



iNCLUSIVE
CONSERVATION
iNITIATIVE

WALKING THE TALK: **HOW INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION** **IS DELIVERING RESULTS**

Phase Three Report



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CONSERVATION
INTERNATIONAL





WALKING THE TALK: HOW INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION IS DELIVERING RESULTS

Phase Three Report
July 2024 to June 2025

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ANAPAC	Alliance Nationale d’Appui et de Promotion des Aires et Territoires du Patrimoine Autochtone et Communautaire en RDC	ICCA	Indigenous and Community Conserved Area
ARLEs	Asia Regional Learning Exchanges	ICI	Inclusive Conservation Initiative
BCPs	Biocultural Community Protocols	IIFB	International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity
CADPI	Centro de Autonomía y Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas	IMPACT	Indigenous Movement for Peace, Advancement and Conflict Transformation
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity	IPAG	Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group
CBMIS	Community-Based Monitoring and Information System	IPF	Indigenous Peoples Foundation for Education and Environment
CCROs	Customary Certificates of Right of Occupancy	IPFAF	Indigenous People’s Finance Access Facility
CI	Conservation International	IPOs	Indigenous Peoples Organizations
CONAF	National Forestry Corporation	IPs and LCs	Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities
COP	Conference of the Parties	IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
CRIC	Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca	LE	Learning Exchange
CVLs	Certificates of Village Land	LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
DGM	Dedicated Grant Mechanism	NRBM	Natural Resource and Biodiversity Management
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	NBSAPs	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans
FENAMAD	Federación Nativa del Río Madre de Dios y Afluentes	NEFIN	Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities
FIAY	Foro Indígena de Abiyala	PA	Protected Area
FILAC	Fondo para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas de América Latina y el Caribe	PMU	Project Management Unit
FPCI	Fundación para la Promoción del Conocimiento Indígena	STAP	Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent	TK	Traditional Knowledge
GAP	Gender Action Plan	UCRT	Ujamaa Community Resource Team
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework	UN	United Nations
GBV	Gender-Based Violence	UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
GEBs	Global Environmental Benefits	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
GEF	Global Environment Facility	VICOPA	Village Community Bank
GIS	Geographic Information System	WMA	Wildlife Management Area
GSC	ICI Global Steering Committee	WRLFs	Women’s Rights and Leadership Forums
HRM	Holistic Rangeland Management		

PART I: SETTING THE STAGE

ABOUT THE INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

In 2019, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) decided to pilot a new initiative for increased access of financing to Indigenous and local community organizations to conserve biodiversity, deliver multiple Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs), and support related cultural and economic development initiatives. As part of the GEF-7 Programming Directions Strategy’s Biodiversity focal area, the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) was endorsed in January 2022. It was built upon the principle that inclusive conservation requires that Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs and LCs) are the main actors and implementers. The project does not aim to define the concept of “inclusive conservation” and recognizes that this is to be self-determined by IPs and LCs. With over USD \$22.5 million invested in project financing, and over USD \$90 million of expected co-financing, ICI is designed to support the leadership of IPs and LCs in the stewarding of lands, waters, and natural resources. By combining substantial investments in specific locations, with support to magnify local results through global capacity building, and policy influence – demonstrating large-scale impacts – ICI catalyzes the transformational changes needed to secure and enhance support for the contributions of IPs and LCs to biodiversity and other GEBs.

WHO WE ARE

The ICI is grounded in the leadership of IPs and LCs and supported by a diverse network of partners across local, national, regional, and global levels. At its core are the IPs and LCs organizations leading 10 site-based initiatives in 12 countries, each rooted in local governance systems, cultural values, and territorial priorities. These organizations are not recipients of externally driven programs – they are the architects and implementers of their own conservation visions. ICI is guided by the ICI Global Steering Committee (GSC), composed entirely of Indigenous leaders, which ensures that the initiative’s strategic direction, accountability, and learning reflect the worldviews and priorities of IPs and LCs.

