

# People in Conservation

*Biodiversity Conservation and Livelihood Security*



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## Opening Words

The impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic have left the Adivasi and other traditional forest dwelling communities vulnerable in several ways. Loss of livelihood options, closure of local markets, severe shortage of basic healthcare facilities and healthcare professionals has led to compromised health conditions due to endemic malnutrition and low immunity among them. Lack of awareness and an already poorly functioning Public Distribution System have made matters worse. Before hastily implementing an ill thought out lockdown, the government should have taken special note of its ramifications on the poor people (many of whom were adivasis) and pre-emptively come up with a response strategy.

Unfortunately the COVID Response Plan for “Atma-Nirbhar Bharat” (self-reliant India) finds no mention of Adivasis despite persistent appeals by tribal groups, experts and opposition leaders. There seems to be no concern for 300 million tribal people and other forest dwellers that constitute a quarter of country’s population, and which suffered most due to the Covid-induced lockdown. The central government and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) in particular needed to come up with a COVID Response Plan for tribal communities and issue comprehensive guidelines to state governments to address issues and their concerns. Experts too have expressed dismay over the failure of the government in this regard. They highlighted that the procurement of the minor forest produce - a major source of income for tribal communities - was impacted and that this may have a long term consequence for communities. Despite the fact that 100 million forest dwellers depend on minor forest produce for food, shelter, medicines and income, they are ignored. They suffer ignominy, displacement and impoverishment as the State has betrayed them. Many in the civil society have urged PM Modi, Arjun Munda and other ministers to pay attention to the adverse impact of the lockdown on livelihoods and survival of millions of tribal groups and forest dwellers. Historian Ramachandra Guha has said, “The impact of the COVID crisis and the lockdown on our already disadvantaged tribal and forest communities has been immense; the Government must act to alleviate their suffering.” On the contrary, various reports from across the country show that in addition to the above situation the atrocities and injustices that adivasi and other local communities anyway face due to forest, conservation and economic policies continued and increased during the pandemic. For instance during the pandemic, Compensatory Afforestation (CA) plantations were forcefully carried out on forest lands used by adivasis and other traditional forest dwellers, with the erection of fences for such areas to restrict their access, without consultations or consent of the concerned communities. These actions are not only in direct violation of their rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA)<sup>1</sup>, but do also impact their food and livelihood security and destroy local agro-biodiversity that sustains the adivasi community. The main NTFP collection season from April to June coincided exactly with the lockdown, completely disrupting the trade and value

chain as traders were unwilling to buy NTFPs. The schemes to resolve the bottleneck announced by the central govt., such as the VanDhan Vikas and Minimum Support Price have been inadequate due to the absence of institutional support in the tribal areas. Experts have also demanded that the huge amounts of money collected under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act (CAMPA) should be disbursed among the Gram Sabhas so that they could use it to appropriately address the challenges posed by the lockdown, depending on their local needs. They said that the government should ensure adequate testing and healthcare facilities in tribal areas by deploying Mobile Health Units. The other demands include effective implementation of FRA to ensure land and forest security to the tribal and forest dwelling communities and withdrawal of the forest clearance decisions and other guidelines issued during the lockdown period; and releasing the ample CAMPA funds (50,000 crores) controlled by the forest dept. to the tribal communities and Gram Sabhas. And yet, despite all this, the only response the Ministry of Environment and Forest could offer during such difficult times was to throw open many protected Areas to businesses, a sacrifice at the altar of ‘development’.

Among the major reasons why the above situation arose has been the lack of recognized rights of these communities over their land and surrounding ecosystem.

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 (FRA) aims at addressing the “historic injustice” faced by adivasis and other traditional forest dwellers. It does so by recognizing the following rights in all forest areas including protected areas (PAs):

- a. Individual and community forest and land rights;
- b. Resource use, management and conservation rights;
- c. Right to free, prior and informed consent through a gram sabha resolution before diversion of their forests for other purposes;
- d. Right to a free, prior and informed consent for a relocation package and its satisfactory implementation.

However as so often happens, good intentions (or laws) do not easily translate into effective implementation. Ever since its promulgation, there has been much lethargy as well as resistance displayed by the very nodal agencies charged with implementation of this positive act. It is important to note here that the provisions that guarantee the rights of the community to protect, manage and conserve forest areas indeed represent the right step towards community empowerment, decentralization and democratization of forest governance. The promulgation of the act was a step in the right direction at the right time in tandem with parallel international initiatives encapsulated in the idea of indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCAs). ICCAs are natural and/or modified ecosystems containing significant biodiversity values, ecological services and cultural values, voluntarily conserved by Indigenous peoples and local communities, both sedentary and mobile, through customary laws or other effective means.

1. I.e. the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights). Act, 2006.

ICCAs can include ecosystems with minimum to substantial human influence as well as cases of continuation, revival or modification of traditional practices or new initiatives taken up by communities in the face of new threats or opportunities. Several of them are inviolate zones ranging from very small to large stretches of land and waterscapes.

ICCAs burst upon the global conservation scene in the first few years of the new millennium. Various called indigenous protected areas, biocultural heritage sites, community reserves, and various other names, these are not new in practice. The conservation of sites and species by indigenous peoples and local communities is age-old. But the fact that these are equivalent in many ways to conventional, government-managed 'protected areas', was recognized only at the turn of the millennium. Two events advancing such recognition were the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Parks Congress (WPC, Durban 2003) and the VIIIth Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, Kuala Lumpur 2004). Both of these meetings, were attended by thousands of conservationists from virtually all countries on the planet, endorsed the need to recognize CCAs as an important phenomenon. The CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas has explicitly committed countries to recognize, support and take other action regarding CCAs by 2008.

Three features can be taken as the defining characteristics<sup>2</sup> of ICCAs:

1. A community is closely connected to a well defined ecosystem (or to a species and its habitat) culturally and/or because of survival and dependence for livelihood;
2. The community management decisions and efforts lead to the conservation of the ecosystem's habitats, species, ecological services and associated cultural values [even when the conscious objective of such management may differ from conservation per se, and be, for instance, related to material livelihood, water security, safeguarding of cultural and spiritual places, etc.];
3. The community is the major player in decision-making (governance) and implementation regarding the management of the site, implying that community institutions have the capacity to enforce regulations; in many situations there may be other stakeholders in collaboration or partnership, but primary decision-making rests with the concerned community.

One can see from above how the FRA on the one hand and ICCA on the other are mutually complementary initiatives at the national and the international levels respectively. Effective implementation of the CFR provision of the FRA would not only ensure that the law of the land is respected, but also that an international obligation is met.

