

January 2026



Engagement of Indigenous Peoples in the revision of the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)

REGIONAL REPORT



About the series

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), adopted in 2022, marks a historic milestone in international environmental policy through its explicit and unequivocal recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights and contributions to conservation.

As a next step, Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity were required to update and revise their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) to align with the KMGBF within two years. These updates, still ongoing in many countries, provide a prime opportunity to strengthen Indigenous Peoples' rights and integrate their knowledge.

This paper is part of a series documenting Indigenous Peoples' and advocates' experiences with NBSAP revision processes in several Asian countries where AIPP members and partners are active. By examining both successful engagement strategies and persistent challenges, they offer insights for other Indigenous advocates, highlight key concerns for policy-makers, and point to important opportunities for allies to support Indigenous Peoples. AIPP's goal is to inform on-going and future policy development, implementation, monitoring and reporting to enable more meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples in biodiversity governance and decision-making across the region.

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Indigenous Community Protected Area in Preah Vihear, Cambodia. Photo by Minh Tran.

Introduction

It was 2 a.m. on December 20, 2022, when the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity delivered its statement on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).¹ After 20 days of tense negotiations at the 15th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Montreal, 196 countries adopted the historic global agreement to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and live in harmony with nature.

The legally binding framework marks a milestone for Indigenous Peoples: it unequivocally recognizes our rights, the value of our knowledge, and our central role in global environmental governance (Box 1). It makes it clear that **realizing Indigenous Peoples' rights is fundamental to effective conservation.**

Indigenous caucus representatives from Asia went home with major victories to

celebrate. But they also knew that international wins were not enough. For Indigenous communities across the region – from the forests of Thailand, to the mountains of Nepal, to coastal villages in the Philippines – **the real question was whether national governments would fulfil the commitments made in the KMGBF.**

Living in harmony with nature has always been part of Indigenous philosophy. Conservation is a daily practice rooted in culture and spirituality, whether it involves rotational farming, forest custodianship, or the sustainable use of marine resources. Yet in order to maintain our ways of life, Indigenous Peoples in Asia need our national governments to recognize and protect our fundamental and inherent right to self-determination. Otherwise, the ambitions of the KMGBF will remain out of

reach.

Countries implement their global commitments through National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs), which set targets and guide how they implement and report on biodiversity actions.

Countries were asked to update their NBSAPs to align with the KMGBF, with those unable to complete full revisions asked to communicate their national targets. This was the ultimate test of whether global recognition of Indigenous Peoples would translate into national implementation.

Recognizing the importance of this historic

moment, Indigenous Peoples in Asia have been working together to ensure our voices are heard. Every year, AIPP members take stock of our engagement in biodiversity processes at the national and local levels, reflecting on achievements and challenges and sharing them during the annual Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples of Asia Conferences.² The E-Sak Ka Ou Declaration³ (2023) and the Tohmlé Statement⁴ (2024) clearly articulate our call for full and effective participation in NBSAP revisions, as well as our collective commitment to protecting biodiversity and the environment.

This report documents how Indigenous Peoples have engaged in and been included in the NBSAP revision processes across 15 Asian countries⁵ where AIPP members and partners are active. It follows the footsteps of Indigenous leaders, including men, women, youth and persons with disabilities, who have worked tirelessly to influence biodiversity decisions – both from the ground up and from the global level down. **It highlights persistent challenges, including structural barriers and normalized unjust practices, and the transformative power of Indigenous-led biodiversity governance, including innovative and pioneering work.**

The findings are intended for Indigenous advocates working on conservation, Indigenous knowledge, land rights and human rights issues, providing insights into strategic approaches for engaging with national biodiversity planning processes. They may also be useful to government officials and Indigenous Peoples' allies who seek to contribute to more inclusive and

effective pathways to implementing the KMGBF and its vision of inclusive conservation governance.

After a brief overview of the approach taken in our analysis, **Section 2** looks at how power is organized in biodiversity governance and why Indigenous Peoples are so often sidelined from the decisions that shape our lands, waters and lives. **Section 3** shifts the focus to Indigenous Peoples' agency, showing how communities are building their own coalitions and institutions to challenge exclusion, assert rights, and maintain Indigenous values through alternative biodiversity governance. Informed by these experiences, **Section 4** examines how well the revised national biodiversity plans reflect the commitments of the KMGBF. **Section 5** concludes with key findings and recommendations for Indigenous advocates, allies and duty-bearers.

1.1. Scope and methods

This report examines biodiversity planning processes from AIPP’s perspective as an Indigenous organization, focusing on Indigenous Peoples’ experiences and priorities. It is based mainly on the information available to AIPP as of 28 July 2025, with some updates. NBSAPs are still pending in many countries, and the full extent of Indigenous Peoples’ inclusion or exclusion, and the results of their efforts to influence the NBSAPs, may only become clear as the decision-making processes are completed and the final NBSAPs are analysed.

This report draws from four main components:

A woman from the Murut Tahol Indigenous Community harvesting rice in her family's field in Alutok village, Malaysia. Photo by Lakpa Nuri Sherpa.



NBSAP ANALYSIS

As of 28 July 2025, six NBSAPs had been revised and submitted to the CBD Secretariat, with five available in English (India, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam). Four countries – Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR and the Philippines – submitted only national targets, while Nepal published an NBSAP vision document. The NBSAPs, national targets and vision document were analysed for Indigenous recognition and full and effective participation. Due to limited language capacity, Indonesia’s Bahasa-language NBSAP was not included.

COUNTRY EXPERIENCE PAPERS

In 2024, AIPP invited members to share their experiences engaging in the NBSAP revision process. Indigenous leaders from Nepal, Thailand and the Philippines prepared detailed papers describing and analysing Indigenous Peoples’ engagement in the NBSAP processes in their respective countries.

RAPID ASSESSMENT SURVEY

An online survey was disseminated to AIPP member and partner organizations, yielding 85 responses from 15 countries and 59 organizations. Respondents included 41 men, 44 women, 25 youth and five persons with disabilities. The survey ran from 14 July to 1 August 2025 and was available in Bahasa Indonesia, English, Hindi, Khmer, Nepali and Thai.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

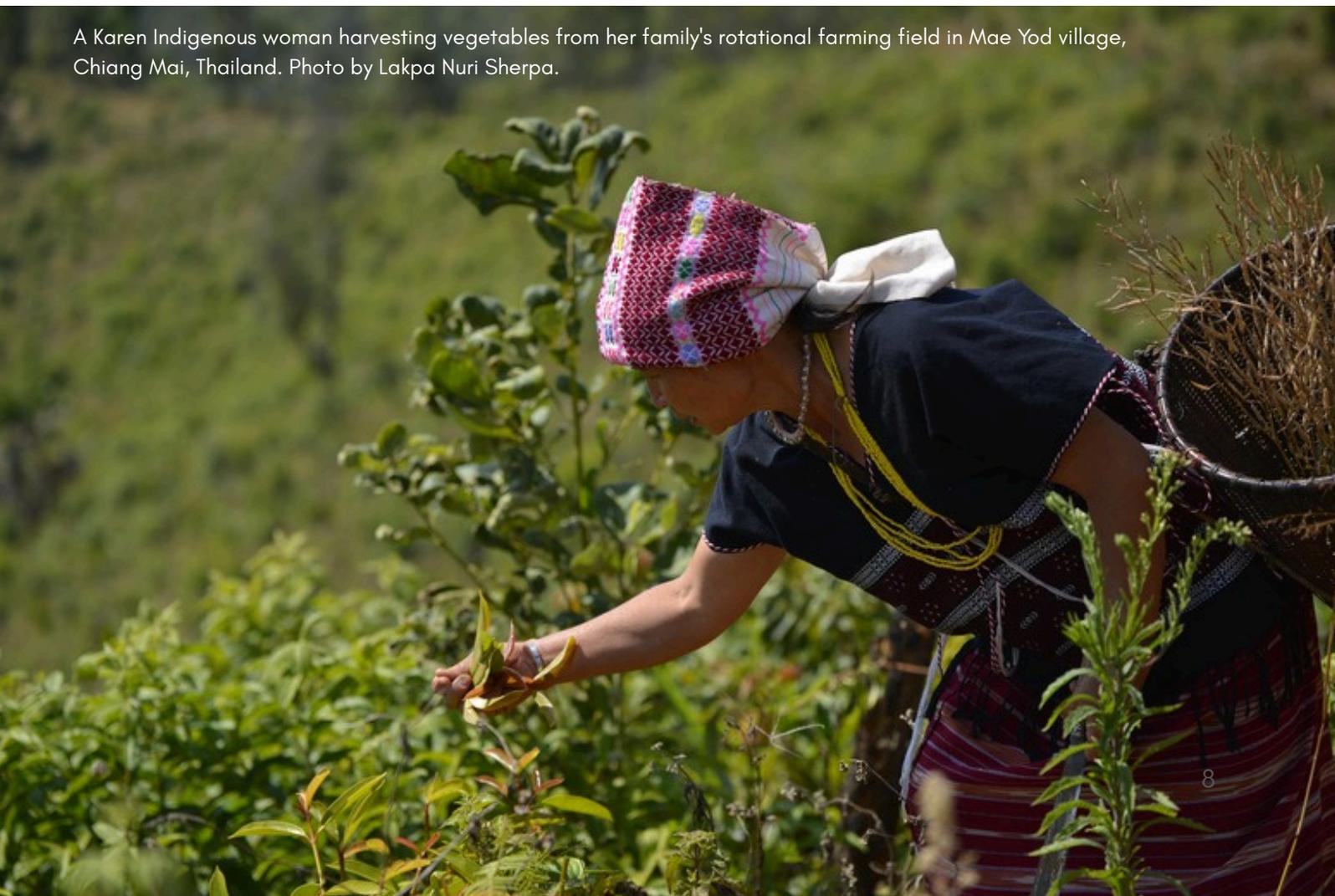
Interviews were conducted in August 2025 with 21 Indigenous leaders, experts and advocates from 10 countries who reported being familiar with biodiversity policies in the survey. This included 10 Indigenous men, 10 Indigenous women, one woman advocate, as well as three Indigenous youth and two Indigenous persons with disabilities. Most interviews were conducted in English, two in Nepali and one in Thai.

All anecdotes and quotations presented in this report are drawn from the in-depth interviews, unless specifically attributed to another aspect of the research.

The 85 survey responses and 21 interviews represent a substantial portion of AIPP's network, which comprises 46 member organizations across the region. While they cannot capture the full diversity of Indigenous experiences across Asia, they provide important insights into the

experiences of organized Indigenous advocacy networks engaged in biodiversity policy. The concentrated sample within AIPP's network also reveals important patterns about how information and opportunities flow through Indigenous advocacy networks, highlighting both the strength of these networks in facilitating participation, and the risk that Indigenous communities not connected to formal organizations will be excluded.

A Karen Indigenous woman harvesting vegetables from her family's rotational farming field in Mae Yod village, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Photo by Lakpa Nuri Sherpa.



Box 1. Indigenous Peoples in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

The recognition of Indigenous Peoples in the KMGBF is the result of more than two decades of advocacy and collaboration between Indigenous Peoples and allies. As a legally binding global framework for biodiversity, the KMGBF places human rights at the heart of conservation, challenging a legacy of conservation policies often having been implemented at the expense of human rights and Indigenous Peoples' rights. Its adoption signals that Indigenous Peoples' voices are finally being heard in international biodiversity governance.

A human rights-based approach: The KMGBF represents a historic step in integrating human rights into environmental policy. It states clearly: "The implementation of the Framework should follow a human rights-based approach, respecting, protecting, promoting and fulfilling human rights." It explicitly affirms the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and calls for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, requiring cooperation across all levels of governance.

Increased visibility of Indigenous Peoples in conservation: Compared with the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Targets, the KMGBF significantly expands recognition of Indigenous Peoples, from only two of 20 previous targets, to seven of 23 targets today.

Recognition of Indigenous Peoples' right to land and full protection of environmental human rights defenders:

Target 22 of the KMGBF firmly requires governments to "ensure the full, equitable, inclusive, effective and gender-responsive representation and participation in decision-making, and access to justice and

information related to biodiversity" of Indigenous Peoples. It further commits to respecting our "rights over lands, territories, resources, and traditional knowledge" and the full protection of environmental human rights defenders.

Indigenous Peoples as conservation

partners: The KMGBF contains a dedicated section recognizing Indigenous Peoples as custodians of biodiversity and partners in conservation. A further milestone was reached at COP16 in 2024, where Parties agreed to establish a Permanent Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) (Traditional Knowledge, Innovations and Practices) and related provisions,⁶ with a new Programme of Work. This creates, for the first time, a "permanent home" within the CBD for Indigenous Peoples' direct engagement and contributions to decision-making.

Unfinished business: Despite these gains, significant gaps remain. The KMGBF failed to recognize the Indigenous Peoples' lands and territories as a distinct and autonomous pathway in conservation. Target 3 refers to "indigenous and traditional territories", but it uses diluted language that risks subsuming these under protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, rather than affirming them as self-determined systems of conservation.

