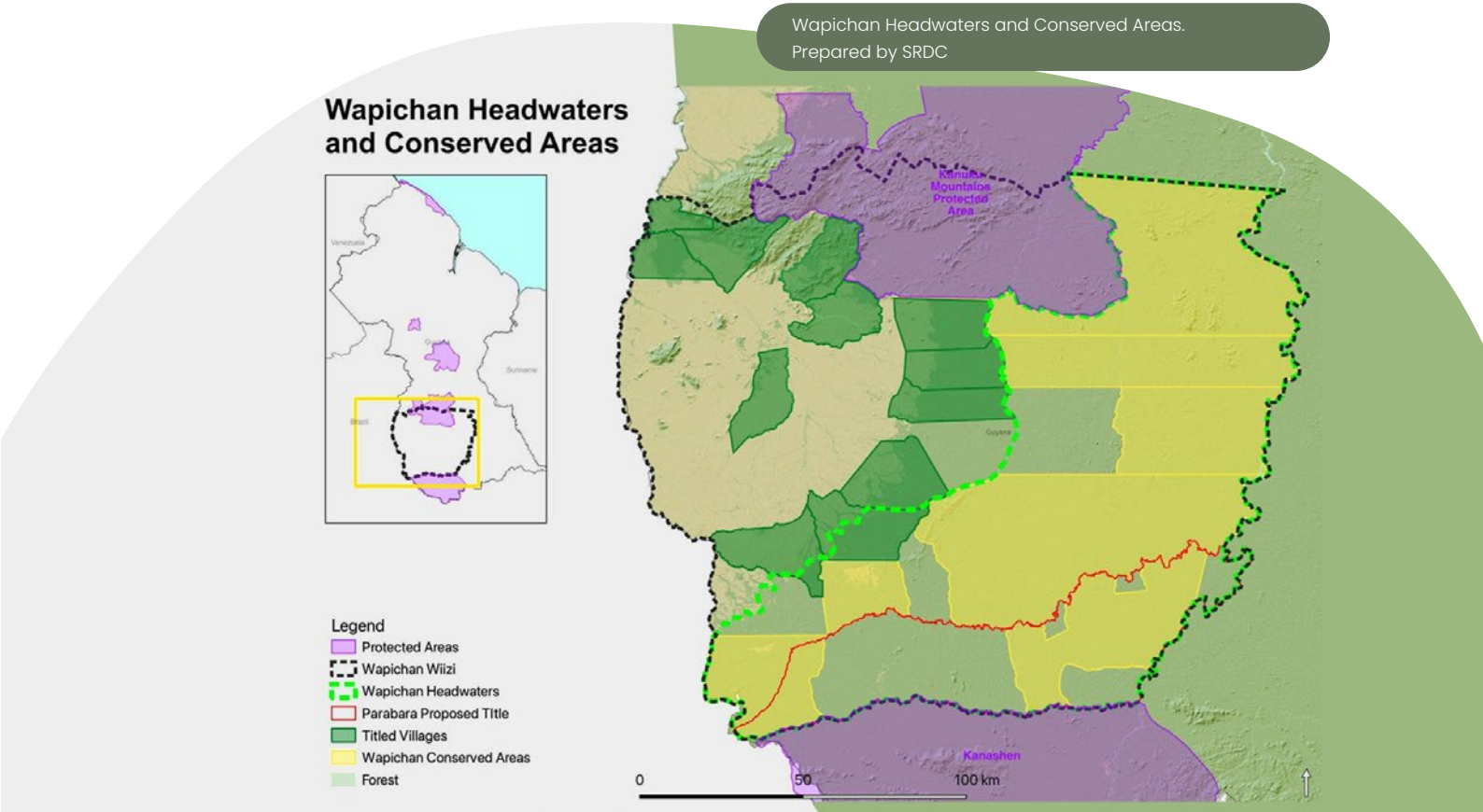
Our territorial management plan designated five villages – Shea, Maruranau, Awarewaunau, Aishalton and Parabara – to lead the management of the eastern portion of the territory, which we now refer to as the Wapichan Conserved Area. The area is of immense importance not only to the Wapichan but also to the global community: it is a vast carbon sink; a place rich in biodiversity, home to numerous endangered species and a key ecological corridor; a source of fresh water; and a repository of sacred cultural heritage sites.