- Neema Pathak Broom and Milind Wani

2. See <https://www.iucn.org/content/indigenous-and-community-conserved-areas-a-bold-new-frontier-conservation>

## 1. News and Information<sup>3</sup>

### Adivasi of Payvahir Village conduct a census of wild animals in their CFR village in Melghat

Payvahir village around Melghat Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra state) has conducted a wildlife census in their forest for the fifth time this year. The village has been governing 192 ha of the surrounding / adjoining forest, the rights for which were conferred upon them eight years ago under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. Six youth from the village have constructed two *machaans* (towering observation points) near the water holes in the forest and have recorded 27 blue bulls, 29 wild boars, 3 peacocks, besides deer, black naped hare, kingfisher, jungle fowl and other animals. This exercise was conducted parallel to the *Nisargaanubhav* programme which has been facilitated by the Maharashtra Forest Department.

The village has also put various regulations in place for democratically governing their forest which will include soil and water conservation work, forest protection, keeping forest fires and poaching in check, banning of felling of trees and open grazing amongst others.

**Source:** The Hitavada, Nagpur City Line, Dated 11th May 2020

### A community rallies around hornbill habitat to aid conservation

Nine settlements in Athirapally-Vazhchal-Nelliampathy forests in the Palakkad and Trissur of Kerala have been responsible for the conservation of the only region where all four South Indian species of hornbills (the Great Indian Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*), Malabar Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros coronatus*), Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) and Malabar Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros griseus*)) are found. The Kadar community that dwells in these settlements is included under the particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTGs) and is known to practice a nomadic lifestyle and shifting cultivation.

The Kadar community had in 2015 rejected the proposed Athirapally Hydroelectric project which was going to displace 163 Kadar families in Vazhachal and 17 families

3. Input for this section have been provided by Shruti Ajit (shrutiajit16@gmail.com) of Kalpavriksh.



in Pokalappara settlements<sup>4</sup>, after invoking their CFR rights over 40,000 ha of forests that had been recognized the same year.

72 Kadar youth of the community with the guidance of Western Ghats Hornbill Foundation, in collaboration with Kerala Forest Department, have been trained for protecting hornbill habitat. They will keep vigil over poaching incidences and prevent of felling of nesting trees and wildfire, and restricting human intervention in this region during their nesting seasons.

**Source:** Written by K.A.Shaji, Mongabay India, Dated 16th December 2019 (<https://india.mongabay.com/2019/12/a-community-rallies-around-hornbill-habitat-to-aid-conservation/>)

### **Arunachal Pradesh: Villagers declare their forest CCA**

Chug Village, in West Kameng district, has declared 100 sq. km. of their forest as a community conserved area under the guidance of WWF-India. A complete ban on hunting and extraction of timber has been enforced by the village in the forest and a census was conducted using camera traps and sign surveys. Nearly 18 mammal species, 21 bird species and six butterfly species have been identified, including the red panda, musk deer, the takin, Asiatic black bear, the Himalayan Monal pheasant and the Satyr tragopan.

**Source:** The Arunachal Times Dated 4th January 2020 (<https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2020/01/04/villagers-declare-their-forest-cca/>)



## **2. Event**

### **ICCA Regionalization Meeting**

The ICCA Consortium is an international association promoting the appropriate recognition of and support to ICCAs (Territories and Areas Conserved by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities). The Consortium supports field based initiatives, strengthens national capacities and supports advocacy at national and international levels towards improved policies and practices relevant for ICCAs.

The ICCA Consortium's South Asia Regional Assembly was held at Prakriti Sadhana Kendra in Udaipur, Rajasthan in November 2019. Its objective was to bring together members and honorary members of the Consortium, its partners, and others working on community conserved areas in South Asia, to share and learn from each other's experiences, and to define a way forward for community conservation in South Asia. A large number of participants from India were joined by individuals and organizations from Nepal and Bangladesh. Participants included representatives of various villages and local initiatives, civil society organizations, independent researchers and academics.

Following detailed introductions of the participants and their work, there was an introductory session on ICCAs in the global, South Asian and Indian contexts.

A session on conservation and restoration in ICCAs identified gaps in traditional conservation systems, discussed existing conservation practices, as well as the support required for conservation in different ecosystems. The focus was on community ownership in restoration efforts.

A session on equity issues within ICCAs focused on topics of gender, caste and youth perspectives.

Group members shared ideas about systems of governance in ICCAs: Depending on the local context, governance mechanisms can be adaptive and extremely diverse, yet function within the universal principles of transparency, equity, justice, collective and open dialogues, and inclusiveness.

A breakout-group discussed ways of knowledge generation and transfer, including traditional and new systems. A second such group discussed the need for a combination of formal and informal systems of

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4. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/athirappilly-project-unlikely/article8205169.ece>

management, relations with the state, and actions needed to achieve better management. A third group discussed several livelihoods and occupations related to ICCAs, their impacts on the communities and ecosystems, and the challenges faced by people in ensuring livelihoods security.

A variety of presentations highlighted international policy support to ICCAs and policy transformations in different countries, the potential of transformative laws such as the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 and the Forest Rights Act, 2006 of India, and ICCAs within the larger context of alternatives and radical ecological democracy. The UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre registry process and membership of the ICCA Consortium were also topic of dialogue.

The concluding session turned to strategies and the way forward. Participants felt that a network at South Asia level could be a space for introspection, reflection, and cross-learning, and it could help advocacy at the local and national level, as well as provide a common collective identity to enhance community voices in various forums.

Participants formed thematic groups on issues like Grasslands and Savannas, Wetlands and Riverine Ecosystems, Himalayan Mountain Ecosystems, Forests, Trans-boundary ICCAs, Gender in ICCAs, and Youth in ICCAs. These smaller groups consist of local representatives who will come together at national and international levels. They will work on outreach, networking, documentation, knowledge generation, and advocacy, among other aspects.

The larger South Asia network will focus on linking conservation activities with livelihoods, empowering women and youth within ICCAs, skill and capacity building, advocacy and legal support, exchange visits and training programmes, creating fellowship-based programmes for custodians of ICCAs, supporting communities in conflict zones and more.

Kalpavriksh continues to be the coordinator for the South Asia region.

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### 3. Perspectives

#### Community Conserved Areas: policy issues in historic and contemporary context

**Fikret Berkes**

**Editorial comment:** Although slightly dated, this piece has been included for its detailed exposition providing information and analysis that will be useful for anyone interested in ICCAs.