Taken together, these gains represent hard-won progress and a historic shift toward centring rights in biodiversity governance. The challenge ahead lies in translating recognition into practice, ensuring that Indigenous Peoples' rights are not only acknowledged in international texts, but fully realized on the ground.

Power and participation in the NBSAP revision

Despite the KMGBF's emphasis on the rights and roles of Indigenous Peoples, in much of Asia, Indigenous Peoples continue to face marginalization in official biodiversity planning and NBSAP revision processes. There are significant differences across countries, however, reflecting governments' attitudes towards rights-holder engagement in general and the level of recognition given to Indigenous Peoples and their rights.

All the countries covered by this report,

except Bangladesh, are signatories to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which confirms Indigenous Peoples' rights to self-determination, as well as to our land, culture, language and identity. Yet the term "Indigenous Peoples" remains politically sensitive and is rejected by some governments, depriving Indigenous Peoples of individual and collective rights. Nepal is the only Asian country that has ratified the legally binding International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, in 2007.

2.1. Where Asian countries stand on recognizing Indigenous Peoples

Strong constitutional recognition:

Indonesia, Malaysia (in Sabah and Sarawak), Nepal and the Philippines explicitly recognize Indigenous Peoples as “indigenous” in their constitutions. The Philippines’ Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) of 1997 provides the region’s most comprehensive protection framework. India also protects Indigenous Peoples through constitutional provisions for Scheduled Tribes and the Forest Rights Act of 2006.

Moderate recognition: Cambodia and Indonesia have some laws and policies recognizing customary communities and collective land rights. However, Cambodia went backward when its 2023 Environment and Natural Resources Code excluded Indigenous Peoples recognition, undermining previous protections.

Limited recognition: Bangladesh, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam provide minimal recognition, typically referring to Indigenous communities as “ethnic minorities” or “national races” without recognizing distinct Indigenous Peoples’ rights. Japan recognizes the Ainu people, but maintains limited Indigenous rights frameworks, while Taiwan only recognizes a limited number of Indigenous communities as Indigenous,

leaving many excluded from protection and recognition.

Recent breakthroughs: In August 2025, Thailand passed the “Bill on the Protection and Promotion of the Way of Life of Ethnic Groups” with overwhelming parliamentary support. While the law still avoids the recognition of Indigenous Peoples as Indigenous, it establishes legal protections for Indigenous communities for the first time in Thai history. In Nepal, the Supreme Court issued a directive in June 2025 requiring government at all levels to follow the UNDRIP and ILO Convention 169 when making laws, policies and programmes. Both achievements were the fruits of persistent legal advocacy of Indigenous leaders in these countries.

Existing legal frameworks are not always implemented adequately, however, and progress across the region has been uneven. In October 2025, for example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations adopted the ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment, marking a major step forward on environmental rights in the region. But for all its strengths, the declaration fails to recognize Indigenous Peoples, protect Indigenous Environmental Human Rights Defenders and promote land rights and the Free, Prior and Informed Consent principle in this framework.

Huay Lu Luang village of Lahu Indigenous Peoples in Northern Thailand. Photo by Lakpa Nuri Sherpa.



2.2. National governments and their partners in the NBSAP process

State actors “are everything”, said Sanjeeb Drong, an Indigenous man from Bangladesh, in describing about how decisions on environmental policies such as the NBSAP are shaped. His words capture a reality observed across the region: while many institutions, from UN agencies to international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), circle around the process, it is ultimately national governments that hold the power. As he explained, even UN agencies, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) “all work with government ministries, who are the sole implementers”.

This section examines how power is organized and exercised in the revision of NBSAPs. National governments remain the main decision-makers, holding authority over the process. International actors, such as global NGOs, conservation organizations, UN agencies, and national and international consultants exert significant influence as funders, facilitators or technical experts. Some of these actors have helped open space for Indigenous Peoples’ participation, while others have reinforced a technocratic model of conservation that sidelines rights-based approaches. Indigenous Peoples have increasingly gained recognition and inclusion in policy-making processes, yet Indigenous Peoples’ participation remains tokenistic in many cases, despite growing rhetoric about stakeholder engagement.

The interplay between these actors ultimately shapes whose knowledge counts, whose priorities are reflected and, ultimately, whether biodiversity plans move towards justice and equity or reproduce old exclusions. For Indigenous Peoples, recognition on paper does not necessarily translate into shared power in practice.

The guidance for revising or updating the national biodiversity strategy and action plans says that the NBSAPs “should involve and facilitate the engagement of all government sectors at all levels of government, and all stakeholders, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women and youth across society, to ensure that targets, actions and expected outcomes are coordinated, that the concerns of different actors are addressed, and that their ownership and commitment towards implementation are attained” (para. 2).⁷ It also encourages Parties to consider “an assessment of how stakeholders, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women and youth were involved in the revision and implementation” (para. 7).

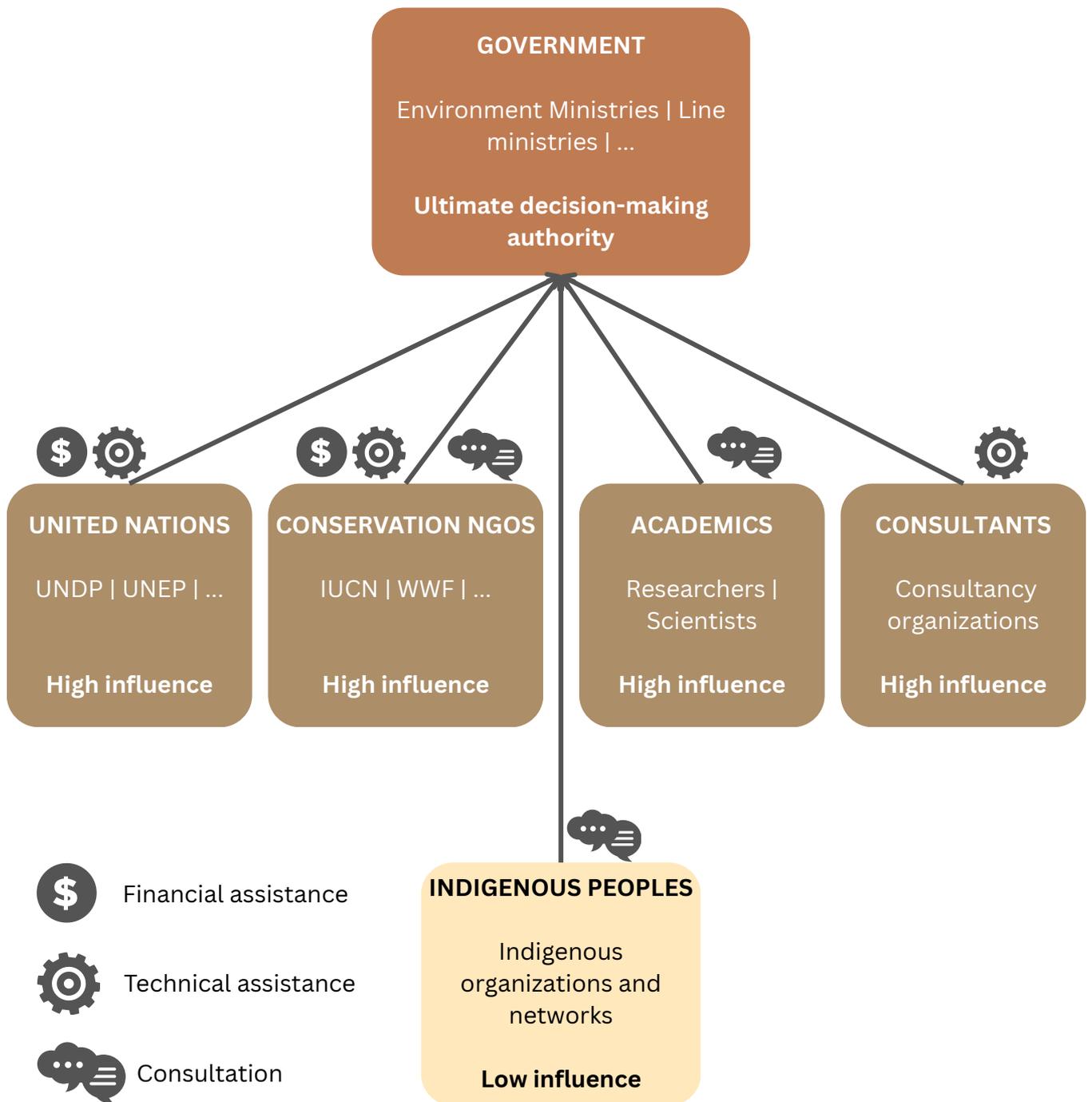


Figure 1. Decision-making architecture around NBSAPs, as described by interviewees.

2.2.1. The authority of the state

NBSAPs are meant to be developed and revised primarily by national governments, with financial and/or technical support from UN agencies – mainly the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and other international partners, such as IUCN, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and donor governments, such as through Germany’s GIZ.

Environment ministries were the lead authors of the updated NBSAPs in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. The India NBSAP also included the National Biodiversity Authority and UNDP in its Supervisory Team and Drafting Committee. Indonesia’s NBSAP lists representatives of several line ministries on the Steering Committee and Writing Team. Thailand’s NBSAP acknowledges support from the Global Environment Facility, in cooperation with UNDP, a consultancy, and the Biodiversity Finance Initiative. Indigenous leaders in these countries confirmed that while international actors had contributed resources, expertise and facilitation, national governments decided on the priorities and content.

All this is consistent with the nature of international commitments such as the KMGBF, but it also means that **Indigenous Peoples’ ability to participate in and influence the NBSAP update process in each country has varied greatly**, depending on the national government’s overall priorities and on which agencies within the government were involved.

The existence of Indigenous-specific bodies within governments by no means guaranteed access or influence. For

instance, in the Philippines, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) was minimally engaged in the NBSAP update process and related activities led by Indigenous Peoples. In Nepal, the National Indigenous Nationalities Commission was invited to consultations led by Indigenous Peoples, but the representatives showed little support or engagement in the process. The National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal has provided financial support for Indigenous Peoples to organize their own consultations, but Indigenous Peoples said they felt that their voices on several critical issues had still not been heard.

Even when Indigenous politicians gain authority, their influence remains constrained by party politics and institutional hierarchies, with “actual actions not always guaranteed”, one interviewee said – as party priorities override Indigenous concerns.

2.2.2. Influence of major non-state actors

Indigenous leaders across the region said **international actors such as UN agencies, donors and NGOs had significant influence in shaping participation norms and processes, and this resulted in greater inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in stakeholder consultations**. Major international initiatives related to the NBSAP revision emphasized an inclusive and participatory approach. For instance, the GBF Early Action Support (GBF-EAS) project funded by the Global Environment Facility, which covered 138 countries (including all included in this report, except Japan), emphasized whole-of-society

approaches, including Indigenous Peoples' participation in aligning NBSAPs with the KMGBF.

Other influential actors in the NBSAP revision process have included consultants, academics and international NGOs. Non-state actors play different roles across contexts. In some cases, ministries outsource drafting or consultation processes to consultants, as seen in Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. International conservation NGOs such as WWF, IUCN and Conservation International often have strong voices in consultations, and governments tend to treat them as civil society representatives, sometimes at the expense of direct Indigenous Peoples' representation. In other contexts, however, funding from UN agencies or international NGOs has enabled Indigenous Peoples' engagement, as in the Philippines and Nepal – though it is unclear how much those consultations actually influenced the resulting NBSAPs.

Not all conservation-focused organizations, while vocal and influential, promote a human rights-based approach as strongly emphasized in the KMGBF. In Indonesia, a woman advocate said that international partners supporting the NBSAP process had tried to set up inclusive processes, “it seems like a business-as-usual process. They had invited some NGOs, but most of them are big NGOs. It’s often conservation NGOs that are invited and outspoken. They talk about marine, wildlife and nature-positive approaches, but none talk about a human rights-based approach. All conversations are dominated by three main ministries, Ministry of Forestry, Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning, and Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries. All of the NBSAP targets are set up through their

authorities.”

Indigenous leaders said that academics occupied a distinct position of legitimacy in NBSAP processes. Indeed, an Indigenous woman leader from Taiwan observed that academics were often granted the strongest voice. In the Philippines, academics not only facilitated consultations, but also worked to mediate between government agencies and civil society.



Indigenous leaders at a protest for land and Indigenous Peoples' rights in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Photo by Minh Tran.

2.3. How power is maintained: a culture of exclusion

“In a country like India, where Indigenous Peoples are not recognized, how can we expect them to include us?” – Indigenous woman in Northeastern India

In the survey and in interviews, Indigenous Peoples repeatedly described being left out and left behind in governmental policy-making processes, including their countries’ NBSAP updates. They are rights-holders and knowledge-holders, but due to cultural, legal and structural barriers, they continue

to be marginalized – if they are recognized at all.