The GEF Project Agencies – Conservation International (CI) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) – jointly support ICI through a dedicated Project Management Unit (PMU). Together, CI and IUCN bring decades of experience working with IPs and LCs and provide technical and fiduciary oversight for GEF-funded activities. Both institutions are committed to transforming how they operate – working alongside IPs and LCs and their representative organizations, rather than directing them. Collectively they are ensuring that project processes and systems evolve to enable direct access, mutual accountability, and strengthened Indigenous governance. The PMU works closely with the GSC to ensure that project deliverables align with the initiative’s objectives and uphold Indigenous leadership, values, and decision-making throughout. This model reflects ICI’s core principle: that effective, inclusive conservation is only possible when it is led by those who steward their lands, waters and natural resources.



ICI GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Effective and accountable governance is fundamental to ensuring that Indigenous Peoples have true ownership over the initiatives that affect their lands, rights, and futures. In the ICI, Indigenous governance is not a principle in theory – it is a structure in practice. The GSC, composed entirely of Indigenous representatives, serves as ICI’s highest governing body. It plays a central role in providing strategic oversight, guiding decision-making, and upholding the initiative’s integrity. As a mechanism led by and for Indigenous Peoples, the GSC ensures that the ICI remains grounded in Indigenous priorities, values, and leadership – making it a model for inclusive and self-determined global conservation.

Over the past year, the GSC convened three formal meetings both virtually and in person to review progress, plan strategically, and approve key programmatic priorities. During these meetings, the GSC emphasized the importance of strengthening land rights, advancing gender equity, and elevating Traditional Knowledge (TK). In June 2025, the GSC concluded its 2023–2025 term and welcomed a new cohort of members, including newly appointed, Co-chairs Vivian Silole (Ilaikipiak Maasai, Kenya) and Jorge Nahuel (Mapuche, Argentina), demonstrating ICI’s continued commitment to regional and gender representation, and Indigenous leadership.

The GSC continues to shape ICI as a living model of Indigenous Peoples’ self-determination in action, grounding global conservation in community-led governance, cultural integrity, and collective vision.

Indigenous Peoples–Led Initiatives in Action Map



ICI MODEL OF CHANGE

The ICI is advancing a paradigm shift in conservation finance – one that responds to the growing global recognition that IPs and LCs are essential to achieving biodiversity and climate goals. As donors and governments pledge unprecedented levels of funding for IPs and LCs–led solutions, ICI exemplifies how those resources can be effectively and responsibly delivered. Its model of change centers direct access, enabling IPs and LCs organizations to receive and manage funds, lead decision-making, and implement conservation rooted in their governance systems, cultural values, and TK. Guided by a clear Theory of Change, ICI bridges global finance with grounded practice by investing in tenure security, institutional and adaptive capacity, culturally relevant monitoring, and policy engagement. Just as importantly, ICI has required its partners – including CI and IUCN – to adapt and transform how they work with IPs and LCs: shifting from control to trust, and from implementing for communities to walking alongside them as rights-holders and partners. This evolution is essential to delivering not only on global pledges, but on the promise of more just, effective, enduring and – most importantly – inclusive conservation.

FOREWORD



from the CEO and Chairperson
Global Environment Facility

Walking the Talk:

**Carlos Manuel
Rodríguez**
(GEF)

**Transforming Systems to Deliver on
Indigenous- and Community-Led
Conservation Impact**

Transforming conservation finance isn't just a matter of intent—it's a matter of infrastructure, equity, and trust. For decades, the global community has acknowledged the central role Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) play in stewarding nature. But recognition alone doesn't shift power. Walking the talk means restructuring how finance flows, how decisions are made, and who holds agency. For the GEF, it means providing resources directly to Indigenous Peoples' organizations under the guidance of Indigenous leaders.

The GEF-7 Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) was launched to test and demonstrate what many Indigenous and local community leaders have long advocated: that large-scale, rights-based, Indigenous-led conservation is not only possible—it is essential. Through ICI, Indigenous-led organizations are directly implementing funding between \$1 and \$2 million—often for the first time—and leveraging significant co-financing from other donors. With these investments, they are advancing ancestral governance, managing their territories sustainably, and delivering measurable global environmental benefits—on their terms.