##### Introduction

The rapidly developing idea of indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCAs) creates both opportunities and challenges for conservation practice. ICCAs are defined as “natural and/or modified ecosystems containing significant biodiversity values, ecological services, and cultural values, voluntarily conserved by indigenous, mobile and local communities, through customary laws and other effective means” (IUCN 2008). Three features are important. First, ICCAs involve a community (or communities) closely connected to the ecosystem culturally and/or because of livelihood needs. Second, management decisions of the community effectively lead to conservation, even though conservation may not be the primary objective. Third, the community is the major decision maker, and community institutions have the capability to enforce regulations (Pathaket *al.* 2004).

The importance of ICCAs was recognized internationally through two key events: IUCN's Fifth World Parks Congress (WPC) in Durban in 2003 and the Seventh Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP7) in Kuala Lumpur in 2004. The Durban Congress broke with conventional conservation wisdom to suggest a diversification of conservation approaches. It recommended that the CBD “recognize the diversity of protected area governance approaches, such as community conserved areas, indigenous conservation areas, and private protected areas” (Pathaket *al.* 2004). Through its Theme on Indigenous and Local Communities, Equity and Protected Areas (TILCEPA), the IUCN prepared a volume of guidelines regarding steps that conservation agencies could take to recognize ICCAs and assess their conservation values for inclusion in protected area systems (Borrini Feyerabendet *al.* 2004a).



What do these ICCAs look like? They are found in both terrestrial and marine areas. They range in size from sacred groves less than 1 ha, to 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> Xingu Indigenous Park in Brazil (Oviedo 2006). Some are already recognized and incorporated into national protected area systems. About 20% of Australia's protected area consists of 20 indigenous protected areas (Smyth 2006), but the evidence for or against the biodiversity benefit of these and other ICCAs are not clear. Kothari (2006) has shown that ICCAs can be allocated into each of the six IUCN protected area categories. For example, certain sacred groves and other sites with taboo prohibition can be categorized as IA and IB (strict nature reserve and wilderness areas). However, the bulk of the ICCAs would fit into Category V (protected landscape/seascape) and Category VI (Managed Resource Protected Area).

What IUCN initially called CCAs represent a diversity of different kinds of areas under different kinds of governance systems, with different kinds of problems. Integrating even a fraction of these ICCAs into national systems could contribute to improved conservation but would require much effort. Although ICCAs are part of the CBD Programme of Work (Pathaket *al.* 2004), there is little documentation of ICCAs (Kothari 2006) and even less of the discussion of policy implications. Here I examine the historic and contemporary context of ICCAs, provide some examples, and raise some policy issues.

### Historic context

The term ICCA may be new, but the idea of areas or species conserved by communities is not. The traditional basis of conservation is older than the modern conservation movement and goes back at least to royal game preserves in Europe. Probably the best known kind of traditional conservation, sacred forests, or sacred groves, have been documented in some detail from India, and traditional sacred areas of diverse descriptions are found in all parts of the world (Ramakrishnan *et al.* 1998). There are more of these sacred areas than probably appreciated; a preliminary survey conducted in Ecuador in 2003 among 976 indigenous communities resulted in the identification of 328 sacred sites (Oviedo 2006).

The World Heritage Sites network of UNESCO includes many sites related to the conservation of cultural and biological diversity: sacred mountains (such as Machu Picchu in Peru), sacred forests, temples and shrines, and sacred lakes and springs (Schaaf & Lee 2006). A UNEP compendium on cultural and spiritual values of

biodiversity conserved by traditional systems includes sacred groves that serve as temple gardens and the community medicine chest at the same time (Posey 1999). There seems to be some overlap between these values and that of modern conservation. Colding & Folke (1997) found that about one third of species specific taboos used by indigenous people corresponded to threatened species on the IUCN Red List.

Many national parks around the world have been established at the sites of former sacred areas (Borrini Feyerabend *et al.* 2004b). One example is the Alto Fragua Indiwasi National Park in Colombia, the first national park in that country created at the request indigenous groups (Oviedo 2006). Another example is the Kaz Daglari National Park in Turkey, established in an area with centuries old sacred sites and a high diversity of trees used by local craftsmen and traditional woodworkers since the 1400s (Ari, pers. comm.; Berkes 2008).

In some cases, existing high species richness is explainable in terms of traditional livelihood practices rather than the existence of sacred sites. Bird *et al.* (2008) have shown that indigenous burning for small game hunting results in the formation of small scale mosaics that maximize habitat diversity in Australia's Western Desert. In the absence of indigenous burning, these fine grained mosaics dissolve, leading to a decrease in biodiversity at the local scale. Similarly, large areas of Oaxaca State in southern Mexico exhibit high species richness despite the absence of official protected areas. Robson (2007) attributed this to local and indigenous practices that result in multi functional cultural landscapes, characterized by community forests in the higher areas, shade coffee at lower latitudes, and a mosaic of multiple use forests and small scale agriculture at the lowest latitudes.

Integrated protected landscapes with both wild and domesticated species are particularly interesting for conservation (Kothari 2006). In the Peruvian Andes, the center of origin of the potato, Quetchua indigenous people maintain a mosaic of agricultural and natural areas as a bio-cultural heritage site. A potential candidate for IUCN Category V designation, the 8,500 ha area contains some 1,200 potato varieties, both cultivated and wild (Pathaket *al.* 2004). The Quetchua do not make a sharp distinction between cultured and wild varieties, but tend to regard them as part of a continuum (Kothari 2006).

The Oaxaca and Peru cases exemplify mixed systems that retain some elements of historical belief and practice, but at the same time respond to contemporary issues and livelihood needs. They also highlight the fundamental difference between formal protected areas and ICCAs. The primary objective of the former is biodiversity conservation, whereas the latter are established for livelihoods, community well-being (including the provision of clean water in the Oaxaca case, J. Robson, pers. comm.) as well as for cultural reasons. Resource management systems and practice in ICCAs often produce outcomes that are analogous to those desired by conservationists from industrialized nations, and this is not merely accidental. The people in these areas do not use a biodiversity discourse, but nevertheless have well-developed concepts for productive landscapes and waterscapes that provide a diversity of what we would call ecosystem services and products for livelihood needs (Capistrano et al. 2005).

Many rural and indigenous peoples do not make a distinction between the biological, economic, and social objectives of conservation, as scientists often do, but tend to regard these aspects as interrelated. In the worldview of many indigenous groups, from the Cree and Dene of northern Canada to the Maori of New Zealand, use and protection go together. One has to use a resource to respect it and to have responsibility for it. According to this view, conservation without use makes no sense (except for taboo areas and species) because it alienates people from their lands and from their stewardship responsibilities (Berkes 2008).