2.3.1. Gatekeeping through information

Less than half of survey respondents (40 of 85) reported having received any information about the NBSAP update (Figure 2), even though it could fundamentally shape conservation efforts in Indigenous territories. Just eight respondents had received such information from the government; more than half had received it through Indigenous networks, and a quarter from networks of civil society organizations (Figure 3).

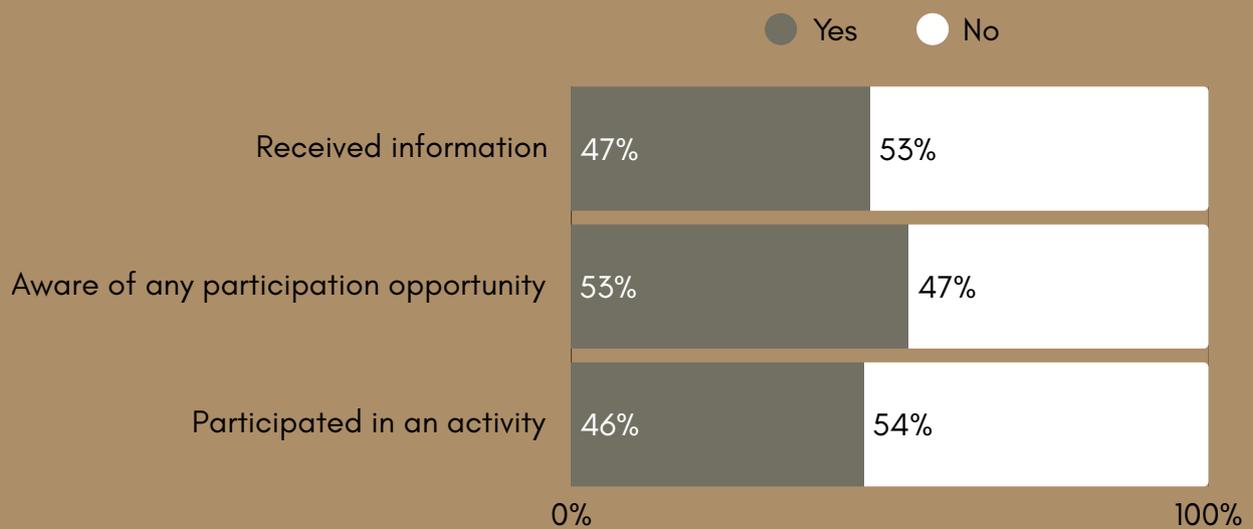


Figure 2. Percent of survey respondents on whether their community 1) received any information about the NBSAP update, 2) was aware of an opportunity to participate in the NBSAP update, and 3) was able to participate in any activity as part of the NBSAP update. N=85

Less than

10%

of all survey respondents received NBSAP update information from the government

“In our biodiversity policy, Bangladesh celebrates World Wetland Day, Forest Day, Tiger Day, Elephant Day, Vulture Awareness Day, River Day and more. We have a day for everything in the policy, but not for Indigenous Peoples, who are the stewards of nature.” – Sanjeeb Drong, Bangladesh

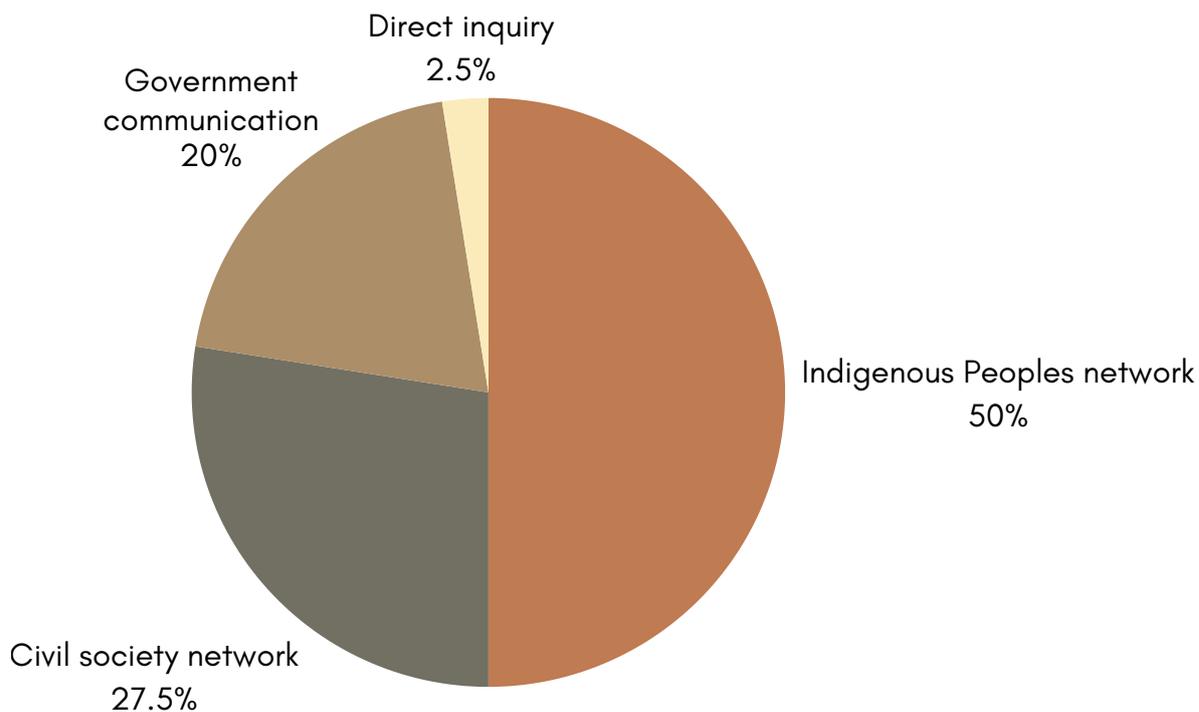


Figure 3. Survey respondents (who received information, n=40) on the sources of information about the NBSAP update.

This reflects **a key mechanism through which governments constrain the power of Indigenous Peoples: failing to share crucial information**. “Information is only known by the Ministry of Forestry and related government sectors,” an Indigenous woman from Indonesia wrote.

Even when information from the government reached communities, it was often inadequate, provided at the last minute and in formats and languages that might be inaccessible to some people, especially persons with disabilities. In Thailand, even during the NBSAP consultation process, the biodiversity indicators could not be shared with the public, as they had not been adopted by the Cabinet. This means that Indigenous representatives attending consultations did not have the full information about the policy that they were being consulted on.

Interviewees said that information was often circulated just a few days ahead of or during the consultation. In Cambodia and Nepal, some materials were only available in English, and in other countries, documents were available in the national or official languages, but not in Indigenous languages. This is compounded by the technical nature of biodiversity policy matters, often written in scientific jargons that are removed from the lived realities of many Indigenous communities. As such, it is difficult for Indigenous Peoples to prepare in advance, consolidate inputs, and engage fully and effectively in the discussions.

The lack of access to information is also reflected in a paradox: slightly more people were aware of participation opportunities than had received information about the policy-making process itself: 53% of the survey respondents (45 of 85). This is

common, they said: Indigenous Peoples are often invited to participate in processes without being fully informed of the underlying policy. This is a clear violation of the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent.

2.3.2. Limited opportunities and many constraints

Roughly 46% of the survey respondents (39 of 85) said that they or someone from their organization had participated in the NBSAP revision process. This means that roughly one in six people surveyed who knew of an engagement opportunity did not participate. Survey respondents and interviewees explained that **time constraints were a key barrier**: invitations often arrived with little notice, leaving little room for community representatives to rearrange their commitments to attend.

“It is a process that is organized for government agencies, civil society agencies, and the private sector and businesses... [Indigenous Peoples] had to try to find a way to participate rather than being invited directly.” – Nittaya Earkanna, Indigenous woman in Thailand

“Decision-making was mostly top-down, with limited space for Indigenous leadership or co-design of the process. [...] We were a part of the process only because the KMGBF and CBD ensures us an important constituency. We were not an equal.” – young Indigenous woman from Nepal

Pancha – a traditional support system in farming by Self-Help Groups at Kairbere, Simdega Jharkhand. Photo by Adivashi Women’s Network (AWN).



Financial and logistical constraints further limited participation.

Consultations were typically held in distant urban centres, far from the communities where many Indigenous Peoples live. Travel was not only time-intensive, taking up to several days, but also expensive. In some cases, participants reported that travel costs, food and accommodations were only partially covered, if at all. This meant that only those with enough resources, or those already based in major or capital cities, could participate.

Furthermore, an increasing reliance on online consultations has excluded communities with limited or no internet access, unstable electricity, or low digital literacy. Even when online participation is possible, time zones, poor connectivity, and unfamiliar platforms create added challenges. An Indigenous man from Malaysia recalled joining an online consultation on the NBSAP while traveling from a regional CBD-related meeting, suggesting the lack of proper planning on the organizer's side leading to overlapping schedules. In such an online meeting, he reflected, the ability for the few Indigenous representatives to make effective interventions were more limited than in an in-person meeting.

Open calls for public input are another mechanism through which Indigenous Peoples have engaged in the NBSAP update process. However, Indigenous leaders in the Philippines noted that anyone who was not part of the Indigenous network active in biodiversity matters might not have been aware enough of the NBSAP update. This effectively excluded many Indigenous communities and organizations, as well as local government units and non-Indigenous organizations. In Nepal, the government's

1 in 6

people surveyed who knew of an NBSAP engagement opportunity could not participate

call for input on the NBSAP was only open for a 10-day period, which was not enough for Indigenous communities to comprehend the dense technical information and deliberate collectively – an important aspect of Indigenous governance systems.

2.3.3. Performing inclusion without influence

Even if they were able to attend consultations, Indigenous leaders said their presence often felt symbolic, and they could not play a substantive role. Indigenous leaders across the region said that **Indigenous Peoples were rarely seen as conservation partners**, unlike conservation NGOs such as IUCN or WWF. **Indigenous leaders were also generally not invited to serve as resources**, unlike some other groups representing women or youth.

Even if Indigenous representatives have been able to join the consultations, the opportunities to speak up have been limited. Sanjeeb Drong put it this way: “Two or three [Indigenous] people may be invited and given two or three minutes to speak in a meeting that lasts the whole day, with at least 10 ministries present.” Governments can then report Indigenous Peoples’ participation in the process, but the Indigenous speakers’ contributions may not even be documented in meeting minutes or the resulting policies. “To call this ‘effective’

or ‘meaningful’ participation is deeply problematic,” he said.

In Malaysia, Indigenous Peoples compared a consultation for civil society with another attended mainly by representatives of various government agencies. Civil society was given a two-hour, online meeting, while the government-focused session was allocated three days. Providing more time and space for CSOs and Indigenous Peoples to share their input would help ensure more meaningful participation and stronger outcomes.

Despite the KMGBF’s strong language on Indigenous Peoples, only 13% of total 85 survey respondents said they had participated in dedicated state-led consultations with Indigenous Peoples, while 22% had attended a state-led multi-stakeholder consultation. A few (8%) said they had submitted written input through an open call for contributions. Some respondents reported having had direct influence on decision-making: 7% through

policy drafting, and 10% by serving on an advisory group or technical working group (Figure 4).

Multi-stakeholder consultations can effectively exclude Indigenous participants, as we are far outnumbered by other constituencies.

An Indigenous woman in the Philippines recalled attending a regional consultation where seven of the roughly 100 participants were Indigenous. A young Indigenous man in Cambodia said he had been one of just two Indigenous representatives in a workshop with 30–40 participants. In Nepal, the Steering and Technical Committees for the NBSAP revision include Indigenous members, but just one or two in committees of 20–30.