This past year, the GEF's Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) undertook a series of consultations with Indigenous leaders, including ICI partners, to ask a foundational question: What will it take to transform the system? The answers were striking. Participants called for new indicators that reflect

Indigenous values and governance, safeguards determined by Indigenous Peoples themselves, and a project cycle that fits community rhythms—not donor timelines.

As one participant shared, "We need tools and timelines that follow our seasons—not donor calendars." This means rethinking everything from fiduciary structures to how knowledge is defined and validated. The consultations emphasized bridging Indigenous and Western scientific knowledge, institutionalizing Indigenous leadership within GEF governance, and expanding support for Indigenous-led funds that can scale solutions across territories.

The ICI is modeling this shift. Across 12 countries, Indigenous organizations are innovating finance mechanisms, building culturally grounded monitoring systems, and piloting new approaches that reflect the full spectrum of biodiversity, climate resilience, and cultural continuity. Their work is not only meeting GEF goals—it is reshaping how we define success.

As we prepare for the 30th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 30) and the ninth replenishment of the Global Environment Facility's Trust Fund (GEF 9), this report offers more than a look back. It is a call to scale what works and shift what doesn't work. The GEF remains committed to walking this path with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities—grounded in respect, built on trust, and focused on lasting change.

FOREWORD



Vivian Silole
(Ilaikipiak Maasai,
Kenya)



Jorge Nahuel
(Mapuche,
Argentina)

from the Co-Chairs, Global Steering Committee
Inclusive Conservation Initiative

Walking Our Way:

**Wisdom, Responsibility, and the Path
of Indigenous-Led Conservation**

As Indigenous Peoples, our ways of life, knowledge systems, governance, and deep sacred relationships with nature are not new—they have sustained our territories and cultures for generations. The land is not a resource—it is a relative. The rivers, forests, mountains, and animals are not separate from who we are; they carry our stories, shape our responsibilities, and hold our futures. When we speak of conservation, we do not speak of protecting something outside of us. We speak of protecting life itself—our life, the life of all beings with whom we share the Earth, and the relationships that bind us.

What is new is the growing willingness of global institutions to recognize and support the value of our Indigenous Knowledge systems through direct partnership, funding, and shared decision-making. The Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) reflects a meaningful step towards that recognition. Through ICI, our communities are not only being seen—we are being trusted. Trusted to lead, to make decisions, to manage resources, and to care for our territories in the ways we always have. This report does not just reflect a summary of activities. It reflects a shift—a shift in who holds the pen, who holds the funds, and who holds the knowledge.

These opportunities are enabling us to strengthen our institutions, deepen our governance, and support our youth to carry forward our responsibilities. These are not just technical steps—they are cultural, spiritual, and intergenerational. Our approaches are no longer seen as marginal. They are essential. And while the path is not perfect, it is one we are walking together – with trust, unity, purpose, hope and solidarity.

Working with Conservation International and IUCN as agencies of the GEF has been part of this journey. These institutions, too, have had to walk a new path. They are bound by the policies and procedures of the GEF system, which were not created with Indigenous Peoples' ways of knowing and doing in mind. But we recognize their willingness to listen, to adapt, and to advocate for change—not only within ICI, but within their own institutions and the broader GEF family. It has not always been easy, and not everything has gone smoothly. But what stands out is the growing respect, cultivated open dialogues, and the commitment to shared learning—from all sides.

Together, we are asking deep questions: How do we define success beyond numbers? How do we respect different ways of knowing, of time, of relationship? How do we make space for Indigenous voices not just at the table—but at the center? These questions do not have simple answers. But we are answering them through practice, through collaboration, and through walking the path—step by step.

The GEF-7 ICI is showing what is possible when trust replaces control, when dialogue replaces assumption, and when communities are not treated as stakeholders, but as stewards. Our stories in this report are diverse—across geographies, languages, and ecosystems—but they share a common spirit: that we are conserving not just biodiversity, but our ways of life, our memory, and our future.