### Contemporary context

In addition to historically old ICCAs, as in sacred groves, new ICCAs have been coming into being in recent years. Most of the marine ICCAs seem to be new and are concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region, a legacy of the rich heritage of reef and lagoon tenure systems with prohibitions, and species and area taboos (Johannes 2002). More than 500 marine ICCAs are found in the Philippines alone (Kothari 2006). In the case of terrestrial ones, some of the new ICCAs are based on existing landscapes used as per traditional practice, and some seem to be basically new protected areas, encouraged by payments for environmental services, for example, in Oaxaca (Robson 2007). Shade-grown coffee, now common in agroecological systems in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, is a new "innovation", primarily because international markets opened up for green products (Tucker 2008).

The differences in the primary objectives of many ICCAs as compared to formal protected areas, and how the two sets of objectives might mesh, may best be considered through a set of cases. **Table 1** lists five recently formed ICCAs from a diversity of geographical areas and cultures, three of them involving indigenous groups (Canada, Mexico, and Guyana cases) and two non-indigenous (Thailand and Namibia) ones. Two of the cases are under protected area status (Canada, Namibia) and one is within an existing protected area (Guyana). Three (Namibia, Mexico, Thailand) were short-listed for UNDP's Equator Prize for projects combining biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation objectives (UNDP 2008).

**Table 1.** Examples of modern CCAs

Case	Main reason for ICCA	Reference
The Torra Conservancy, Namibia, 352,000 ha, one of Namibia's 50 plus conservancies	Employment and cash benefits from wildlife use; ecotourism; community organization and empowerment; participation in wildlife management	Hoole (2007)
Nuevo San Juan, Mexico, 18,000 ha community based forestry enterprise	Economic and social development; multiple use forest ecosystem for timber and non-timber forest products; control of traditional lands	Orozco (2006)
Pred Nai Community Forestry Group, Trat Province, Thailand	Rehabilitation of degraded mangrove forest (about 2,000 ha); access to livelihood resources; secure community land tenure	Senyk (2006)
Arapaima Management Project of the North Rupununi District Development Board, Guyana	Community based conservation as investment for future use of <i>Arapaima gigas</i> , a giant Amazon fish; collateral donor support; empowerment; management participation	Fernandes (2004)



Case	Main reason for ICCA	Reference
Paakumshumwaau Maatuskaau Biodiversity Reserve, 4,259 sq km, Cree Nation of Wemindji, Canada	Biodiversity and landscape conservation; security from hydro electricity development threat; reaffirming land and resource rights; community identity, cohesion and cultural needs	Quebec (2008)

One striking finding in **Table 1** is the wide range of motivations for ICCAs: access to livelihood resources, security of land and resource tenure, security from outside threats, financial benefit from resources or ecosystem functions, rehabilitation of degraded resources, participation in management, empowerment, capacity building, and cultural identity and cohesiveness. A related finding is that each case has multiple objectives, often combining economic, ecological, and social aspects. As these are recent ICCAs, livelihood needs as well as ethical/cultural values seem to be important. Attachment to land and tenurial security are major motivations in all cases, even in the seemingly most commercial Mexico case.

In some, cultural values are implicit: in the Guyana case, the arapaima (*Arapaima gigas*) was once considered by the Makushi people as “mother and father of all the fishes,” associated with myths and stories, and was under taboo protection. The modern Makushi say that they do not believe in such superstitions (Fernandes 2004). In many of the cases, the needs of future generations are very much a part of the ICCA narrative, a point that comes across most strongly in the Canadian case, a locally managed protected area “so our grandchildren can hunt and fish,” and in the Guyana case in which the Makushi are apparently willing to forego current arapaima harvests for future potential benefits from enhanced future use.

### Policy implications

ICCAs have the potential to considerably increase the current area under conservation status, but they also raise a number of questions with policy implications, many of them under discussion in IUCN circles (Kothari 2006; Oviedo 2006). Here I explore four areas of policy implications: assessing the evidence for or against the real conservation benefits of ICCAs; integrating

traditional knowledge with protected area management; finding the right mix of governance regimes; and dealing with challenges faced by ICCAs.

### Assessing the evidence for conservation benefits of ICCAs

Brazil's extractive reserve model of rubber tappers served as the basis for the development of IUCN Category VI protected areas (Oviedo 2006). These reserves are typically lightly used areas in which protecting one component (e.g., rubber trees) serves to conserve entire plant communities. But many ICCAs, such as Mexico's multifunctional forests, are more heavily used. Brayet al. (2002) have suggested that community managed forests of Mexico (including the Mexico case in **Table 1**) can serve as a model for sustainable forest landscapes.

What are the conservation trade offs in including such forests in national protected area inventories? In some cases, conservation organizations have allied themselves with indigenous groups, as in the case of the Kayapo of Brazil, with clear evidence that indigenous control protects against forest degradation by settlers (Schwartzman and Zimmerman 2005). In other cases, increasing market integration may impoverish conservation values, unless the indigenous group in question has the opportunity to learn from resource scarcity and develop its own conservation ethic over time (Holt 2005). Given the extremely diverse nature of ICCAs, it is likely that some of these areas will prove to be of positive biodiversity value and others not. At the end of the day, a given ICCA can be incorporated into the national conservation network only by the agreement of all parties.

### Integrating traditional knowledge with protected area management

ICCAs may offer lessons in integrating traditional knowledge and management practices into protected area planning, but this will require legal and policy changes (Oviedo 2006). Local and traditional knowledge have been discussed seriously only since the 1990s, and have not to any extent entered mainstream conservation science. Yet, integrating ICCAs into protected area systems would mean that conservation area managers at all levels would need to be able to deal with local institutions and knowledge. There is a rapidly growing list of applications of local and traditional knowledge in protected area management. State based scientific knowledge and community



knowledge are complementary because the two kinds of knowledge operate at two distinct spatial scales, and good management requires the use of both (Borrini Feyerabend et al. 2004b; Berkes 2008). The cases in **Table 1** and other UNDP Equator Initiative projects (Berkes 2007) indicate that integrating such knowledge often involves multiple partnerships, and requires managers to have the skills for network building, negotiation and conflict resolution.

### Finding the right mix of governance regimes

There is no single “correct” governance model for ICCAs, although experiences in Brazil (Oviedo 2006) and Australia (Govanet et al. 2006) provide guidance. The strength of the Australian model for indigenous protected areas is that, the incorporation of ICCAs into the national system is voluntary, and aboriginal people can choose the level of government involvement. In return for government assistance, the aboriginal owners of the ICCAs are required to develop and implement a management plan (Pathaket et al. 2004).