In such a context, not only do Indigenous representatives get little time to fully present our opinions and inputs, but our concerns are also likely to be dismissed or overlooked over the interests and priorities of other actors that have higher

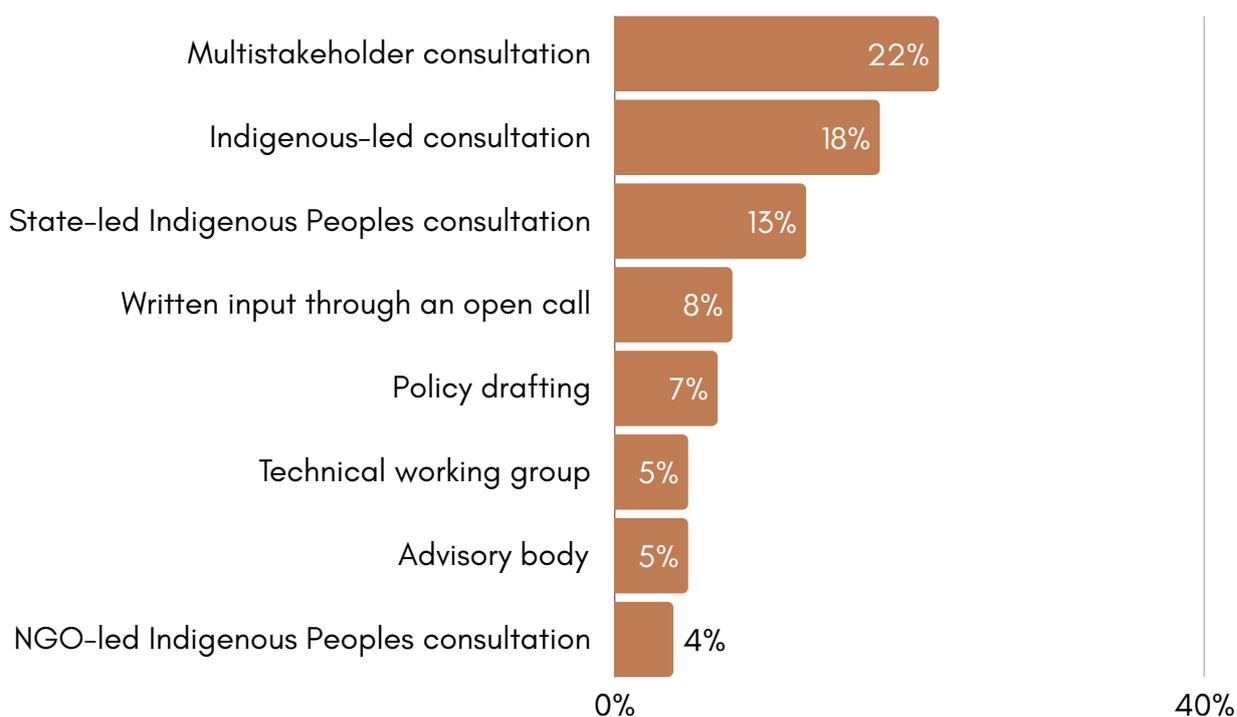


Figure 4. Survey respondents on the type of participation in the NBSAP update. N=85

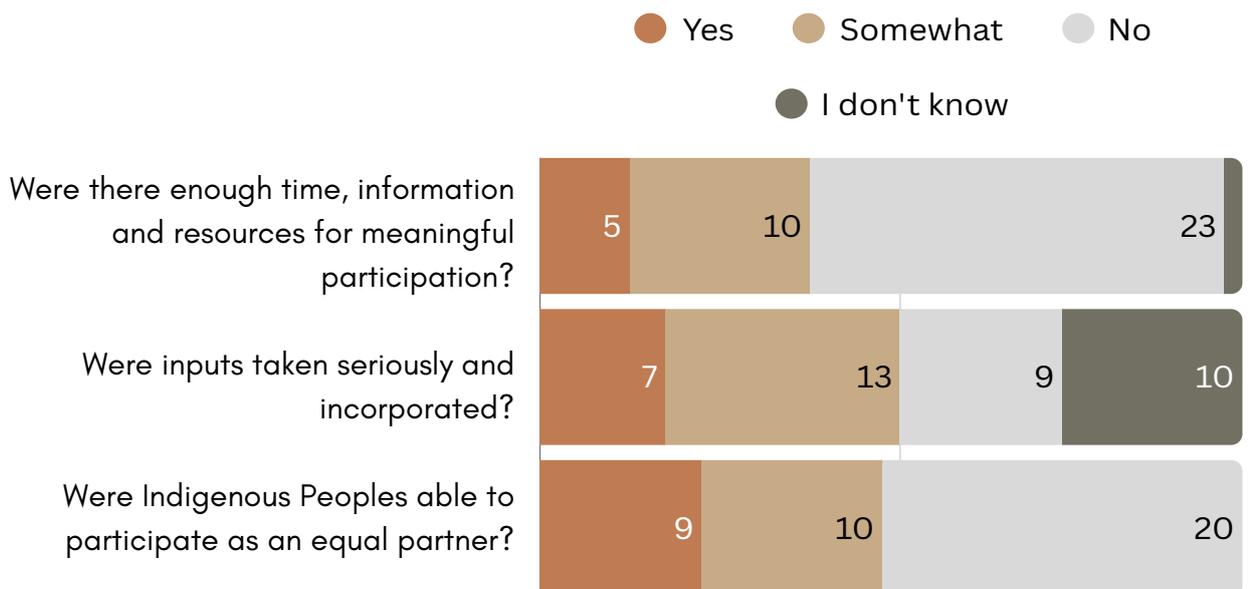


Figure 5. Survey respondents (who reported participation in NBSAP update, n=39) on the quality of their participation.

representation and influence. Indeed, close to half of survey respondents who participated in a NBSAP process felt Indigenous Peoples were not an equal partner, and over 60% reported not being able to participate meaningfully (Figure 5).

A key problem is that in multi-stakeholder platforms, there is not enough preparation to ensure that people from different backgrounds and actors with diverse agendas can come together and negotiate as equals towards a common goal. For instance, in one of the Philippines’ regional consultations, Indigenous leaders expressed concerns over the destructive impacts of mining and extractive industries on biodiversity and ecosystem health in the region. Government officials responded that the mining industry is a major contributor both to the economy and renewable energy.

As a result, **even though the participation of Indigenous Peoples through different mechanisms has increased in the NBSAP revision, Indigenous Peoples’ influence**

on decisions remains limited. Asked in the survey whether Indigenous Peoples’ inputs had been considered and integrated into their country’s NBSAP, 10 respondents said they didn’t know, and nine said “no” (Figure 5). In other words, among those that were able to participate in the NBSAP revision in some form, nearly half (49%) either didn’t know if their voices mattered – or knew that they didn’t.

An Indigenous woman from the Philippines expressed strong frustration: “It’s like they already had the [NBSAP] plan in their mind. Whatever we say, they just say it’s already there in the plan or it’s not relevant. It’s like they are gaslighting us.” Other Indigenous leaders expressed similar sentiments and noted that actual decision-makers within the government tended to be absent from consultations in which Indigenous Peoples participated. There might have been a few government representatives, they said, but often not the ones directly in charge of the NBSAP revision or biodiversity matters. And even if they were present, it was merely to

deliver opening remarks, after which they would soon leave.

Many issues of key concern to Indigenous Peoples have been unaddressed or dismissed in participation platforms, such as justice, human rights, environmental human rights defenders, or Indigenous and Traditional Territories. In the Philippines, when the target related to environmental human rights defenders was brought up, it was deemed outside the scope of consultation. Officials suggested a different platform for a separate discussion, which did not end up happening, according to Indigenous representatives. In Indonesia, inputs related to Indigenous Peoples' land and tenure security were deemed sensitive and dropped from the NBSAP - or only incorporated using softened language. In Nepal, Indigenous and Traditional Territories continue to be a contested issue as the NBSAP is under revision.

2.3.4. Marginalization within marginalization

With few opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to participate in the NBSAP update process, **community members whose voices are often excluded appear to have been particularly unlikely to get a seat at the table.** Asked whether she had participated in an NBSAP consultation, Pinsuda Namkeaw, a young Indigenous woman from Thailand, wrote in the survey: "There are only limited seats for Indigenous Peoples, and there is still no space for Indigenous youth to participate in the review of the NBSAP." A young Indigenous man, also from Thailand, explained that Indigenous Peoples' organizations often have no choice but to prioritize the participation of adult representatives with longer experience in the field.

The survey results suggest that this pattern resulted in some groups within Indigenous communities having less influence than others. Asked to score the relative influence of different groups among Indigenous Peoples, on a scale of 1-5, with 3 as “neutral”, survey respondents rated equality between women and men at 2.8, between youth and adults at 2.4, and between persons with disabilities and without disabilities at 2.0 (Figure 6). This highlights **persistent inequalities in participation, with persons with disabilities being particularly marginalized**. It is also important to note that many people hold multiple marginalized identities (e.g., Indigenous female youth), which further compounds the challenges and opportunities available to them to influence policies.

These differences have real, tangible consequences. Although 52% of the survey respondents were women, 60% of those who reported not having received any information about the NBSAP or NBSAP consultation opportunities were women. Male respondents were also more likely to have engaged in the NBSAP revision than women.

In the Philippines, Indigenous leaders noted that in the consultation process they participated in, they did not recall seeing a single person with disabilities, Indigenous or not. Asked about the engagement of Indigenous persons with disabilities in the NBSAP or related biodiversity decision-making processes, two Indigenous men – one in Nepal, the other in Bangladesh – noted that the government offices themselves are not disability-friendly, as a reflection of the little attention people with disabilities receive.

In addition to gender, age and disability,

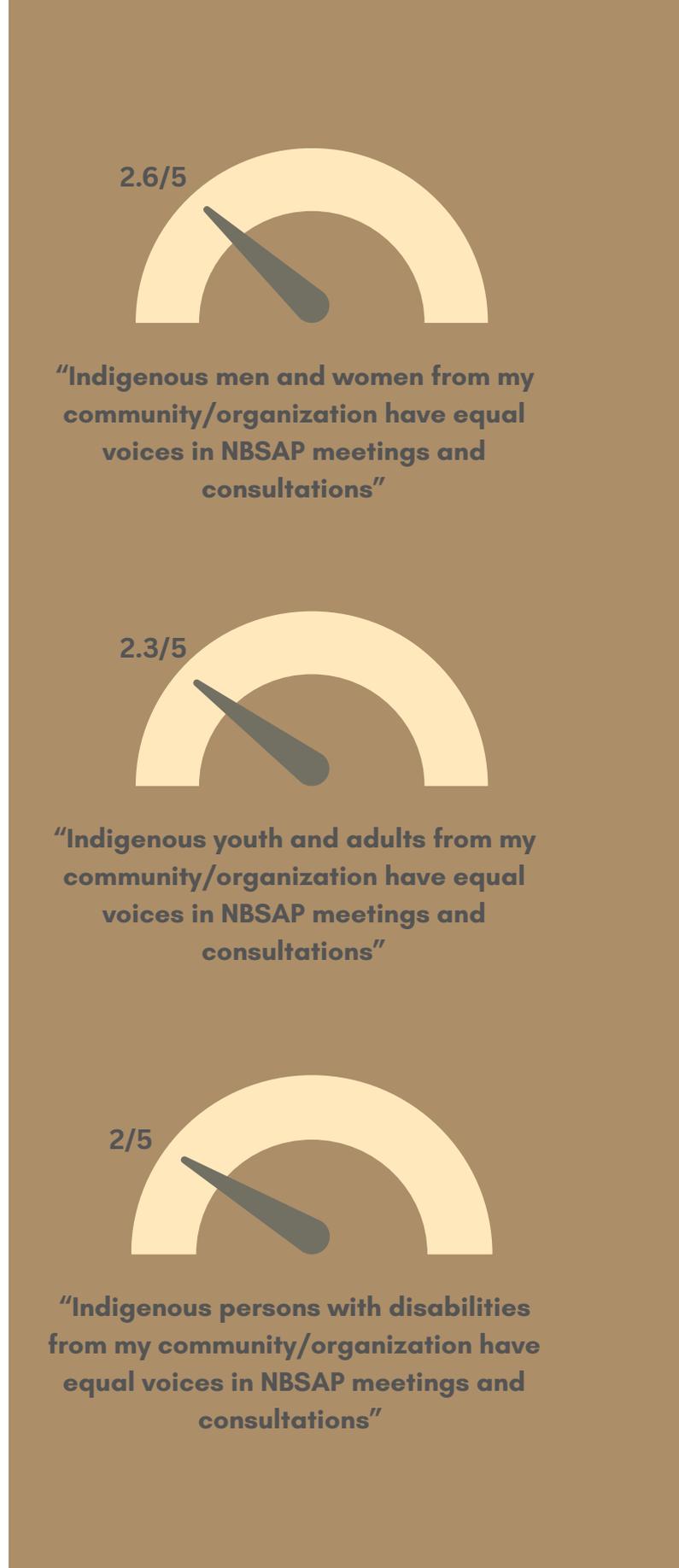


Figure 6. Survey respondents’ average ranking of the statements on a 1-5 scale (1=totally disagree, 3=neutral, 5= totally agree).

location also matters. Voices from the ground level are less likely to be heard than those of Indigenous Peoples' organizations or NGOs working at the national level, which often have greater visibility and resources. Yet even national-level Indigenous organizations do not always fully represent the diversity of perspectives across communities, regions or generations. Because invitations for "Indigenous representatives" tend to be limited to a handful of well-known organizations or individuals, opportunities to engage are concentrated in relatively few hands. When consultations are further centralized in capital cities or regional hubs, this sometimes leaves grassroots priorities and perspectives underrepresented in the national conversation.

2.3.5. Taking the reins – but also assuming the burdens

As noted above, 23% of the survey respondents who reported participating in the NBSAP update said they had only participated through an engagement process led by Indigenous Peoples. This shows **a significant contribution of Indigenous leadership in organizing consultation and facilitating participation, but also suggests the burden, including financial costs, that has been taken on by Indigenous Peoples to ensure their voices are heard.**

In the Philippines, for example, Indigenous Peoples' contributions to the NBSAP came from a year-long organizing process, with all activities, including fundraising, led by Indigenous Peoples. Even the burden of basic information dissemination, including translation into Indigenous and local languages and simplification of technical

information, has fallen on Indigenous organizations and networks.