For the Wapichan people, conservation is not a new idea. It is a way of life, embedded in our customs, traditions and knowledge systems. From elders who know the ways of the land and who pass down ecological wisdom, to hunters, fishers and farmers

who observe seasonal patterns, our people have always practised forms of stewardship that ensure balance between human use and nature’s renewal. In recent years, this traditional knowledge has been complemented by modern scientific tools. Our communities are now using camera traps, eDNA testing, and other methods to monitor wildlife, identify species and understand population trends. This blending of approaches has strengthened our ability to both manage our resources responsibly and demonstrate the global ecological significance of our lands. A biodiversity survey conducted in the sacred mountain of Karawaimentaawa in 2022 led to the discovery of new species and the development of a headwaters protection framework.

The role of the Wapichan as guardians of biodiversity and climate stability is clear. We are on the frontlines of forest protection, watershed preservation and climate resilience. As one community member put it, “For us, conservation is not new – it is our way of life. Protecting our lands is about survival, cultural identity, and the future of our children.” This worldview demonstrates that Indigenous-led conservation is not a parallel path but the very heart of sustainable solutions to today’s global climate crises.

Despite our contributions, the Wapichan people face escalating threats from extractive industries and external pressures. Mining, logging and infrastructure projects are frequently prioritised over Indigenous rights to land. Gold mining, in particular, has left deep scars, polluting and contaminating rivers with high levels of turbidity and mercury, damaging soils, and endangering the health of fish and aquatic species on which communities depend. Such activities not only destroy ecosystems but also erode cultural traditions, weaken food security, and undermine the future of younger generations.



Target 3 of the GBF, known as 30 by 30, presents a unique opportunity. For the Wapichan, it offers not only a chance to contribute to national and global conservation goals, but also to advance our longstanding struggle for legal recognition of our traditional lands. It opens a pathway to secure land titling and extensions, safeguard cultural heritage, foster sustainable livelihoods and combat climate change impacts, all while ensuring our full participation in decision-making processes.

Although this new global framework offers a significant opportunity, it also carries risks. We have already experienced how the implementation of protected areas legislation can undermine our rights. The OECM pathway to Target 3 can provide recognition for community-managed lands that deliver conservation outcomes without being designated as formal protected areas. OECMs offer flexibility, allow traditional land use, and also provide international visibility through global databases. However, in Guyana there is no legal framework for OECMs, and without safeguards they risk being symbolic acknowledgements that do not advance land rights. There is a danger that governments or external actors may misuse them to meet targets while sidestepping the deeper need for secure Indigenous authority and land titling.

The third pathway to Target 3 – Indigenous and Traditional Territories (ITTs) – is, in theory, exactly what we are offering with our Wapichan Wiizi Conserved Area. But in Guyana we have already experienced how legislation, such as the Amerindian Act, can claim to advance recognition of Indigenous land rights while in fact undermining our rights. Moreover, we do not yet know how ITTs would be registered and recognised internationally.

ICCAs (Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas) align strongly with Wapichan traditions because they are built on customary laws, knowledge, and governance practices. They affirm cultural identity, strengthen local stewardship, and can be registered in the ICCA Registry to gain international legitimacy. However, ICCAs are not always recognised within national policy frameworks, and currently do not count toward national Target 3 reporting. While they amplify cultural recognition, they may not resolve legal land rights unless supported by broader political will.

There is also the risk that such initiatives, if not properly communicated and understood, could create confusion within communities, especially among elders unfamiliar with these terms.

For the Wapichan, the most promising pathway may lie in pursuing both OECMs and ICCAs in parallel, combining the cultural legitimacy of community-led conservation with the international recognition needed to influence policy. Crucially, these strategies must be firmly grounded in the right to free, prior and informed consent, and anchored in the overarching struggle for land titling and secure legal authority. Only then can they become tools for empowerment rather than create risks of co-option.

The Wapichan people are actively building partnerships to secure recognition of our conservation leadership. We have engaged government agencies to strengthen Indigenous-led conservation plans, collaborated with conservation partners to enhance technical support, and participated in global forums. These efforts have already borne fruit, with the President of Guyana expressing support for our conservation initiative. Such partnerships are crucial in advancing Indigenous-led conservation as a shared national and global priority.