Although the governance dimension in the current IUCN protected area categories makes a distinction between “co managed protected areas” and “community conserved areas” (Borrini et al. 2004a), ICCAs will be in effect co managed because all conservation is guided by government legislation, and necessarily involves multiple organizational levels, requiring partnerships and networks. The conservation outcome is often the result of the interaction (or lack thereof) amongst these levels (Berkes 2007). Co management involves finding the right mix of community and government rights and responsibilities, and a problem solving approach. However, for many communities, “co management” implies the threat of government intervention. In any case, co management by itself is no guarantee of good conservation; for example, the co managed Kakadu National Park in Australia has succumbed to damage from invasive species (Bradshaw et al. 2007).

### Dealing with challenges faced by ICCAs

Existing ICCAs suffer from many limitations and problems, including the loss of traditional management capabilities and authority, and insecure land tenure (Kothari 2006). On the basis of cases in **Table 1** and elsewhere, addressing weak institutions and capacity building needs about 10 years, and requires partnerships and networks, typically involving the community, NGOs, government agencies, and universities (Capistrano et al. 2005). “Packaged”

prescriptions do not work because each ICCA is different. Flexibility and site specific approaches are needed to adapt solutions to local problems through learning by doing. Strengthening land and resource tenure through government recognition and payment for environmental services are ways to provide incentives for ICCAs to join the national system. However, many indigenous and rural groups around the world associate “parks” with “dispossession”. Kothari (2006) alludes to this problem in a discussion of the reluctance of Indian ICCAs to take advantage of new legislation for recognition. In the Philippines, the Tagbanwa people fear losing control of their resources if Coron Island is added to the national system (Pathaket et al. 2004).

In conclusion, each of these issues (and others) has implication for conservation policy, nationally and internationally. Responding to the call of the 2003 World Parks Congress for more diversity in protected area governance, ICCAs can contribute to the redefinition of conservation, and the role of local people and institutions in it. As such, the conventional conservation approach could become more inclusive and pluralistic, no longer in the monopoly of scientists from industrialized nations. But at the same time, broadening the constituency for conservation will make it more real and legitimate for indigenous and rural peoples of the world. Whereas strict preservation will continue to be important, the incorporation of sustainable use and livelihood needs into IUCN Category V and VI lands may help conservation to contribute to UNDP Millennium Development Goals regarding sustainability and poverty eradication. Managers working in these areas will need to develop skills consistent with participatory governance, joint problem solving and social learning, knowledge integration, and community based multilevel conservation.

**Source:** <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1755-263X.2008.00040.x>

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## The Power of the Community

**Neema Pathak Broome**

Throughout the inhabited world, indigenous peoples and local communities have governed, used and conserved their territories and areas. Globally, many of their territories and areas are amongst the richest and most resilient ecosystems on the planet. Exactly because of this many such biodiversity-rich territories and areas of the indigenous peoples and local communities have been declared national parks or other kinds of formal protected areas by governments across the world.

With the looming planetary crisis of climate change and the ensuing global warming brought on by the current model of development which fosters remorseless exploitation of natural resources, dispossession of communities, breakdown of local and indigenous cultures, and species extinctions, there has been a global reassessment of underlying causes of climate change. Globally there is a realisation that conservation of the remaining natural ecosystems and biodiversity is now even more critical. The governments in different parts of the world, including in India, have been engaged in conservation by declaration of formal protected areas (PAs). PAs in the Indian case include National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Wildlife Corridors, and Tiger Reserves among others. Protected Areas however do not take into account and restrict the jurisdiction, and use and access rights of the local people over these territories, and in many cases local people are relocated or evicted.

The Global Environment Outlook 5 report (UNEP 2012), has revealed that in the last two decades, while the global

PA coverage has gone up in both numbers and spread, and covers 13% of the world's land area, biodiversity however has declined at population, species, ecosystem and possibly genetic levels. The report identifies lack of people's participation in management and governance of PAs as also lack of recognition of conservation practices of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities among the reasons for this decline of biological diversity.

The United Nations Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), while bringing out an evidence based report on the serious decline of biodiversity clearly states that "Recognition of the knowledge, innovations and practices, institutions and values of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities and their inclusion and participation in environmental governance often enhances their quality of life, as well as nature conservation, restoration and sustainable use. Their positive contributions to sustainability can be facilitated through national recognition of land tenure, access and resource rights in accordance with national legislation, the application of free, prior and informed consent, and improved collaboration, fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use, and co-management arrangements with local communities."<sup>5</sup>

It is estimated that indigenous people's territories cover 22% of the earth's terrestrial surface and contains 80% of the earth's biodiversity. In addition to these are areas managed by non-indigenous local communities including, peasants, pastoralists, fishing communities. It is increasingly being realized that together these contain world's bio-culturally most important landscapes and seascapes. Indigenous peoples and local communities have many different local names for such conserved and protected territories and areas. In international conservation circles these diverse institutions and practices are now, for convenience, being referred by the umbrella term ICCAs. The abbreviation ICCA stands for indigenous peoples' and community conserved territories and areas (as per IUCN) and indigenous and community conserved areas (as per Convention on Biological Diversity-CBD). According to the IUCN, ICCAs are "natural and modified ecosystems, including significant biodiversity, ecological services and cultural values, voluntarily conserved by indigenous and local communities through customary laws or other effective means" (IUCN World Parks Congress 2003 Recommendation V.26).

5. <https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment>



The conservation contributions of ICCAs are a result of diverse customary, institutional and collective practices based on knowledge developed through longstanding interaction with local environments. Territories and areas of indigenous Peoples and local communities in general and ICCAs in particular however are threatened by a number of factors. These include lack of legal backing and tenure security; takeover of indigenous lands and other common property resources for declaration of PAs or for external development projects by the government and/or corporate agencies; smuggling, poaching and non-adherence to local rules by outsiders; breakdown of traditional institutions and knowledge; failure of the education system to emphasize or even acknowledge the value of local natural resources, culture and traditional knowledge; changing value systems and aspirations; national and sub-national party politics; global market forces.

The indigenous peoples and local communities from across the world have been demanding that their rights and conservation practices be recognized and they be supported in dealing with external threats. Towards this objective, in 2010, an international consortium ([www.iccaconsortium.org](http://www.iccaconsortium.org)) was formed. The ICCA (Indigenous Peoples and Community Conserved Areas and Territories) Consortium is an international association dedicated to promoting the appropriate recognition of, and support to ICCAs globally. Its Members are indigenous peoples' organizations and federations, community organizations at various levels and civil society organizations working closely with them. Its honorary members are individuals with relevant expertise and commitment. The activities of the Consortium range from supporting local ICCA-based initiatives to promoting appropriate international and national policies and practices, from strengthening capacities to launching research initiatives and bringing out technical publications. The ICCA also endeavors to work with concerned state institutions and other expert bodies.