"All of the consultation I heard [of] or participated in was led by Indigenous Peoples Organization with their own resources, which really does not have much potential to impact the document itself," wrote Pema Wangmo Lama, a young Indigenous woman from Nepal. She shared that in Nepal, even though structural inclusion of Indigenous Peoples has been achieved through Indigenous representatives in the Steering and Technical Committees for the NBSAP revision, much of the organizing burden remained on Indigenous leaders. Indigenous Peoples had to mobilize their own resources to consolidate inputs.

Interviewees in the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia also observed that governments seemed most interested in Indigenous Peoples' contributions if they helped to advance official conservation goals and commitments; Indigenous Peoples' priorities still had little influence on the agenda. Moreover, an Indigenous woman from the Philippines noted that government officials, including local authorities, had been reporting Indigenous contributions as their own.

2.3.6. Discounting Indigenous knowledge

Across the region, Indigenous advocates said, there remains a bias against Indigenous knowledge. **While traditional knowledge is recognized by the KMGBF as an important source of knowledge for conservation and is included in national biodiversity plans, in practice, it is still treated as inferior to other sources of knowledge.** A woman advocate in

Indonesia said that officials often question whether Indigenous Peoples have the capacity to make meaningful contributions, asking: “Why should we invite them? ... This is very technical; can we [even] get technical inputs from them?”

Malaysia’s government has recognized the value of at least some Indigenous knowledge, with Indigenous Peoples’ customary practice of river ecosystem management in Sabah, known as Tagal, adopted by the Sabah Fisheries Department. However, while the previous version of the Malaysia NBSAP included a detailed discussion of such Indigenous knowledge, the new NBSAP update does not.

Interviewees described the knowledge hierarchy as both cultural and institutional. Speaking from Taiwan’s context, a young Indigenous man said in the survey that scholars and academics had more authority in policy-making, and an Indigenous woman said in an interview that a PhD is often treated as a prerequisite for entry into policy-making spaces. In Malaysia, an Indigenous woman with a doctorate observed that because of her academic credentials, she was treated as a legitimate expert, but other Indigenous leaders without such titles were not afforded the same credibility. In the Philippines, Thailand and elsewhere, Indigenous Peoples are often not invited as facilitators or resource persons in policy dialogues, despite having in-depth knowledge of biodiversity and conservation.

The format of consultations also reinforces exclusion. In Indonesia and Thailand, Indigenous men and women described consultations where government officials acted as “lecturers”, delivering presentations to participants who had not been adequately informed or resourced to contribute. In such contexts, Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge, rooted in generations of managing local ecosystems, was sidelined or dismissed as anecdotal. As a young Indigenous woman from Nepal noted:

“Our knowledge systems and governance structures were not given the same weight as scientific or government perspectives.”

These dynamics highlight how **tokenism operates not only through limiting Indigenous Peoples’ participation, but also through devaluing Indigenous knowledge**. To be heard, Indigenous Peoples are often required to translate Indigenous epistemologies into the dominant scientific or policy language. This further marginalizes Indigenous people who do not have access to resources, education and opportunities to learn the technical language.

Rethinking biodiversity governance through Indigenous practices

Indigenous Peoples have been custodians of the environment since time immemorial. An intimate, reciprocal and sacred relationship with land, water, air, and all living beings sits at the heart of Indigenous ways of life, embodied in Indigenous livelihoods, customary governance institutions, knowledge systems and cultural and spiritual practices and beliefs. It continues to shape and guide Indigenous Peoples' struggle for rights.

While often an "afterthought" in government-led biodiversity planning, Indigenous Peoples across Asia are not only

advocating for inclusion and participation – we are modelling an alternative to the status quo. It is an approach grounded in Indigenous cosmologies, worldviews, values and belief systems, and in a long history of social movement-building.

This section describes **how Indigenous Peoples have actively challenged the dominant paradigm in biodiversity planning, replacing it with solidarity, accountability to communities, reciprocity, and inclusive, intergenerational and intersectional approaches.**

3.1. Organizing for solidarity

Through task forces, coalitions and federations, Indigenous Peoples have mobilized and self-organized to deliberate on matters of biodiversity, conservation and customary use, build consensus and come up with strategies to influence biodiversity decisions. This organizing reflects more than a technical function: it embodies Indigenous values of self-governance, reciprocity and stewardship. By acting collectively across diverse communities, geographies and languages, Indigenous Peoples show how biodiversity governance can be inclusive and grounded in shared responsibility for conservation and human rights.

Materials for dyeing and weaving gathered by Tai Phuan and Taidam Indigenous women in Xieng Khouang, Lao PDR. Photo by Minh Tran.

In Thailand, when the government failed to communicate and engage with Indigenous Peoples in biodiversity planning processes, Indigenous leaders formed a task force to monitor the revision of the NBSAP and progress on the KMGBF. It includes an Indigenous Member of Parliament, academic representatives, and representatives of Indigenous Peoples organizations and networks. It serves as a platform for oversight and engagement in processes that was designed to exclude Indigenous communities. The task force ensures that collective inputs are documented and communicated to those in charge of the NBSAP update.

In the Philippines, the formation of the Indigenous Peoples and Biodiversity Coalition (IPBC), with more than 50 members, similarly enabled sustained participation in global and national biodiversity policy dialogues of Indigenous communities, Indigenous Peoples organizations and allies. Indigenous Peoples and allies from different parts of the country came together to review the national biodiversity plan, consolidated inputs, and even came up with their own biodiversity plan – the historic Indigenous Peoples’ Biodiversity Strategy and Plan (IPBSAP).⁸

In Nepal, pre-existing institutions such as the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, National Indigenous Women Forum, National Indigenous Women Federation, Youth Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, and Nepal Indigenous Disabilities Association mobilized to provide structured coordination among Indigenous communities, including Indigenous women, youth, and persons with disabilities, with technical insight from the Nepal Indigenous Forum for Biodiversity, in NBSAP engagement. These institutions play a major role in consensus-building and making sure that Indigenous Peoples at the grassroots level can effectively be represented in decision-making processes with a united voice.

Together, these experiences show that **when Indigenous Peoples organize, it is not only about resisting exclusion, but also about creating our own mechanisms and infrastructure for collective decision-making.** In doing so, Indigenous Peoples are modelling **a form of biodiversity governance that is accountable, inclusive, and led by rights-holders themselves.** Rather than tokenistic processes where voices are diluted and not acted upon, Indigenous-led organizing prioritizes the collective interest. These structures facilitate a form of grassroots-driven democracy that places the power in the hand of the people and where representatives are answerable to communities on the ground.



An Indigenous fisherfolk in Indonesia. Photo by If Not Us Then Who.

3.2. Reclaiming power through agenda-setting

Tokenism remains a challenge in many contexts, where Indigenous Peoples may be invited to the policy-making processes, but not given the means to influence outcomes. Yet experience in Nepal and the Philippines shows that Indigenous leaders are actively reshaping the terms of engagement. By carving out spaces of real influence, they demonstrate how biodiversity governance can shift from centralized control to shared power.

Community Protected Area managed by Kui Indigenous people in Preah Vihear, Cambodia.
Photo by Minh Tran.

The shift away from tokenism is evident in Nepal, where Indigenous Peoples secured formal roles within the national NBSAP revision committees. Leaders of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities and the National Indigenous Women Forum are the Chair and Co-Chair, respectively, of the NBSAP Steering Committee, and the Nepal Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity has a representative in the Technical Committee. This was the outcome of persistent lobbying efforts that started in 2004, when Indigenous leaders proactively sought out engagement with the national CBD focal points.

“There was no invitation from the government; we just knocked on their doors and keeping knocking until a dedicated space was opened for us as part of the process,”

recalled an Indigenous person in Nepal.

After the approval of the KMGBF, Indigenous leaders persistently engaged with the national CBD focal point, the Department of Environment and Biodiversity, under the Ministry of Forest and Environment, proposing meetings in government offices and inviting the national CBD focal point to their offices.

After much hesitation from the government, Indigenous Peoples successfully secured the role of Indigenous men and women as key decision-makers and technical experts for the first time in Nepal’s biodiversity policy-making. Concerned that Indigenous leadership would fade out once the NBSAP revision is completed and the committees could be converted into an advisory body, Indigenous leaders have also successfully demanded the formation of a Subcommittee representing Indigenous

Peoples, as well as local communities, who will oversee the implementation of the NBSAP.

Such roles in formal committees means Indigenous leaders are not only visible but recognized as decision-makers and knowledge-holders. Their chairing and co-chairing of the Steering Committee signals a redistribution of power, where Indigenous leadership is acknowledged in setting agendas. It also affirms Indigenous knowledge as technical, not just cultural or symbolic, challenging the knowledge hierarchy that confines Indigenous Peoples to the margins of policymaking. While the committees still face limits, such as difficulties in convening meetings, the achievement represents an institutional foothold from which Indigenous leaders can expand influence, build alliances, and demonstrate that inclusive biodiversity governance, including Indigenous and Traditional Territories, requires Indigenous leadership at the centre.

The case of the Indigenous Peoples' Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (IPBSAP) in the Philippines is another prime example of Indigenous Peoples creating their own space and setting their own agenda.

“We did our own process to ensure effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, because the official process was not really democratic or open to Indigenous Peoples,”

said an Indigenous woman leader from the Philippines.

In August 2023, even before the government conducted their stakeholder engagement workshops, over 20 Indigenous Peoples organizations came together, determined to coordinate and advance Indigenous voices on biodiversity issues. They held a national roundtable in November 2023, a regional roundtable in January 2024, a second national roundtable in May, and a writeshop and planning workshop in July. It was no easy feat in a country of more than 7,000 islands. Through financial support from 14 agencies and funders, and pooled resources of 30 Indigenous Peoples organizations and 11 NGOs and their networks, Indigenous communities' collective inputs and ideas were succinctly stated in the IPBSAP.

The IPBSAP represents not a seat at the government's table, but rather Indigenous Peoples' own table.

Government officials were welcome to sit in, but as invited guests. At this table, Indigenous Peoples defined the priorities, methods and outcomes. The IPBSAP was submitted to the government as a contribution to the national biodiversity plan, but Indigenous Peoples are committed to implementing it regardless of national adoption and implementation. It shows the willingness of Indigenous Peoples to work with state actors and collaborate in good faith, while ensuring that Indigenous leadership would not be diluted or co-opted.

Box 2. The Indigenous Peoples' Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan

August 6, 2024 was a historic day in the Philippines' national NBSAP consultation. Almost 200 delegates from across the country witnessed Indigenous Peoples handing over to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources the Indigenous Peoples' Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan – the first of its kind. It was a proud culmination of a year of hard work of Indigenous Peoples organizations alongside partners and allies.

The document clearly articulates **the status of biodiversity in Indigenous Peoples' territories** in the Philippines and **Indigenous Peoples' worldviews on biodiversity and development** that make them de facto custodians of biodiversity. It communicates the **key contributions and commitments of Indigenous Peoples** to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in the Philippines through existing policy, governance and financing landscapes, followed by a **comprehensive analysis of their challenges, threats and opportunities**.

To complement the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, the document outlines a set of **23 targets in alignment with the KMGBF and the action plans** through which Indigenous Peoples contribute to reaching those targets. It showcases case studies that demonstrate how Indigenous Peoples are already contributing to biodiversity conservation.

The plan also details a set of key issues and recommendations on the implementation of the national biodiversity plan from the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples:

- 1. Free, Prior and Informed Consent;**
- 2. Indigenous Peoples' customary governance systems;**
- 3. Full, meaningful and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples;**
- 4. Indigenous knowledge system and practices;**
- 5. Community-based documentation, research, monitoring and information systems of Indigenous Peoples;**
- 6. Access to justice and protection of environmental defenders;**
- 7. Access to information;**
- 8. Access and benefit-sharing;**
- 9. Funding;**
- 10. Intergenerational transmission of knowledge; and**
- 11. Capacity-building.**

The IPBSAP marks a turning point in biodiversity governance. **It is not only a contribution to the national plan, but also a stand-alone agenda set by Indigenous Peoples themselves, signalling that biodiversity policy cannot be legitimate without their leadership.** By outlining their own vision, commitments, and 23 targets aligned with the KMGBF, Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines have demonstrated that they are not passive stakeholders, but active rights-holders and custodians of biodiversity. The IPBSAP thus serves both as a model of Indigenous-led governance and as a challenge to governments to meet Indigenous-defined standards of inclusion, accountability, and justice.