The Wapichan Wiizi Conserved Area is more than a local initiative. It is a model of Indigenous-led conservation that integrates traditional wisdom with scientific innovation, protects biodiversity, and contributes to climate stability. Securing legal recognition for our territory is not just a matter of conservation but of justice and survival. By recognising Wapichan Wiizi under the 30 by 30 framework and supporting community-driven approaches such as OECMs and ICCAs, Guyana and the international community can achieve a true win-win: advancing global biodiversity goals while affirming the rights and authority of the Wapichan people. The future of these lands – and the future of our planet – depends on such recognition and action.



Wapichan sacred mountain.
Photographer: Don Antone

Case study 3: The Pgaz K’Nyau communities of Huay E Kang and Huay Hin Lad Nai (Thailand)

Author: Prasert Trakansuphakon, Pga k’nyau Association for Sustainable Development (PASD)

The two Pgaz K’Nyau (Karen) communities of Huay E Kang (Chiang Mai) and Huay Hin Lad Nai (Chiang Rai) in northern Thailand are recognised as official communities with traditional livelihoods and practices.

Huay E Kang, established more than 300 years ago, was recognised as an official village by the government in 1969, and is located in a national reserved forest, which was gazetted in 1964. The forest spans 9,378 rai (about 1,500 hectares), supporting a population of 603 people across 125 households. The communities’ self-governance combines the spiritual authority of the hif hkof (village spiritual leader) with a government-appointed village headman. The Huay Hin Lad Nai community, also within a national reserved forest, manages over 10,000 rai (about 1,600 hectares) using Indigenous knowledge.

Both communities have distinct forest zones for different uses, including sacred forests, community forests, and rotational farming areas, which are central to their food security and forest regeneration.

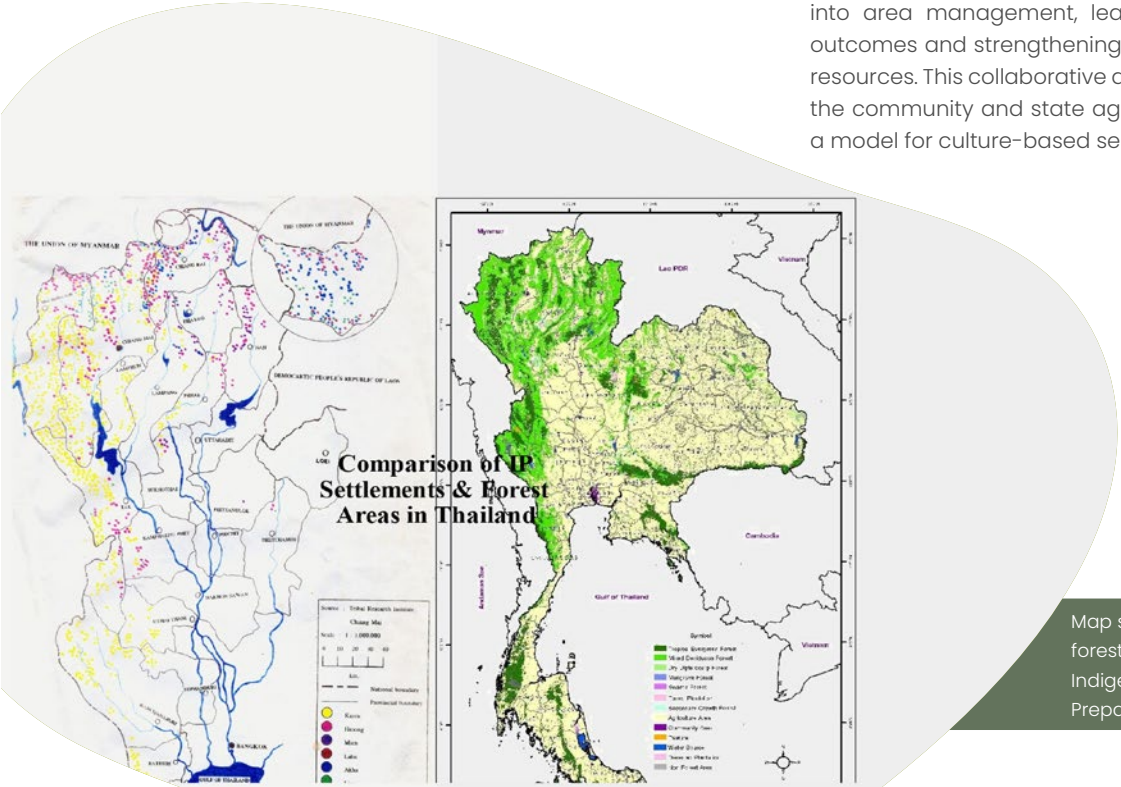
Both communities’ traditional governance systems, including customary laws, rituals and ceremonies, align with the principles and objectives of Target 3. A key practice is their system of rotational farming, which is a leading example of sustainable agriculture.