During the pandemic we also saw dozens of examples of adivasi and other ecosystem-dependent communities' remarkable resilience in coping with the crisis, particularly where they have been self and legally empowered under the Forest Rights Act 2006, Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act 1996, or in states such as Nagaland where customary rights including rights over lands and forests of the local communities are already recognised.

Obviously, these communities didn't become resilient overnight during the pandemic; on the contrary the processes towards empowerment had begun much earlier leading to localisation of forest based economies, strengthening local livelihoods and efforts towards restoration of their surrounding forests, wetlands, grasslands and other ecosystems.

In the last few years we have seen many gram sabhas and their federations whose rights were recognised under the FRA develop management strategies towards forest based livelihoods. This has led to increased village household incomes as also generating incomes for the gram sabhas themselves, drastically reducing distress outmigration (in some cases by about 60%). Such gram sabhas and their members were less affected by the lock down. In states like Maharashtra these gram sabhas were able to continue to provide incomes to the NTFP collectors even when supply and marketing was severely affected due to the lockdown. Some of the gram sabhas were also able to take care of and provide basic income to those who had returned to the villages due to the lockdown. The funds generated by the gram sabhas through their forest management efforts were without any strings attached and free from the control of the bureaucracy. Consequently, gram sabhas were able to use these collective funds to provide food and support to their community members without depending on external support and charity.

Village institutions in states such as Nagaland were able to ensure community health and nutrition and food security through regulated collection and equitable distribution of uncultivated forest foods during the pandemic from the forests that they have been conserving as their community conserved area.

Many such empowered communities were able to use their collective funds to invest in physical and psychological health care, and additional employment generation activities during the pandemic when government agencies failed to do so.

Not surprisingly in many local articulations it is now emerging that such communities are self reflecting, re-examining and re-valuing their relationship with their ecosystems, including the youth who have now seen that these ecosystems have sustained them when they were left with no other support.

These examples further strengthen the recognition of the need for a different approach towards sustaining

local livelihoods, community oriented cultures, social organisation and revival or continuation of local communities' systems of biodiversity management, restoration and conservation.

On the other hand the pandemic even more strongly exposed a complete lack of vision within the MoEF towards being able to achieve biodiversity and wildlife conservation goals. At the peak of the COVID 19 spread in April itself the MoEF instructed all states and union territories to restrict movement of people to National Parks/Sanctuaries/ Tiger Reserves, immediately impacting about 3 to 4 million people, mostly adivasis, PVTGs, nomadic, pastoralist communities and fish workers. In some places this led to forceful evictions, and crop and property destruction of the people in these most difficult times.

At the same time Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) announced opening up of 41 new coal blocks.

MoEFCC is also completely ignorant about the long history and a wide spread of community conserved areas (CCAs) in the country, which remain unrecognized and hence highly threatened by infrastructure development projects. During the pandemic itself, many local communities, while struggling to survive themselves had to also continue their fight to save their protected ecosystems. These include over 8000 ha of sacred forests or Oran in Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan being protected for more than 600 years by the surrounding communities, being destroyed for installing solar panels for producing 'green energy'.

Another well known example is the Vedanthangal bird sanctuary, protected by the local communities since times unknown and which even the British had to lay their hands off, is now threatened by a pharmaceutical company. Sandh Kumari in Bastar - one of the largest sacred groves of central India spread over 100 acres being destroyed by carrying out plantations under CAMPA.

Given the above, following recommendations emerge

1. The institutions of self-governance must be legally empowered to be part of all decisions affecting their ecological and environmental security, through community rights (including through the Forest Rights Act and Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act). Implementation of these laws is currently

abysmally poor and needs to be taken up in a campaign mode;

2. Rights-based legislations such as the FRA and PESA must also be enacted for ecosystems other than forests such as for marine and coastal areas, grasslands and wetlands;
3. All evictions and dispossession of ecosystem-dependent communities in the name of wildlife conservation, afforestation (including through the use of CAMPA funds), and other seemingly ecological programmes must immediately be stopped;
4. Finally, a complete overhaul of existing conservation worldview and paradigm of seeing ecological restoration, wildlife and biodiversity conservation delinked from the rest of the human economic and political activities is required. The new conservation regime will need to have urban and rural local communities empowered (with rights and responsibilities) to govern ecosystems around them, and be recognised and supported as Community Conserved Areas. This will also be in keeping with India's commitment to international conservation treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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## 4. Signs of Hope

### Community Participation in Conservation of Loktak lake of Manipur

*By Salam Rajesh*

#### Background

The natural resources of the freshwater Loktak Lake provide the backbone of economy for families settled within the lake and around its peripheral areas. It provides habitat and feeding ground for wide variety of avifauna, migratory water birds, faunal and vegetation population. The implementation of the 105 megawatt capacity Loktak Multipurpose Hydroelectric Power Project, which was initiated by the Ministry of Irrigation and Power way back in 1971 and commissioned in 1983, disturbed the entire lake ecosystem, resulting in loss to biodiversity and displacing human population.

Although there are efforts by the Government to work for the conservation of the lake, things have not worked out as planned. In the absence of an effective conservation and management plan for the lake, this water body is in the process of 'ageing' due to different factors. For the fishers thriving off the lake's resources for their living, it has become a dire necessity to think of ways for conservation of the lake in their own way so that their livelihoods and survival is secured in the best way possible.

#### Introduction

Manipur, having land mass of 22,327 sq.km, falls within the Assam Hills Province of the North East India Bio-Geographical Zone I. Strategically, Manipur lies at the crossroads of the Burmese, Chinese, and Indian faunal and floral ranges. The ecosystem in Manipur consists of two interrelated biomes, wetlands and forests. The wetland Loktak Pat, located towards the southern portion of the central Manipur valley, constitute an important asset of Manipur's natural heritage. Manipur also falls under the Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot zone, indicating presence of wide variety of biological life – some of which are endemic and rare to the world.

Loktak is one of the largest freshwater lakes in India. With a water spread of around 289 sq.km. (Which, however, on paper has been revised to around 236.21 sq.km. only as per the Loktak Development Authority's 2016 report), it is rich in biological diversity and plays an important role

in the ecological and economic security of the region. Loktak and its related wetlands provide habitat for wide variety of biological life forms ranging from the smallest micro-plants to larger vertebrates including human kind. The lake was recognized as a Ramsar site of international importance in 1990. The lake is also an Important Bird Area (IBA) site considering the wide diversity of local resident avifauna and migratory water birds population, some species arriving here for their winter rest from as far as Europe and China.