3.3. Intersectional leadership

Effective biodiversity governance recognizes and centres intersectional leadership that brings multiple perspectives and lived experiences to decision-making processes. Evidence from across the region demonstrates how Indigenous Peoples are already leading intersectional approaches and centring the voices of marginalized groups. It is not just about checking the boxes of representation or filling a quota, but a commitment and accountability to ensure that those most affected by biodiversity loss are part of the decision-making process. This requires a governance model that centres diverse lived experiences, as well as power-sharing, so leaders are not just “making space”, but constantly negotiating when to step back and when to step forward so their leadership amplifies rather than replaces others.

Lisu Indigenous men, women, youth, and children of Pang Sa village, Chiang Rai, Thailand, performing their traditional dance. Photo by Lakpa Nuri Sherpa.

Women’s leadership has played a central role in elevating the voices and rights of Indigenous Peoples in biodiversity.

The Thailand country experience paper describes how in consultation workshops, Indigenous women leaders articulated the gendered dimensions of ecosystem relationships, demonstrating how conservation policies affect men and women differently and highlighting how Indigenous knowledge of forest and marine conservation is deeply intertwined with gendered practices and responsibilities. Indigenous women in Thailand tend to be more outspoken and vocal than men in decision-making spaces and policy processes, the author said in an interview. Similarly, the author of the

Philippines paper said that women-led organizations form the majority of the IPBC: nine of the 13 coordinators are Indigenous women. The IPBC has also been actively pushing for younger women within the coordinating committee to take on more leadership roles.

Intersectional leadership also manifests through the commitment to the inclusion of Indigenous leaders with disabilities,

as exemplified in an interview with a man and woman with disability in Nepal. The Nepal Indigenous Disabled Association has been a leader in advocating for inclusion not only of persons with disabilities, but also across age and gender lines when organizing consultations on the NBSAP. Indigenous persons with disabilities

promote holistic approaches that recognize how biodiversity loss impacts affect people differently based on their various identities and circumstances, and each have their own unique contributions as well. Similarly, an Indigenous woman leader in Nepal said that Indigenous women’s networks have advocated for social inclusion as a pillar of conservation, highlighting disproportional challenges faced by Indigenous persons with disabilities and youth.

Finally, **intersectional leadership is evident in how Indigenous leaders strategically negotiate privilege and representation.** The PhD-holding Indigenous woman from Malaysia cited in section 2.3.6 said that, recognizing that her academic credentials give her access to government spaces that are often closed to other Indigenous people, she consciously uses her privilege to “open up spaces for our Indigenous advocates who can then come in and share our different expertise together”. She is often invited to represent Indigenous women across Malaysia, and she said she finds it important to intentionally introduce



Thakali Indigenous woman performing a morning ritual in Syang village, Lower Mustang, Nepal. Photo by Lakpa Nuri Sherpa.

other Indigenous colleagues and ensure that diverse voices are heard. Otherwise, she noted, their gendered experiences and lack of English fluency or technical credentials might limit their participation.

At the same time, she makes a point to step forward when her silence could mean erasure for Indigenous women in Malaysia. She explained that if she does not speak up for Indigenous women who cannot be present or who does not yet have the confidence or credibility to speak in such forums, non-Indigenous actors will often fill the gap and speak on their behalf. In these moments, she chooses to voice the concerns of her community, not as a substitute for their participation, but as a safeguard against their exclusion. This demonstrates how **technical expertise and privileged access can be wielded strategically to both expand participation and ensure that policy engagement draws on the full spectrum of Indigenous knowledge and leadership** and that Indigenous women’s perspectives are not sidelined in policy spaces.



Indigenous food exchange at AIPP’s 5th Indigenous Knowledge and Peoples of Asia Conference. Photo by Indigenous Media Network.

3.4. Multi-channel engagement

Where formal inclusion has been delayed or denied, Indigenous leaders have taken the initiative to map influential stakeholders and processes, engage strategically, and open diverse channels for influence. Political fluency – understanding how decisions are made and how to navigate relationships with government agencies, donors and international conservation actors – has been key. For Indigenous Peoples, meaningful participation is not a one-off consultation but a sustained, multi-channel practice rooted in accountability to communities.

In Nepal, Indigenous organizations built momentum after COP15 by organizing dialogues and roundtables with UNDP, the NBSAP revision team, and the CBD focal point. These were not simply awareness-raising efforts, but strategic interventions to ensure that Indigenous concerns were integral to national policy processes. The long-term engagement is important as government officials change often, so it is important to make sure that relationship and awareness on Indigenous issues are not built with selected government representatives.

Outcomes of Indigenous Peoples-led consultations were submitted directly to the NBSAP Revision Secretariat. When these inputs were not received positively, Indigenous leaders mobilized key experts to prepare a study with evidence, gather signatures from 39 different organizations

and allies, and submit it to the government, followed by a press conference.

In the Philippines, Indigenous leaders maintained consistent and proactive engagement with the Biodiversity Management Bureau, submitting detailed text proposals through multiple channels, both during consultations and online through emails and dashboard submission. Government representatives and Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representatives to local legislative bodies were invited to participate in Indigenous Peoples-led consultations. When the government reached out to Indigenous Peoples for reporting, Indigenous leaders were unsure whether the invitation came from a place of genuine partnership and worried that their contributions would be credited to the government. However, recognizing that Indigenous contributions

were being reported anyway by local governments, Indigenous Peoples decided to collaborate in good faith, understanding that they could also report directly to the CBD, as a non-state actors' contribution.

In Thailand, the Indigenous Task Force identified key actors shaping the NBSAP revision and adapted its strategies accordingly. When outreach to the lead government agency went unanswered, Indigenous leaders engaged with the NBSAP consultant, UNDP, IUCN and WWF Thailand to access consultation spaces and advance Indigenous voices. Beyond these channels, they also brought Indigenous perspectives into national political arenas, such as through public forums at Parliament on the NBSAP and other environmental issues.



Weaving looms of Indigenous women in Nathong, Xieng Khouang, Lao PDR. Photo by Minh Tran.

3.5. Trust and reciprocity as the keys to lasting influence

The work done by Indigenous leaders to set the agenda, engage through multiple channels, and build capacities at the grassroots demonstrates a distinct approach to influencing biodiversity governance. It is based on trust, relationships and mutual respect across all levels of decision-making. Influence is not only about formal roles or submitted plans; it is about nurturing ongoing connections where Indigenous knowledge, values and priorities are heard, recognized and integrated into policy, linking international visibility with national and sub-national technical processes.

A river managed by Kui Indigenous Peoples under a Community Protected Area in Preah Vihear, Cambodia. Photo by Minh Tran.

Indigenous leaders in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand highlighted that their collaboration with state actors actually started from their engagement at the international level, at CBD meetings. There, Indigenous leaders and government representatives have supported one another, including by sharing information about everything from official policy processes and negotiations to logistics. Through these interactions, **Indigenous Peoples have not only shown their willingness to collaborate, but also their technical knowledge and capacities**. This has enabled both sides to work better together at the national and sub-national levels.

Indigenous leaders across the region have learned that effective biodiversity advocacy requires simultaneous engagement across multiple governance levels, **moving beyond symbolic participation in high-profile forums to target the technical processes where implementation decisions are made**. As an Indigenous woman from Malaysia observed: “We have to remember

it’s not just the COP. It’s getting into meetings that matter when we return home.” The real challenge, she added, is to not only attend national dialogues and conferences, but gain access to “the nitty-gritty of the actual planning”. It is through spatial planning meetings, environmental impact assessments, and regulatory processes that land use decisions are made that directly affect Indigenous territories. **Concepts such as customary use and community-based monitoring may gain applause at global forums, but without an Indigenous Peoples’ presence in technical planning processes, these ideas never translate into enforceable policies.**

In Nepal, India and Bangladesh, Indigenous leaders highlighted an important strategy of inviting government representatives to participate in Indigenous-led activities. This includes invitations to community visits, conferences and workshops, so that government officials are aware of the initiatives and capacities that Indigenous communities have.

3.6. Grassroots capacity-building and implementation

The experience of Indigenous Peoples shows that strong, sustained engagement in biodiversity governance requires building strength from within. This means investing in intergenerational knowledge transmission, leadership development, and community-driven learning. Across the region, where official information on the KMGBF and NBSAP processes was limited or inaccessible, Indigenous leaders stepped in to facilitate trainings and dialogues. These efforts have not only deepened community understanding of global and national biodiversity frameworks, but also ensured that participation in consultations is informed, grounded in, and accountable to local priorities.

Besides direct lobbying with key stakeholders in NBSAP revision, Indigenous leaders at the Inter Mountain Peoples Education and Culture in Thailand have mobilized resources to provide training to Indigenous youth on international environmental agreements and policy-making processes. Technical concepts and complex policy processes behind the global and national policy processes are translated into youth-friendly information and activities, while critical vocabulary and lobbying skills are transferred to the future generations. This has ensured that **when Indigenous collective voices are consulted, participation is informed, intergenerational and grounded in local realities, even when the duty-bearers fail to provide access to information.**

Such capacity-building reflects a commitment to long-term implementation of conservation strategies, not just short-term representation.

Similarly, the Nepal Indigenous Women

Federation has worked strategically to ensure **engagement with communities that are the hardest to reach, to connect local authorities with woman leaders on the ground, and to foster women's leadership across generations.** This has allowed Indigenous women leaders to gain recognition at the national level, whereas in the past, women had often been inadequately represented by umbrella Indigenous networks.

In the Philippines, following the launch of the historic Indigenous Peoples' Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, the IPBC has actively worked to localize the plan, ensuring that targets and activities are operationalized in alignment with local priorities and needs across diverse Indigenous communities. This ensures that the plan will be **owned, implemented and monitored by Indigenous communities at the local level**, demonstrating Indigenous Peoples' commitment to conservation.

Box 3. Indigenous women building evidence to strengthen their voice

April 2026 will mark the 14th anniversary of PEREMPUAN AMAN, the Association of Indigenous Women of the Archipelago in Indonesia, which has shown what it means to truly advocate for Indigenous women's rights.

Devi Anggraini, an Indigenous woman leader, explained the drive behind this work: "At the global level, in platforms like the CBD, everyone says 'Indigenous women play key roles in biodiversity.' But it is all lip service." **A gender perspective is not being discussed with the depth and complexity it requires, she said, whether in global spaces/sphere of influence or in debates on finance.** She noted that the problem is not only the absence of gender analysis, but the **failure to engage with how gender intersects with Indigeneity, land tenure insecurity, and marginalization within Indigenous communities.**

And while lofty words are used at the international level, Anggraini added, "women on the ground don't know what these words mean." What Indigenous women need, she argued, is transformative change, to **move from symbolic recognition of women's "key roles" to concrete support for protecting and scaling up those roles in biodiversity governance.**

For PEREMPUAN AMAN, **transformation begins at the grassroots.** A major barrier to gender equity in Indonesia is the lack of documentation and disaggregated data. PEREMPUAN AMAN trains Indigenous women as enumerators to generate and own their data, filling the gaps that hinder government reporting on the SDGs while strengthening women's political capability.

Data gathered by Indigenous women have helped to document the role of Indigenous women in sustainable natural resource management, such as in the Indigenous

women's forest in Jayapura, Papua, where certain forest areas are governed under the authority of Indigenous women. These semi-autonomous zones are regulated through rules that women define and enforce, and they demonstrate that what is often dismissed as the "domestic" sphere is in fact a political space. Their knowledge maintains biodiversity-rich forests, while also shaping systems that ensure food, safety and spaces of belonging for women in their communities

This effort is not just about data collection. It is about building evidence of women's knowledge, strengthening their political voice, and creating the tools to advocate for their priorities. Although government authorities initially dismissed the data collected by Indigenous women as lacking credibility, they persisted. They integrated their data into village-level planning and used it to support policy advocacy. Ultimately, PEREMPUAN AMAN's data were cited in the CEDAW Committee's concluding comments to the Indonesian government, and will be included in regional and global advocacy on CEDAW General Recommendation No. 39.

Asked about engagement in national biodiversity planning, PEREMPUAN AMAN leaders emphasized that they did not want to just take seats at the table. Their priority has been to ensure that **Indigenous women at the community level develop the political consciousness and capacity to negotiate with government actors themselves.** As Anggraini explained: "I have gone through the experience of losing our land, and I don't want any other Indigenous woman to suffer the same way."

For PEREMPUAN AMAN, real transformation will only be measured when Indigenous women themselves are leading dialogue with government on the issues that shape their lives.

Indigenous Peoples in the updated NBSAPs

The critical issues discussed in Section 2 and the strategic and proactive Indigenous leadership described in Section 3 raise a key question: Do the updated NBSAPs and national targets that Asian countries are submitting appropriately reflect Indigenous Peoples' contributions, knowledge and rights, in line with the clear language of the KMGBF?