This is what it means to Walk the Talk. We are not asking others to lead us—we are inviting others to walk with us. Guided by our knowledge, grounded in our territories, and always with future generations in our hearts and central to our vision.

Photo by the GEF

Photo by IF NOT US THEN WHO? and Hector Thompson

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: WALKING THE TALK

The ICI is not just a project – it is a proof of concept for a new model of conservation that places IPs and LCs at the core. Now at its midpoint, **ICI is Walking the Talk: shifting from commitments to action, from inclusion to leadership, and from donor-driven models to direct, accountable, Indigenous-led finance.**

Grounded in the principles of rights, reciprocity, and respect, ICI is delivering results that affirm the value of conservation led by those who have stewarded their lands, waters and natural resources for generations. With approximately USD \$15 million in direct financing – often for the first time – flowing to Indigenous organizations working at the territorial level, communities are not merely recipients, but architects of their own conservation visions and priorities, guided by respect for their fundamental rights.

A defining feature of ICI's approach is its commitment to **learning by doing—adapting systems and support structures in response to the evolving realities of Indigenous partners**. This adaptive model reflects the understanding that transformation must be co-created and rooted in practice.

This year's results demonstrate how ICI partners are delivering both local and global impacts:

- **Historic co-governance agreements** in Chile between Mapuche communities and national institutions;
- The **strengthening of traditional Councils of Chiefs** in Fiji and an **Indigenous Trust** established in The Cook Islands;
- **Land tenure security** advances in Kenya and Tanzania, including formal registration under the Community Land Act and Certificates of Village Land (CVLs);
- Implementation of **Holistic Rangeland Management (HRM)** systems in Tanzania;
- **Identification and demarcation of Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs)** in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC);
- Rollout of **Gender Action Plans (GAPs) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) protocols** in Peru, Chile, Argentina and the DRC;
- Creation of **youth diploma programs** in Guatemala and Panama; and
- Development of the **Makanisi Learning Academy** and a growing **ICI International Environmental Policy Fellows Program** supporting the strengthening of a new cohort of global Indigenous leadership in policy spaces.

ICI is also driving institutional change. CI, IUCN, and the GEF are adapting policies and practices to make space for Indigenous leadership, cultural accountability, and shared governance. CI and IUCN are transforming their grantmaking – streamlining processes, reducing burdens, and building systems that are responsive to the realities of Indigenous organizations. Monitoring now includes cultural indicators, reporting has been simplified, and intergenerational learning is actively promoted.

Despite these advances, structural challenges remain: rigid funding mechanisms, short grant cycles, misalignment with Indigenous priorities and contexts, and underinvestment in strengthening Indigenous institutions. ICI calls for these barriers to be dismantled – and for long-term, flexible finance to become the norm.

Walking the Talk means delivering more than funds—it means strengthening Indigenous institutions, building trust, shifting power, adapting processes and creating space for Indigenous leadership and governance. This report is both a record and a roadmap. It demonstrates what's possible when communities lead, and it invites others to join in scaling what works. Because **Walking the Talk** is not just a metaphor – it's a mandate!

PART II: DELIVERING RESULTS

This year marked a pivotal shift for the ICI, as Indigenous-led initiatives transitioned from planning to full-scale implementation – demonstrating what **Walking the Talk** of inclusive conservation truly means. This year's progress underscores the power and potential of Indigenous leadership to drive systemic change on the ground: advancing rights, revitalizing governance systems, managing territories, and shaping national and global conservation agendas. Across 10 diverse territories, ICI partners are not only protecting biodiversity – they are modeling a different way forward, where conservation is grounded in culture, care, and community-led priorities.

This section highlights the key achievements and milestones from July 2024 through June 2025, offering a clear picture of ICI in motion. From landmark co-governance agreements and GAPs to regional Learning Exchanges (LEs) and contributions to National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs), the work of IPs and LCs is reshaping how conservation is done. ICI is proving that when resources, authority, and knowledge are in Indigenous hands, impact follows.

i Unit, Biosafety. "Convention Text." Convention on Biological Diversity, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2 Nov. 2006, www.cbd.int/convention/articles/default.shtml?a=cbd-06.