Both communities could potentially be recognised as being within OECMs, but their management practices are rooted in their own customary laws rather than government regulations; they could, therefore, also be potentially recognised as Indigenous and Traditional Territories. The Pgaj Dei Pau (Umbilical Cord Forest) and the Luj pgaj (Forest Offering Ceremony) are significant rituals that demonstrate their spiritual and cultural connection to their territory. Huay E Kang has registered a community forest (within their wider land-use plan) with the government to secure legal recognition while continuing to manage it in a traditional way; this could potentially be recognised as an Indigenous and Community Conserved Area (ICCA).

Community-led initiatives, such as the 60-rai (9.6-hectare) Indigenous Women’s Forest created by the Che Su Mo women’s group in Huay E Kang, exemplify their commitment to conservation. This forest serves as a biodiversity reserve, a source of livelihood, and a learning space for transmitting Indigenous knowledge to younger generations.

The Huay E Kang community has actively engaged in processes that support the achievement of Target 3 by strengthening its internal capacity and documenting its traditional knowledge and regulations. Community members are creating a database of historical information from elders and using GIS mapping to clearly delineate their territory, including culturally significant areas such as the Women’s Forest, the Community Forest, and the Umbilical Cord Forest. The Women’s Forest model has expanded into a network of eight communities. The community is also revitalising the Mae Wang Watershed Network and advocating for a community forest assembly to secure the right of Indigenous communities to manage their own forest areas across the watershed.

Greater collaboration by the state with the Huay EKang community, based on the community’s genuine participation, could improve implementation of Target 3, through integrating local wisdom into area management, leading to sustainable conservation outcomes and strengthening the community’s authority over its resources. This collaborative approach would build trust between the community and state agencies, positioning Huay E Kang as a model for culture-based self-management and conservation.



Map showing that most of the remaining forests in Thailand are found where Indigenous communities are located.
Prepared by PASD and IMPECT.

Conversely, if the state seeks to implement Target 3 without proper engagement with the Huay E Kang community, it poses significant risks to communities and to the state's alignment with the target, for example through the violation of rights, potential displacement from traditional lands, and restricted access to resources. This could lead to conflict and undermine conservation goals. However, the Huay E Kang community is well positioned to mitigate these risks due to its strong networks, internal capacity, and proven ability to negotiate and counter threats to their rights.

More widely, at the national level, a suitable mechanism is needed to discuss and plan the implementation of Target 3 in accordance with the GBF, particularly Target 22 and Section C. The national process for developing guidelines and identifying potential OECMs has allowed only for partial participation of Indigenous Peoples (for example, they are not included in the identification of potential OECMs), and a meaningful discussion or process for the recognition of ITTs has not yet taken place.

To ensure Target 3 supports community-led conservation, governments, funders and conservation actors must take a concerted approach:

- **Governments** need to co-design initiatives with Indigenous communities, recognise their rights to their lands and to manage resources, and formalise these practices through legal and policy reforms.
- **The Thai government** should establish a suitable national mechanism, with the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and all relevant stakeholders, for an effective implementation of Target 3, including options related to all three pathways.
- **Funders** should directly support long-term, flexible work plans designed by community organisations, ensuring projects align with local ways of life and build sustained capacity.
- **Conservation actors** must transition to a supportive role, helping to enhance communities' own plans, tools and capacities.

Ultimately, these synergistic actions are essential to transform Target 3 into a framework where conservation is truly initiated, driven and led by the communities themselves.