However, during the past few decades, Loktak ecosystem had degraded considerably as direct consequence of the commissioning of Ithai Barrage of the Loktak Project. Many interventions in the lake in the past decades including the coffer-dam at Ithai, dredging activities to de-silt the lake's bed, weeding, encroachments, and physical modification of water body had contributed to degradation of the lake's ecosystem. Habitat changes which have been caused by changes in hydrological regime of Loktak and its associated river systems, primarily caused by the Loktak Project, are noted as significant reason for migratory water bird and fish population decline in the lake. The Loktak Development Authority and Wetlands International-South Asia also agree that "the populations of migratory and resident waterfowl have declined during the last few decades due to poaching and changes in ecological character of the wetland. The habitat of Sangai deer in Keibul Lamjao National Park (KLNP) is also threatened due to habitat degradation" (Newsletter 'Loktak'; Vol.1, October 1999).

#### Impacts on Human and Natural Environment

The fishery in Loktak Lake and its associated wetlands accounts for 60 percent of the total fish produce in Manipur. Migratory fish species coming upstream from the Chindwin-Irrawaddy river system in Myanmar contribute about 40 percent of the capture fishery in the lake and adjoining wetlands. With the commissioning of Ithai Barrage, there has been sharp decline in fish yield, impacting traditional fishery and produce. Migratory fishes no longer reach the lake today, being obstructed by the barrage at Ithai village. The State's Fishery Department had since been trying to compensate the loss by introducing exotic carp species. More than one lakh people depend directly on the fish produce of Loktak for their livelihoods and sustenance. The changes brought about by the Loktak Project had greatly disturbed the traditional lifestyle as well as in reducing the earning capability of the local fishers.



The commissioning of Ithai Barrage had serious consequence on the natural environment and the biodiversity of the lake. According to Prof. Hijam Tombi Singh (retired professor, Department of Life Sciences, University of Manipur) and R.K. Shyamananda (former Director, Manipur Science and Technology Council, Govt of Manipur), it caused the disappearance of over 20 species of aquatic plants of economic and commercial value. It caused the disappearance of several species of indigenous fishes that traditionally migrated upstream from the Chindwin-Irrawaddy river system through Manipur River which is a main tributary of the former. It caused accumulation of *phumdi* (floating biomass) and conversion of floating hutments on them into permanent dwellings, increasing the domestic wastes draining into the lake and accelerating eutrophication.<sup>[1]</sup> It caused sharp decline in population of migratory water birds. It caused the thinning of *phumdi* and deterioration in habitat of the endangered Manipur Brow-antlered deer and other wildlife in Keibul Lamjao National Park (Ramsar Sites of India: Loktak Lake, WWF-India, 1994, p.32).

### Some initiatives to conserve Loktak

The Government of Manipur passed a new legislation on 5th April, 2006 titled as 'The Manipur Loktak (Protection) Act, 2006', whereby the State sought to control and administer the management of Loktak Lake, primarily with the objective of halting the process of degradation of the lake's ecosystem and to rejuvenate its health. The Act empowers the State, represented by the Loktak Development Authority (LDA), to act for the protection, preservation and conservation of the lake. The State had sought funds from the Central Government to a tune of Rs.378 crore under the Special Plan Assistance to clear most of the floating biomass crowding the lake's water surface within a time span of three years beginning January 2010. LDA had also been working on conservation of micro-watersheds on the lake's western catchment to mitigate soil erosion and halt the process of deposition of massive volume of silt load into the lake each year.

There have been few initiatives at the community level, too, towards the conservation of the lake. One such initiative was launched by the Manipur Nature Society in association with villagers of Tokpa Kabui village which is located on the eastern face of the Thangjing-Loiching range that forms the western catchment of the lake. The Society worked in around 500 hectares of forest lands belonging to the village community, with a projected

total area of 1000 hectares in later times. The emphasis was on the natural and aided regeneration of forest to check loss of top soil and revitalize the micro-watersheds, ensure healthy growth of the vegetation cover and to induce the return of the wildlife in the area. Micro vegetative check dams were constructed along the course of the hill streams, and few water bodies were created to slow down the process of silt load deposition downhill. These water bodies also provided for fishery for the village. A nature club named as Tokpa Nature Club with around 80 volunteers consisting of both boys and girls, belonging to the Rongmei tribe, was formed and much of the work of community-based management of their forest lands was taken up by the Club volunteers.

Other than the Tokpa Kabui initiative, there has been some effort at conservation of wildlife in few pockets in the peripheral areas of the lake. The Sangai Protection Forum, based at Keibul Lamjao village, had worked on protection and conservation of the Sangai and other wildlife in the Keibul Lamjao National Park area, addressing issues like checking poaching and rescue of stranded animals during floods. Other organizations like the Nongmaikhong Youth Club; Khoijuman Students' Club; Ningthoukhong based Generation de New Image Manipur (GENIM); and Centre for Conservation of Nature & Cultivation of Science (CCNCS), Ningthoukhong had worked towards protection and conservation of the wintering migratory water birds in their respective areas. In 2019, CCNCS in collaboration with State's Forest Department declared a portion of the lake near Thinunggei village in Bishnupur District as "Bird Sanctuary" to protect roosting migratory birds in the winter months, in addition to protecting the resident avifauna population in that area.

In 2011, fishers living in Champu Khangpok floating village within the Loktak Lake formed an association styled as All Loktak Lake Areas Fishermen's Union, Manipur (ALLAFUM) to address several issues pending with the lake. The primary focus was on addressing livelihoods issues with specific concerns on the current status of the lake, namely, the degrading ecosystem leading to decline in fish and vegetation population that threaten their livelihoods and means of sustenance. In tune with this objective, the fishers took the help of concerned individuals and civil society organizations based in Imphal and Bishnupur to take up awareness campaigns and field related activities to address these issues. Since 2012 onwards, ALLAFUM has been continuously organizing observations of various events

to raise awareness amongst the fishers' population living within and in the peripheral areas of the lake. Some of these events are the World Wetlands Day, World Water Day, International Rivers Day, International Day for Ecological Diversity, and World Environmental Day.

As part of the awareness and motivation campaigns to create proactive participation of local community towards conservation of the lake, ALLAFUM organizes various activities within their capacity. Mass rally in dugout canoe across the water body, clean-up of weed infested parts of water body and public consultations form part of their strategy to raise awareness amongst the locals as part of their World Wetlands Day and World Environment Day observations. ALLAFUM recently declared a portion of Birahari Pat within the lake as protected "Fish Sanctuary" within the ambit of the Union with the primary objective of (i) banning of catching fish fingerlings during spawning season, (ii) to maintain closed season during May, June, July, (iii) and to control excessive or uncontrolled fishing of fingerlings and immature fish.