Photo by Hope Kiwely

YEAR IN REVIEW

Timeline of Significant Events and Activities

- First Annual Stakeholder Forum for the ICI, *host IMPACT*, Kenya, July 24–26
- Inclusive Conservation Manifesto developed, Kenya, July 26

JULY
2024

AUGUST
2024

SEPTEMBER
2024

OCTOBER
2024

NOVEMBER
2024

DECEMBER
2024

JANUARY
2025

MARCH
2025

APRIL
2025

MAY
2025

JUNE
2025

- First International Congress of Indigenous Conservation Territories, *host Futa Mawiza*, Chile, September 9–11
- Participation in UN Climate Week, New York, September 22–29
- IPF, Thailand created a GIS Data Centre and held a GIS training program

Historic Co-Governance Agreement signed for Villarrica National Park, Chile, December 3

- Makanisi Learning Academy, Brainstorming & Logo Co-Design Workshop, *host ANAPAC*, DRC, January 22
- First Learning Module on “Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, Gender & Biodiversity”, UNDP’s Learning for Nature platform

- ICI Global Steering Committee Meeting, Virtual, March 18
- ICI Latin America Regional Learning Exchange in Panama, *coordinators FPCI, Panama and Sotz’il, Guatemala*, March 21–25
- ICI mid-term review commences

Second ICI International Environmental Policy Fellows Program Cohort (2025–2026) launched

- Second Dedicated Grant Mechanism (DGM) Global Women’s Training, *host IMPACT*, Kenya, May 5–8
- The Cook Islands cultural education proclamation formally presented to the Ministry of Education at the National Education Symposium

- ICI Africa Learning Exchange, *host UCRT*, Tanzania, August 4–9
- A Focus on Inclusive Finance, ICI Phase 2 Report launched, August 9 (World Indigenous People’s Day)

- ICI Asia Regional Learning Exchange, Nepal, *co-hosts NEFIN, Nepal and IPF, Thailand*, October 4–11
- ICI Global Learning Exchange, *host CRIC*, Colombia, October 16
- ICI Global Steering Committee Meeting, Colombia, October 16
- Participation in Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP16, Colombia, October 21–November 1
- The House of Ariki, The Cook Islands established a formal trust, UANKA Inc.

- ICI completes Planning Grants phase and achieves the approval of full project portfolio summing USD \$14.5 million of GEF funding in the form of Implementation Grants to 10 Indigenous Peoples-led initiatives across 12 countries.
- This milestone marks the completion of 10 Impact Strategies that followed an Indigenous Peoples-led approach to inclusive conservation and enables the achievement of GEBs.
- Full project implementation on the ground across 12 countries.



Photo by Hector Thompson



Photo by IPF Thailand



Photo by Priscila Tapajowara

HIGHLIGHTS, METRICS, AND MILESTONES

AT A GLANCE (July 2024–June 2025)



361

Learners

successfully completed the ICI Learning Module 'Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, Gender and Biodiversity Linkages', developed in partnership with UNDP, to build capacity on inclusive conservation.

200+

ICI Knowledge Products

published, including blogs, videos, maps, lessons learned reports, podcasts, radio programs, and training materials developed across ICI.

60

Youth engaged in the project's execution team

(57% women, 43% men), demonstrating inclusive leadership in implementation.

12

Indigenous International Environmental Policy Fellows

participating in the Fellowship Program across 2 cohorts, including 7 women and 5 men from 12 countries.

38

Biocultural Maps

created by IMPACT-Kenya, Futa Mawiza-Chile, and Futa Mawiza-Argentina, supporting community-driven conservation and Indigenous knowledge systems across 3 countries.

7

Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs)

mapped in the DRC, covering 109,369 hectares of conserved forest to support territorial recognition and community-led conservation.