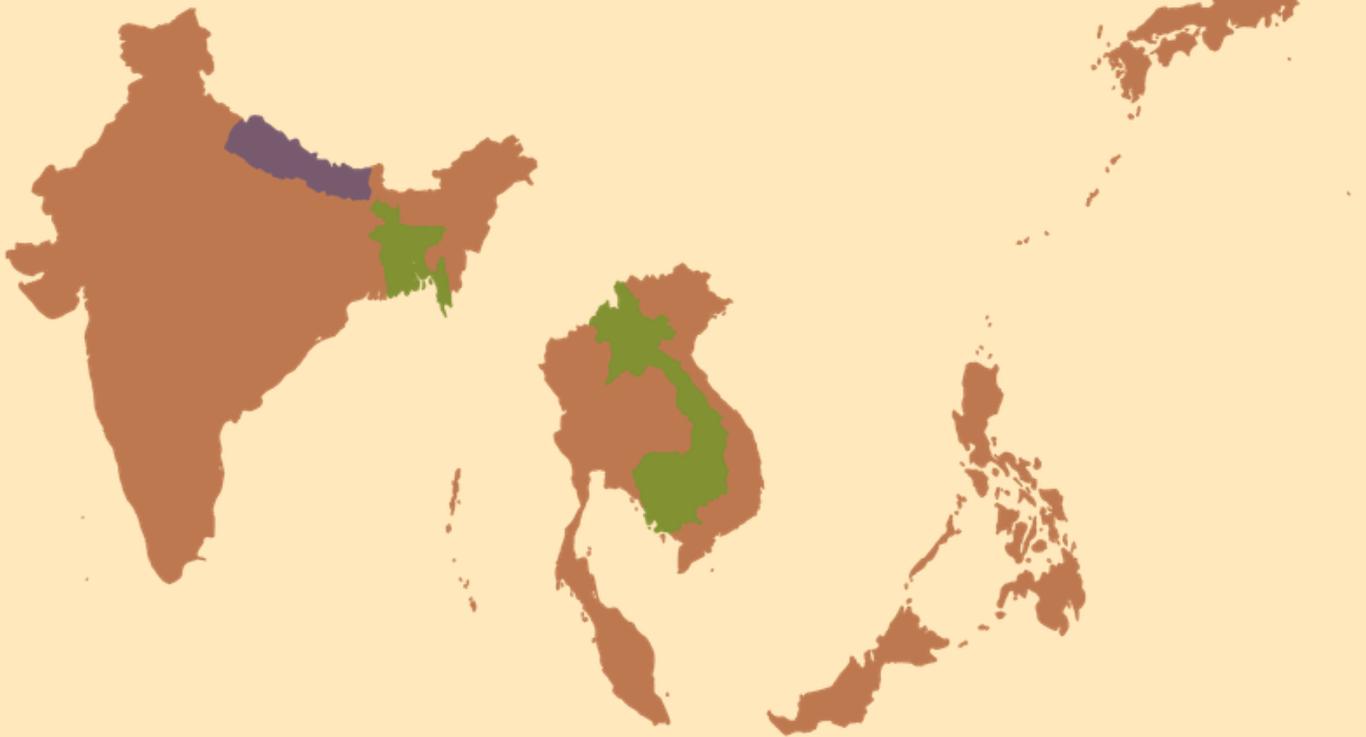
As noted in the introduction, the NBSAP revision is still ongoing in several Asian countries. As of 28 July 2025, six NBSAPs had been revised and submitted to the CBD Secretariat, including five available in English: for India, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. National targets are available for four additional countries – Bangladesh,

Cambodia, Lao PDR and the Philippines – and Nepal has published an NBSAP vision document. This section is based on a systematic analysis of those documents (Figure 7). (As of this writing, Indonesia's NBSAP was only available in Bahasa, and could thus not be reviewed as thoroughly for this report.)

Our analysis (Table 1) found significant differences across countries in their integration of Indigenous Peoples' rights and perspectives. Some have acknowledged Indigenous Peoples' rights more explicitly than in past NBSAPs, while others continue to rely on language that dilutes or obscures Indigenous Peoples' distinct status and demands.

Figure 7. Map of NBSAPs and national targets reviewed

- National targets x4
- NBSAP x5
- NBSAP vision document x1



12 — 52

Figure 8. Percent of national targets integrating Indigenous Peoples, FPIC or traditional knowledge



“If you read the NBSAP, it sounds really impressive because it hits all the right notes, where it talks about the rights of participation, women and different groups. But it paints Indigenous Peoples more like participants in these processes without ownership or leadership. It frames us as guardians, as the ones helping to take care of protected areas. It is not affirming or empowering to us. Still, it is positive that the government is recognizing and involving Indigenous Peoples in the NBSAP process, this gives us something to build on.” – Indigenous woman from Malaysia

“In the recent draft, we see that there are many references of Indigenous Peoples [...] It makes us think that our inputs are there, but then these are already ensured by the [KMGBF] ... It makes me wonder whether the provisions in the document truly are for Indigenous Peoples based on our concerns in Nepal, or just another copy paste from the global document, without recognition of our specific context.” – Pema Wangmo Lama, Nepal.

Overall, there is growing recognition. **More countries are beginning to name Indigenous Peoples, to include Indigenous knowledge, and to make space for Indigenous Peoples' role in biodiversity governance.** In some cases, this means Indigenous Peoples are written into the planning and implementation of national biodiversity strategies. These shifts are not accidental: they reflect the influence of the KMGBF, financial and technical resources available to or mobilized by Indigenous organizations, and the persistence of Indigenous leaders who bring their voices to the global stage, particularly in the CBD COPs, and through regional and national networks. Together,

these efforts are helping Indigenous Peoples become more visible in national policy spaces that have historically overlooked them.

Yet in many countries, **much more must be done to ensure that Indigenous Peoples' leadership and rights are supported not only in planning and implementation, but also in finance, monitoring and reporting.** Crucially, **issues such as land rights, Indigenous and Traditional Territories, and the protection of Indigenous environmental human rights defenders remain under-addressed. Without these, commitments risk being symbolic rather than transformative.**

Table 1. NBSAP Analysis

Country	Human rights-based approach	Protection of environmental human rights defenders	Promotion of Indigenous Peoples' land rights	Reference to Indigenous women	Reference to Indigenous persons with disabilities	Reference to Indigenous youth	Indigenous Peoples in implementation	Indigenous Peoples in monitoring and evaluation	Grievance mechanism	Finance for Indigenous Peoples
Bangladesh NT										
Cambodia NT										
India NBSAP										
Japan NBSAP										
Laos NT										
Malaysia NBSAP										
Nepal VD										
Philippines NT										
Thailand NBSAP										
Vietnam NBSAP										

NT = National Targets, NBSAP = National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, VD = Vision Document for the NBSAP

Including targets/indicators on human rights or Indigenous land rights, recognizing diverse Indigenous groups as biodiversity beneficiaries, and including Indigenous participation in implementation, monitoring data, financing, and having a grievance mechanisms.

Including human rights and defender protection as a guiding principle, promoting Indigenous women's land rights, recognizing diverse Indigenous groups as participants in conservation, and including Indigenous Peoples as partners in implementation or actors in monitoring and evaluation



No reference



4.1. Recognition of Indigenous Peoples

The term “Indigenous Peoples” appears in several NBSAPs and national targets, but overall, terminology for Indigenous Peoples remains inconsistent across the region.

Bangladesh, Malaysia, Nepal and Thailand use the term “Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities” (IPLCs), mirroring the KMGBF’s language. Several biodiversity plans reference Indigenous Peoples using appropriate terminology: the Philippines explicitly uses “Indigenous Peoples” in some of the targets communicated to the CBD; Indonesia’s NBSAP uses “Masyarakat adat” (Bahasa for Indigenous Peoples), and Lao PDR uses “indigenous people” in its national targets.

The remaining countries rely on alternative terminology that does not fully capture the distinct rights and status of Indigenous Peoples. Cambodia refers to “indigenous ethnic minorities”, India and Vietnam use “ethnic groups” or “ethnic minorities”, and Thailand inconsistently uses “ethnic groups” alongside the preferred terminology. India’s NBSAP avoids “Indigenous Peoples” altogether in the main body of the document, even though the KMGBF indicators it references do include the term (indicators 9.b and 22.b).

Attention to intersectionality is also weak among most of the countries reviewed, with no biodiversity plan referring to Indigenous persons with disabilities at all. Gender and age receive more attention: Malaysia and the Philippines both acknowledge Indigenous women and Indigenous youth as stakeholders, while Cambodia just recognizes them as beneficiaries of biodiversity conservation. Nepal’s vision document discusses Indigenous women in the context of participation in biodiversity conservation, but not Indigenous youth.



A blessing ritual performed by Batak Indigenous leaders in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Photo by Indigenous Media Network.

4.2. Indigenous Peoples' integration

To understand how well Indigenous Peoples are integrated in the different targets, a coding was done every time the term "Indigenous Peoples", "Indigenous communities" or "IPLCs" was mentioned. The same was done for references to "Free, Prior and Informed Consent" or "FPIC"⁹ and "traditional knowledge"¹⁰ (Figure 8).

Highest integration: The Philippines' national targets and Malaysia's revised NBSAP include references to Indigenous Peoples in roughly half of the targets, and Thailand's NBSAP, in more than 40%.

No integration: Japan's and Vietnam's updated NBSAPs make no reference at all to Indigenous Peoples.

Free, Prior and Informed Consent: Cambodia, India, Japan, Lao PDR and Vietnam do not use this term at in their documents, while the remaining countries mention it in roughly in 10% of their targets, on average.

Traditional knowledge: All countries include references to traditional knowledge in their NBSAPs or national targets, with an average of 17% of the targets including some mention of traditional knowledge. The highest percentage (40%) was Vietnam, though this is partly due to the small number of targets (two out of just five).

Our analysis found that references to Indigenous Peoples mainly involved three topic areas: participation and stakeholder engagement; traditional knowledge, practices and innovations; and rights. Other topics under which Indigenous Peoples were mentioned include capacity-building, benefit-sharing and gender equality. References to FPIC, land and tenure rights, and Indigenous and Traditional Territories also appear, but less frequently.

Crucially, several issues that are priorities for Indigenous Peoples in the region are mostly missing from the documents, including customary laws and community protocols, Indigenous environmental human right defenders, and Indigenous Peoples' role in reporting. Furthermore, as of 7 August 2025, only five of the focus countries (Bangladesh, India, Lao PDR, Malaysia and Sri Lanka) of this report had National Focal Points for Article 8j and related provisions.¹¹

An Indigenous village in Lower Mustang, Nepal.
Photo by Lakpa Nuri Sherpa.



4.3. Human rights, environmental human rights defenders and land rights

Most countries reviewed adopt some human rights language in their biodiversity plans, with the exception of Bangladesh and Japan. Cambodia, India, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam each has at least a target or an indicator that explicitly promotes human rights or specific rights of specific groups. Only Nepal and Thailand go a step further in their NBSAP vision document and revised NBSAP respectively to clearly articulate the human rights-based approach as a guiding principle of the NBSAP.

Except for Japan and Vietnam, all reviewed countries have at least one target or indicator that protects the rights of environmental human rights defenders. Nepal again stands out: its vision document elevates the safeguarding of environmental defenders to a guiding principle for NBSAP implementation.

Land rights of Indigenous Peoples, by contrast, remain under-recognized. Only four countries – Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines and Thailand – make a reference to Indigenous Peoples’ land rights at all as part of a target or indicator. Most stop at “respecting” existing rights, rather than actively promoting secure land tenure or customary land tenure as a pathway for conservation. Only Nepal’s vision document and the Philippines’ national targets go further, treating Indigenous tenure as, respectively, a headline and complementary indicator. Malaysia’s NBSAP and the Philippines’ national targets furthermore adopt an intersectional lens when discussing land rights of Indigenous Peoples:

- Target 2, action 2.1 of Malaysia NBSAP aims to “enhance capacity building and support to enable IPLCs (including women and children) to play more effective roles in biodiversity conservation, especially with regards to the recognition of basic human and land tenure rights”.
- Target 22 of the Philippines includes the indicator on “land tenure of indigenous peoples and local communities by sex and type of tenure”.

Ta Laew – a bamboo woven symbol used for a good harvest by Pgakenyaw Indigenous communities in Northern Thailand. Photo by Minh Tran.



4.4. Indigenous Peoples in implementation

Most countries have positioned Indigenous Peoples as stakeholders in NBSAP implementation, but rarely as leaders. Malaysia's NBSAP and the Philippines' national targets are the only two that go beyond the language of participation and consultation to encourage partnership and collaboration with Indigenous Peoples. India, Japan and Vietnam omit Indigenous Peoples entirely from their list of stakeholders. No country explicitly recognizes or promotes Indigenous leadership in implementation.

Monitoring and evaluation frameworks show a similar pattern. **Most countries include Indigenous Peoples-specific indicators or commit to disaggregating data by Indigenous status.** Japan and Vietnam again stand as exceptions, excluding Indigenous Peoples from their monitoring frameworks altogether. Even where indicators are included, discussion of Indigenous Peoples' role in monitoring and evaluation is limited, appearing only in Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines and Thailand.