The other objective of declaring the fish sanctuary is also to control and administer a portion of the lake within their control to raise awareness and to protect the migratory water birds during the winter months – starting from October up to February. ALLAFUM volunteers keep a lookout for violators who may lay traps to catch the water birds. In addition to this, ALLAFUM also started an initiative to sow seeds of aquatic plants like water chestnut which they consume as food and for sale in local markets. Many varieties of aquatic and semi-aquatic plants, that are consumed as food and are of economic value, have been gradually disappearing from the lake during these past few decades as direct fallout of the impact of Ithai Barrage. ALLAFUM seeks to re-introduce the plants for achieving multiple benefits, including for food, for earning, and for revitalizing the ecosystem of the lake.

The other important aspect that ALLAFUM seeks to address is the issue of rampant encroachments in the lake's peripheral areas. Nearly 53 sq.km. area of the lake in its northern portion had been encroached upon by locals during these past two decades, whereby people have reclaimed lake areas for agriculture and extending fish culture farms. ALLAFUM has drawn the attention of the State Government and other concerned departments to have a policy that would restrict the encroachments and other physical modifications in the lake area including construction of causeways across the water body. This latter activity had considerably contributed in degrading the lake's ecosystem.



*Observation of World Wetlands Day at Langolsabi locality of Champu Khangpok floating village in February 2019.*  
Photo: Deepak Shijagurumayum



*Observation of International Rivers Day 2018 at Liklai Karong area of Loktak. Photo: Salam Rajesh*



*Observation of World Wetlands Day at Langolsabi locality of Champu Khangpok floating village in February 2020.*  
Photo: Oinam Deben





*ALLAFUM volunteers clearing up weeds chocking passageway of Yangoi Maril (Nambul River) at the point where the river flows into Loktak Lake, 2020. Photo: Oinam Deben*

[1] Eutrophication is the process by which a body of water becomes enriched in dissolved nutrients (such as phosphates) that stimulate the growth of aquatic plant life usually resulting in the depletion of dissolved oxygen. This can be a **problem** in marine habitats such as lakes as it can cause algal blooms. ... Some algae even produce toxins that are harmful to higher forms of life. This can cause **problems** along the food chain and affect any animal that feeds on them.



## 5. Invitation

### ICCA Consortium Membership

The Consortium welcomes new members and support from non members.

Members are organisations that are not for profit. They need NOT be formally recognised by the government. Member organisations include, but are not limited to:

- Indigenous and traditional tribes, nations and peoples, and their customary networks, associations and federations;
- Traditional local communities and their customary networks, associations and federations;
- Indigenous peoples and local community self-initiated groupings and organisations dedicated to advancing their own collective rights and/ or pursuing sustainable livelihoods and the conservation of nature; and
- Civil society organisations working with indigenous peoples and local communities at the local, national or international level on issues of rights, sustainable livelihoods and conservation of nature.

Honorary Members are individuals with special expertise on ICCAs, who are nominated by a Member of the Consortium, another honorary member, a Steering Committee, or a member of the Secretariat.

Please see [www.iccaconsortium.org](http://www.iccaconsortium.org) for more information. If you are interested in applying for membership, please get in touch with Kalpavriksh, the South Asia regional coordinator of the ICCA Consortium by writing to [iccasouthasia@gmail.com](mailto:iccasouthasia@gmail.com).





## 6. In Anticipation

### 100 Years of Declaring Non-Violence in the Tsumba Territory of Life, in the Nepalese Himalaya

The Tsumba Indigenous people of the sacred Tsum Valley, in the foothills of the northwest Nepalese Himalaya (altitude: 3,000 meters above mean sea level), was going to be held a cultural Shyagya festival on April 17-20, 2020. The event was to mark 100 years since the declaration of the Upper Tsum Valley as an area of non-violence by the Tsumba people and their Lamas (Buddhist religious leaders) which revolved around the following seven key directives:

1. Hunting is forbidden;
2. Setting traps is forbidden;
3. Harvesting honey is forbidden;
4. The sale of livestock is forbidden;
5. Violence against calves of Himalayan cows, and other aquatic and terrestrial species is forbidden;
6. Restrictions on the import and export of animals for meat will be respected;
7. Burning in forests and mountains is banned.

The Tsum Valley is a Beyul (sacred refuge) created by Guru Ringpoche, who introduced Buddhism in Nepal in the 8th century. This Valley, a sacred place of spiritual significance, is sustained by Buddhist cultural values and practices, institutions of the Tsumba people, and the support of dedicated leaders and revered Lamas from the monasteries. This territory of life in the Tsum Valley predates official Protected Areas in Nepal, such as the Manasalu Conservation Area (IUCN Category VI), created in 1998. This broad Conservation Area, which includes the Tsum Valley, is co-managed by the National Trust for Nature Conservation and Conservation Area Management Committee.

The Upper Tsum (with 11 settlements) was declared a non-violent area in 1920, and the Lower Tsum Valley (with 22 settlements) declared its commitment to non-violence during the Shyagya festival in 2012. The declarations were made through community consensus.

Nima Lama, a Tsumba community leader, stated in an interview: *"we consider the valley as an open natural museum, where wildlife is intact and (allowed to) move*

*freely"*. He added, "we want to celebrate (the) Shyagya festival not for amusement, but to demonstrate our commitment to the conservation of biodiversity and culture for many generations to come. Our slogan for the event is Ahimsa ko abhiyan: Tsum basiko pahichan (a campaign of non-violence: the identity of Tsum inhabitants)".

A four-day festival was to include: a nature worship pooja (ritual) known as *Rilung thrisole* for the good of human beings, wildlife and other species, and the sun and the rain; *Chewang* pooja for good health; cultural activities (songs, dances, sports); the installation of sacred flags and poles; a march for world peace; and the Tsumba's collective signature on the commitments and rules of non-violence. The Tsumba planned to seek government recognition and approval of the four direction boundaries (*Char Killa*) of the area of non-violence that they have marked and declared. This was considered important for sustaining the Tsumba's territory of life, traditions, and practice of non-violence, as well as to obtain recognition of the sacred and spiritual significance of the place, its importance for bio-cultural conservation, and to complement the existing Manasalu Conservation Area.

The villages in the Upper Tsum Valley that were to host the festival are only accessible through a 4-5 day trek on foot from the nearest road, or by chartered helicopter.

Due to the Covid outbreak the event has been postponed until further notice.

**Shared by:** Sudeep Jana Thing (with inputs from Nima Lama and Jailab Rai), ICCA Consortium Council Member.



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