3

ICI Global Steering Committee Meetings

held (1 in-person in Cali, Colombia during CBD COP16, and 2 virtual), driving strategic decisions and reinforcing global commitment to inclusive conservation.

52%

Indigenous women in the ICI Global Steering Committee Meeting

contributing to gender-equitable governance and decision-making.

4

ICI Learning Exchanges

including 3 regional IEs held across Africa, Asia and Latin America and 1 global IE held in Cali, Colombia, to elevate Indigenous leadership and foster global collaboration for inclusive conservation.

34,673

Direct and Indirect Partners engaged throughout the year.

USD \$15 million

in Direct Access Financing

Over USD \$23 million

in Co-Finance mobilized

203,490
hectares

Secured under 12 Certificates of Village Land (CVLs)

issued by UCRT-Tanzania across three clusters, resolving boundary conflicts through participatory land management.

125

Certificates of Customary Right of Occupancy (CCROs)

issued in Tanzania – 70% to women, including persons with disabilities – enhancing inclusive and gender-responsive land tenure.

1

New legal trust

(UANKA Inc.) established by the House of Ariki-The Cook Islands

1

Historic Co-Governance Agreement

signed in Futa Mawiza-Chile, for Villarrica National Park, advancing inclusive conservation and Indigenous co-stewardship.

7

Community Initiatives

supported through Futa Mawiza-Chile's recently established Small Grants Program

4

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Protocols

(1 each in Peru, Chile, Argentina, and the DRC) developed and adopted to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

IMPACTS ON THE GROUND

Indigenous Governance in Action

The ICI is investing in Indigenous governance where it matters most – on the ground. Across diverse territories, ICI supports Indigenous Peoples in revitalizing, strengthening, and operationalizing their own governance systems. This includes formalizing traditional structures, securing legal recognition of land and territorial rights, and reinforcing community-led mechanisms for decision-making, natural resource management, and accountability. By supporting Indigenous Peoples to lead conservation in alignment with their own governance models, ICI is helping to ensure that conservation is not only inclusive – but culturally grounded, resilient, and just.

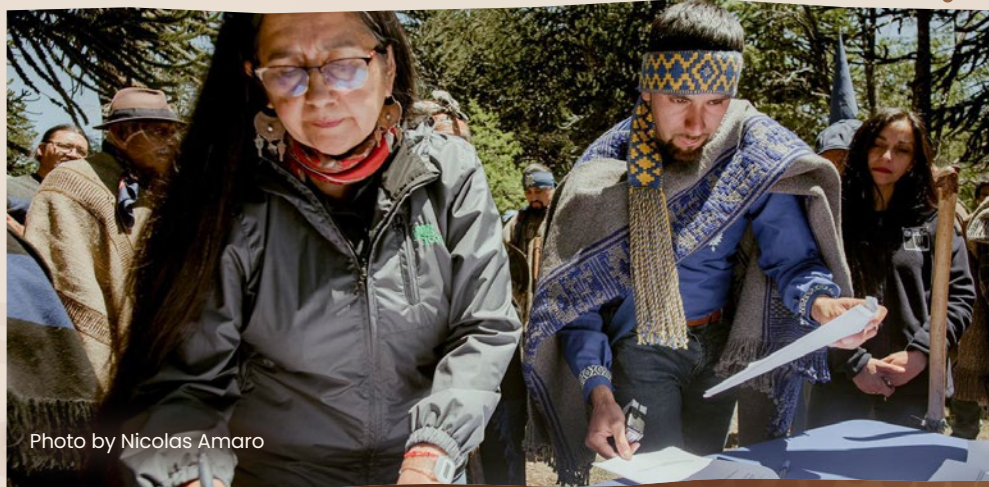


Photo by Nicolas Amaro

From Resistance to Recognition: Mapuche Secure Co-Governance of National Park

In **Chile**, a **historic milestone** was achieved in December 2024 when the **Futa Mawiza** Initiative, led by the Mapuche Association of Winkul Mapu (representing 13 communities), **signed a co-governance agreement with the National Forestry Corporation (CONAF) and the Ministry of National Assets**. This agreement **formalized shared management of 17,000 hectares of Villarrica National Park (Sector Puesco Lanin)** – making it the first time **Mapuche communities in Chile have gained official recognition over a state Protected Area (PA)**. This represents a decisive step towards a more inclusive conservation model, in which indigenous knowledge and state policies work in harmony, setting a precedent for collaborative governance in PAs throughout Chile.