A meeting to review the regulations of the Huay E Kang community.
Photographer: Arisa Phakdikhunathum

Reflections and analysis

At the core of demands of Indigenous Peoples and local communities – regardless of the pathway – is respect for their rights, as well as recognition of their contributions to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, and of their territories, governance systems and traditional knowledge. Both are essential to the achievement of Target 3.

Protected areas – the imperative for reform

As the case study from Kenya demonstrates, protected areas that have been imposed on the territories of Indigenous Peoples and local communities continue to cause harm and conflict. In addition to ensuring that new protected areas respect rights – including the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) – it is imperative that implementation of Target 3 also addresses the historic and ongoing harms that have been caused by existing protected areas.

This requires (a) acknowledging past harms and recognising territorial and other rights that overlap with existing protected areas, and (b) taking steps to address these harms. The latter may include negotiating new governance or use arrangements for protected areas (such as co-management or Indigenous-led protected areas), re-categorising or degazetting protected areas and returning lands to Indigenous Peoples or local communities, or negotiating and providing just compensation.

In many countries, it may also require amending existing protected area laws to incorporate clear requirements to respect rights, including FPIC, and to provide genuine mechanisms for community-led or co-managed protected areas.

However, it is worth noting that, because of past experiences, in many countries Indigenous Peoples and local communities remain wary of protected areas, and have a preference for other Target 3 pathways.

OECMs – a model with potential but also risks

The presented case studies demonstrate that OECMs may in some circumstances be a mechanism that supports rights-based implementation of Target 3, while also presenting a risk to Indigenous Peoples and local communities if the rights of these groups are not adequately protected under national law, and respected in the process of creating OECMs. As noted in Thailand, Indigenous communities have been able to continue their sustainable governance independently, but risk being included within an OECMs without their free, prior and informed consent, with unknown implications for these arrangements. With many countries still to develop national frameworks to recognise OECMs, it will be critical to support rights-based models that are based on recognition of territorial rights and FPIC.

Indigenous and Traditional Territories – a conservation opportunity

As the case studies in this briefing demonstrate, the recognition of Indigenous and Traditional Territories (ITTs) presents a significant opportunity to strengthen conservation outcomes and respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in implementing Target 3, by creating more devolved, diverse and locally-led mechanisms for advancing conservation. ITTs are grounded in traditional stewardship and customary governance systems, often practised and refined over millennia. Because they reflect most closely existing Indigenous and traditional governance systems, they may often be the preferred option of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and it is important that states recognise and support ITTs as a standalone option. At the same time, in some cases ITTs could overlap with other Target 3 pathways – OECMs and protected areas. It remains critical, however, that the preferences and priorities of Indigenous Peoples and local communities are paramount in the use of Target 3 mechanisms that may affect them, most notably through ensuring that they have given their free, prior and informed consent.

Practical support is essential for ITTs to thrive. This includes accessible legal and policy guidance, direct and flexible funding, and peer-to-peer learning to strengthen community-based stewardship. Communities can and should be permitted to govern monitoring and reporting systems themselves, respecting data sovereignty and local decision-making, while support should be provided if requested.

Recognising ITTs as a standalone pathway honours Indigenous leadership and rights, and ensures that Target 3 is implemented in a rights-based, sustainable and culturally grounded way. But it also supports governments in their implementation and achievement of Target 3, meaning governments can include the efforts of communities in their national reporting.

The transfer of knowledge to the younger generation in the Pgaz K'Nyau Women's Forest of the Huay E Kang community.
Photographer: Arisa Phakdikhunathum



Addressing systemic barriers

Effective implementation of Target 3 also requires addressing the systemic barriers that hinder conservation and sustainable use by Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Equal recognition of Indigenous and local knowledge

Indigenous Peoples and local communities have consistently demonstrated that their governance systems, knowledge and cultural practices sustain biodiversity across generations. These systems are not static – they are living, adaptive and context specific, and remain at the heart of effective and sustainable conservation. Achieving the ambition of Target 3 therefore requires deliberately engaging with and learning from these systems, and recognising their central role in conservation outcomes.