Financing presents perhaps the starkest gap: **Very few plans earmark financial resources specifically for Indigenous Peoples,** even though implementation cannot succeed without them. Exceptions include:

- Nepal's vision document includes indicator 7.C, monitoring the percentage of "finance solutions specially targeting women and youth, IPLCs and other marginalized minorities, PWDs [persons with disabilities] on biodiversity".

- Philippines' National Targets emphasize mobilizing "additional financial resources from domestic and international sources to support biodiversity conservation efforts and IPLCs' participation in biodiversity management", including innovative financing mechanisms and climate finance funds.
- Thailand's NBSAP Target 9, Measure 1.4 supports "financial mechanisms for biodiversity with the participation of the public sector, including local communities, indigenous peoples, youth groups, and civil society organizations".
- Lao PDR notes the need for funding to "enable capacity building for ILCs" (assumed to mean Indigenous and Local Communities, though the document provides no explanation).

Most other countries either omit financing discussions entirely or address them without referencing Indigenous Peoples' specific needs and roles. Thus, **even if Indigenous Peoples are recognized and their participation is included in the biodiversity plans, they may be left unsupported, without adequate resources for implementation.**

4.5. Progress and continuity

To assess whether revised NBSAPs represent genuine progress in Indigenous Peoples' inclusion, it is important to understand the larger context and historical baseline prior to the adoption of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

A 2022 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights report¹² found that among 186 NBSAPs globally, few made explicit references to human rights, with only 24% mentioning Indigenous Peoples and even fewer referencing Free, Prior and Informed Consent. A separate analysis¹³ of 27 countries with substantial Indigenous populations revealed that over two-thirds had developed their NBSAPs without meaningfully engaging Indigenous Peoples, with recognition limited primarily to traditional knowledge, not rights recognition. The rights of Indigenous women, inclusion of Indigenous Peoples as full and equal partners, the inclusion of safeguarding mechanisms, and the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' land rights as a conservation strategy were found to be inadequate in many countries. Only Nepal and the Philippines were noted as relatively strong performers.

This pattern extends beyond biodiversity policy. AIPP's 2022 review of 10 Asian countries' nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement found Indigenous Peoples largely invisible as rights-holders or agents of change, with no acknowledgment of land rights and minimal recognition of Indigenous women, youth or persons with disabilities.¹⁴

Against this backdrop of systematic exclusion, the current NBSAP revision processes represent a critical test of whether the KMGBF's language on Indigenous Peoples' rights will lead to genuine policy transformation. For all the signs of progress identified in our review, there is also significant evidence of continued exclusion; marginalization of Indigenous persons with disabilities, youth and women; and critical omissions, particularly with regard to Indigenous Peoples' rights, financial resources for implementation, and accountability.

The critical omissions undermine the positive steps. For example, when references to FPIC are scarce, it raises concern that Indigenous knowledge may be treated as a resource to be extracted, rather than as part of a living system over which Indigenous communities hold the right to decide how it is used. Similarly, while human rights language is entering biodiversity plans, specific and critical rights such as land rights remain under-addressed. Without comprehensive rights recognition and protection for those who defend the environment, biodiversity plans risk advancing conservation goals while allowing injustice to continue.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework was a historic milestone, and so was its recognition of Indigenous Peoples’ rights and contributions. It was the culmination of Indigenous Peoples’ leadership at the global level, following decades of advocacy for their rights and recognition in international environmental policies. Since the adoption of the framework in 2022, Indigenous Peoples in Asia have continued to lead conservation efforts both on the ground and at the national policy level. **Though rarely treated as equal partners, we have shown what inclusive biodiversity governance looks like – and its transformative power.**

Prime examples include the first-ever Indigenous Peoples’ Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan in the Philippines and the inclusion of Indigenous men and women as technical experts and decision-makers in the NBSAP Revision Committees in Nepal. And **across the region, Indigenous Peoples are making our voices heard, both working within the system and actively challenging it as needed.** Facing a system designed to exclude us, Indigenous Peoples persist as biodiversity stewards and leaders. Our leadership highlights the importance of solidarity, trust and reciprocity in governance.

Governments in Asia have a long way to go to meet their commitments in the KMGBF and other international legal instruments that enshrine Indigenous rights. Our study found **multiple forms of exclusion, logistical barriers to engagement, tokenism and performative inclusion, and limited uptake of Indigenous Peoples' insights and priorities** in NBSAPs and national targets.

Still, tangible progress has been made in several countries. Malaysia's and Thailand's NBSAPs, the Philippines' national targets and Nepal's vision document show a fairly strong **recognition of Indigenous Peoples and our knowledge and rights**, including the right to our land and territories. There has also been **an increase in the recognition of our roles** in implementation, monitoring and reporting, with partnership and collaboration being promoted, especially by Malaysia and Philippines, and discussion of financial resources to ensure the participation of Indigenous Peoples by Lao PDR, Nepal, the Philippines and Thailand.

Notably, both in Malaysia and Nepal, a committee for Indigenous Peoples, also including local communities, is being formed as part of implementing the NBSAP, according to Indigenous leaders in these countries. Similarly, in Indonesia and Thailand, Indigenous leaders noted that their respective governments had shown more openness to working with Indigenous Peoples on conservation, through NBSAP implementation or other effective area-based conservation measures.

The lesson is clear. Effective conservation can only be achieved when the rights of Indigenous Peoples and all peoples are respected, and through genuine, equitable partnership between all stakeholders.

To this end, we put forward the following recommendations for ongoing and future biodiversity planning and implementation at the national level.

Recommendations for Indigenous Peoples, leaders and communities

LEVERAGE NETWORKS STRATEGICALLY

Use national, regional and international Indigenous Peoples' networks to monitor policy development and implementation, as well as to set common priorities, track state commitments, and engage in advocacy across levels of governance.

SHARE AND EXCHANGE GOOD PRACTICES

Strengthen regional solidarity by sharing experiences in coalition-building, policy lobbying, and initiatives such as the IPBSAP. Documenting and exchanging lessons help build momentum and allows Indigenous Peoples to adapt successful strategies to their own contexts.

INVEST IN GRASSROOTS LEADERSHIP

Prioritize capacity-building at the community level, especially on policy literacy and political consciousness, to ensure that Indigenous Peoples of all genders, ages and abilities can effectively engage in policy processes on their own terms, not only through representatives at the national or international level.

DEVELOP INDIGENOUS-LED MONITORING MECHANISMS

Build systems for tracking government commitments in biodiversity plans and frameworks, ensuring accountability from the bottom up. This includes community-based data collection and Indigenous monitoring of NBSAP implementation.

ADVANCE INDIGENOUS-LED AGENDA-SETTING

Where appropriate, follow the example of the IPBSAP by creating Indigenous-led plans and proposals that define priorities independently of state-led processes, while still engaging governments on equal terms.

Recommendations for allies, including UN agencies, donors and funders, academics and civil society organizations

SUPPORT INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP WITH FLEXIBLE, ACCESSIBLE, PREDICTABLE AND LONG-TERM FUNDING

Channel funding directly to Indigenous Peoples' organizations and communities, with flexibility to cover emerging needs (e.g., travel costs, translation), while ensuring that women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups fully benefit.

HOLD GOVERNMENTS AND DUTY-BEARERS ACCOUNTABLE

Use advocacy, research and monitoring to ensure states uphold their commitments under the CBD, the KMGBF, UNDRIP, and ILO 169. Push for transparency in how governments implement NBSAPs, especially in relation to Indigenous Peoples' rights. Donors should also adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward human rights violations at all stages of NBSAP preparation, implementation, reporting, and monitoring.

AMPLIFY INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' VOICES

Create enabling spaces in academia, civil society and policy platforms for Indigenous Peoples of all genders, ages and abilities to speak for themselves. Support translation, interpretation and accessible formats so that language and technical barriers do not exclude Indigenous Peoples who are often marginalized.

INVEST IN EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Move beyond symbolic alliances and work toward relationships that are accountable to Indigenous agendas, priorities and knowledge systems.

SUPPORT INDIGENOUS-LED KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

Recognize, protect, and help scale Indigenous community-based documentation, monitoring and research initiatives, while respecting Indigenous data sovereignty.

Recommendations for governments

LEGALLY RECOGNIZE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND OUR RIGHTS

Align national laws with international standards, including UNDRIP and ILO 169, and take proactive measures to secure Indigenous Peoples' land, resource and territorial rights.

INSTITUTIONALIZE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' PARTICIPATION

Ensure inclusive and equitable representation of Indigenous Peoples in relevant decision-making bodies with real decision-making power. Move beyond ad hoc consultations and establish formal mechanisms for Indigenous Peoples' representation in biodiversity committees, with guaranteed resources for sustained participation. This should include permanent advisory groups or standing committees rather than short-term, dissolvable structures.

ENSURE INCLUSIVE REPRESENTATION

Guarantee the meaningful involvement of Indigenous Peoples of all genders, ages and abilities and promote our leadership and decision-making power across all stages of policy development, implementation, monitoring and reporting.

EARMARK DEDICATED FUNDING FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' PARTICIPATION IN THE IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND REPORTING OF THE NBSAP

Allocate adequate and accessible funding to ensure the effective engagement of Indigenous Peoples in relevant processes at all levels of governance. Include Indigenous Peoples' representatives in the governing body of the fund to ensure Indigenous Peoples can use the fund for our self-determined priorities on conservation.

ADOPT AND IMPLEMENT A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

Integrate principles of justice, equity and human rights into the finalization, implementation, monitoring and reporting of NBSAPs, ensuring that conservation does not result in dispossession, rights violations, or the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples. Strengthen coherence between NBSAPs and other environmental policy instruments, such as Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans, to ensure that activities under the Paris Agreement align with - and do not undermine - the goals and principles of the KMGBF.

RECOGNIZE INDIGENOUS-LED PLANS AND INITIATIVES

Treat Indigenous Peoples' strategies, such as the IPBSAP, as formal contributions to national biodiversity planning, and allocate resources to support their implementation alongside state-led plans.

RECOGNIZE, PROTECT AND PROMOTE INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE FOR EFFECTIVE CONSERVATION

Co-create, with Indigenous Peoples, a dedicated platform to document, monitor and report on good practices and community-led conservation, and demonstrate their contributions to NBSAP and KMGBF implementation. Ensure institutional support by appointing a national focal point on Article 8(j) - if one is not already in place - to facilitate coordination and uphold Indigenous knowledge and rights within national biodiversity planning.

PROVIDE FULL PROTECTION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Establish clear safeguards and accountability mechanisms to prevent violence, intimidation, or criminalization of Indigenous leaders advocating for their rights and territories.

Endnotes

- [1] International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB), 2022. Indigenous Peoples and local communities celebrate COP15 deal on nature, and welcome the opportunity of working together with states to implement the framework. Press release, 19 December. <https://iifb-indigenous.org/indigenous-peoples-and-local-communities-celebrate-cop15-deal-on-nature-and-welcome-the-opportunity-of-working-together-with-states-to-implement-the-framework>.
- [2] See <https://aippnet.org/indigenous-knowledge-and-peoples-of-asia-ikpa/>
- [3] See <https://aippnet.org/e-sak-ka-ou-declaration/>
- [4] See <https://aippnet.org/tohmle-statement/>
- [5] They are Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Timor Leste and Vietnam.
- [6] See <https://www.cbd.int/traditional/default.shtml>
- [7] CBD. 2022. "Guidance for Revising or Updating National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans to Align with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework." CBD/COP/DEC/15/6, Annex I. Montreal: Decision adopted by the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. <https://www.cbd.int/nbsap/guidance.shtml>.
- [8] IPBC. 2024. "Indigenous Peoples' Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (IPBSAP)." First iteration. Indigenous Peoples and Biodiversity Coalition Philippines. <https://transformativepathways.net/philippine-indigenous-peoples-biodiversity-strategy-and-action-plan/>
- [9] Free, Prior and Informed Consent is a fundamental principle of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which affirms Indigenous Peoples the right to approve or reject projects and policies affecting their lands, territories, and resources before implementation begins without coercion, intimidation or manipulation.
- [10] Article 8j of the Convention on Biological Diversity specifically addresses the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of Indigenous Peoples relevant to biodiversity conservation, requiring countries to respect, preserve and maintain such knowledge systems.
- [11] See <http://nfp-cbd-tk.pdf>.
- [12] OHCHR. 2022. *Integrating Human Rights in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans: Research, Analysis and Recommendations for Rights-based Biodiversity Action*. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/climatechange/information-materials/integrating-hr-in-national-biodiversity-strategies-action-plans.pdf>.
- [13] Climate Focus and Parabukas. 2023). *Protecting Nature, Respecting Rights: Putting Indigenous and Community Rights at the Heart of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans*. Forest Declaration Assessment and Climate Focus. <https://www.parabukas.com/s/2023NBSAPsReport1.pdf>.

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Syang village in Lower Mustang, Nepal. Photo by Lakpa Nuri Sherpa.



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