National law reform

National law reform to recognise and protect the land and territorial rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities is essential. Legal reforms must prioritise secure tenure; the integration of customary governance and community-led conservation models into national conservation law; and the application of free, prior and informed consent in all conservation initiatives. Laws should enable recognition of diverse forms of Indigenous governance and customary practices, rather than imposing rigid categories.

Financing

Financing remains a central bottleneck. Effective conservation requires direct, flexible, long-term financing that aligns with community priorities. Sustained support strengthens local governance institutions, builds resilience, reduces dependence on external actors, and enables Indigenous Peoples and local communities to pursue self-determined conservation strategies. Community-led financing mechanisms, such as conservation trust funds or participatory management funds, can further reinforce equitable and sustainable conservation outcomes.

Conservation programming

Conservation programming must incorporate co-design and effective participation. Conservation initiatives designed in isolation from Indigenous Peoples and local communities not only lack legitimacy but also tend to fail in practice. Mechanisms that support community-led approaches or joint planning, that strengthen community-based monitoring, and that facilitate peer learning across regions embed local realities into implementation. Programmes developed collaboratively create space for innovation, respect diverse cultural and ecological contexts, and leverage traditional knowledge for adaptive management.

Monitoring and reporting systems

Monitoring and reporting systems must shift toward community control at the local level, and toward participatory monitoring and reporting at national and global levels. Global platforms and registries can provide valuable information, but they must be used only with community consent. They also need to be able to represent and reflect autonomous data generated by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Data sovereignty is not merely technical – it is a matter of self-determination and trust. Supporting Indigenous Peoples and local communities to design, manage and interpret monitoring systems ensures that conservation results are accurately recorded, while also being both locally meaningful and internationally legitimate. Community-led monitoring also strengthens adaptive management and enables Indigenous Peoples and local communities to respond dynamically to ecological, social and economic changes.



The establishment of a Community Forest Assembly Network, with participation from the community, private sector, and both local and central government agencies. Held at the Huay E Kang community. Photographer: Noraeri Thungmuangthong

What to do next

Here we present some key actions governments, funders and civil society organisations can take to translate the principles into tangible outcomes. Implementing these actions will ensure that Target 3 is achieved while securing rights and governance and fostering sustained community-led stewardship. This is essential for aligning biodiversity goals with human rights, and so enabling both to flourish.

Governments

- Formally acknowledge Indigenous and Traditional Territories as a standalone pathway for implementation of Target 3.
- Recognise and protect land and territorial rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in full and require all conservation actions to respect free, prior and informed consent.
- Embed autonomous customary governance systems and collective management into national and subnational conservation frameworks (while ensuring their continued autonomy).
- Revise laws and policies to align with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other international human rights law instruments, as well as forthcoming guidance from the Convention on Biological Diversity on ITTs.
- With the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and relevant stakeholders, establish or strengthen effective mechanisms for implementing Target 3, including those related to the three pathways.

Funders

- Provide flexible, long-term funding for community-led conservation and sustainable use, including for Indigenous and Traditional Territories.
- Support capacity building and leadership development to strengthen inclusive, effective and accountable community governance, adaptive management and sustainable local stewardship.
- Enable and support community-controlled / self-determined funding and funding mechanisms.

Planting of medicinal and natural dye plants in the Women's Forest by women, youth, and community experts. Photographer: Noraeri Thungmuangthong



Civil society organisations

- Foster peer-to-peer learning networks to enable communities to share strategies and solutions.
- Translate legal and policy guidance into accessible, community-friendly resources.
- Support advocacy and awareness-raising to promote recognition of Indigenous and Traditional Territories and systemic reforms.

Cross-cutting actions

- Support community-controlled monitoring systems, respecting free, prior and informed consent and data sovereignty.
- Include the contributions of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in national and global reporting to accurately reflect their roles in biodiversity conservation.
- Establish effective and accessible accountability mechanisms.



Wapichan cultural dance.
Photographer: Don Antone

This briefing has been developed as part of the Conservation Pathways project.

Authors: Forest Peoples Programme (FPP), South Rupununi District Council (SRDC), Pga k'nyau Association for Sustainable Development (PASD), Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand Association (IMPECT), and the Chepkitale Indigenous People Development Project (CIPDP). Supported by WWF-US. October 2025. More information: www.forestpeoples.org/en/conservation-pathways

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