Photo by CI Fiji

Reviving Customary Rule: Chiefs Lead Legal Recognition Across Pacific Islands

In the Pacific, Indigenous-led institutions are strengthening their leadership through the recuperation of traditional governance structures while also expanding to modern institutions. In **Fiji**, the **Bose Vanua o Lau**, alongside the Lau Provincial Council, **registered chiefly titles in previously unrecognized areas, an important step towards consolidating the House of Chiefs and establishing the Lau Trust Deed**. They also developed a governance training manual, “Safeguards to Protect Lau,” rooted in cultural knowledge and designed to guide biodiversity protection across generations. In **The Cook Islands**, the **House of Ariki established a formal trust (UANKA Inc.)** in October 2024 to work alongside traditional community structures to manage ICI and future projects, reflecting traditional leadership values within a self-determined legal framework.



Photo by Hope Kiwely

Tanzanian Communities Secure Land Rights for Over 500,000 Hectares

In **Tanzania**, the **Ujamaa Community Resource Team (UCRT)** have reached significant milestones in land governance. In a major achievement, **participatory land use planning** was completed in eight villages – covering **175,709 hectares** and benefiting **34,172 people** (including **14,701 women**). Across the Yaeda Natron, West Longido, and Simanjiro Makame clusters, communities secured over **507,687 hectares** under **Customary Certificates of Right of Occupancy (CCROs)**. Of the **125 individual CCROs 70% were issued to women**, advancing gender-responsive and inclusive land ownership. UCRT also facilitated the formal registration of **203,390 hectares** through **Certificates of Village Land (CVLs)** in 12 villages, enhancing tenure security and resolving long-standing land disputes. In addition, **372,000 hectares** were **resurveyed** to support the **Makame Wildlife Management Area (WMA)** and its Resource Zone Management Plan. These efforts reflect a transformative shift toward Indigenous-led, equitable, and sustainable land stewardship.



GIS Mapping Advances Land Tenure for 86 Indigenous Communities

In **Thailand**, the **Indigenous Peoples' Foundation for Education and Environment (IPF)** engaged **86 communities** in **Natural Resource and Biodiversity Management (NRBM)** planning. Achievements include land-use mapping, workshops on local food systems, and the creation of a Geographic Information System (GIS) Data Centre to support regulatory development and informed local governance. An accompanying GIS training program was implemented.



18 Communities Secure Land Rights under National Law

In **Kenya**, the **Indigenous Movement for Peace, Advancement and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT)** is advancing formal recognition of the **Mid Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin Territory as an ICCA**. The region spans seven counties and supports over 3.5 million Indigenous pastoralists. As part of this process, IMPACT supported biocultural mapping and calendars, ITK-based research, and the development of community-driven Biocultural Community Protocols (BCPs). They also organized training exchanges on land rights, rights-based conservation, and safeguarding pathways such as Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). **As of June 2025, 18 of 24 community lands are registered under Kenya's Community Land Act**, with four more in progress.



Territorial Mapping and Land Tenure

Strengthening Indigenous-led conservation governance goes hand in hand with securing land and territorial rights – an essential foundation for lasting and equitable conservation.

Through the ICI, Indigenous partners are leading territorial mapping and land tenure efforts that document ancestral lands, resolve conflicts, and establish legal recognition – laying the groundwork for community-led stewardship rooted in TK and practices. These efforts reflect ICI's commitment to Walking the Talk by ensuring that conservation is anchored in justice, ownership, and Indigenous self-determination.



18 Mapuche Communities Use Mapping to Advance Restitution and Preserve Cultural Memory

In **Chile**, **Futa Mawiza** has mapped eight ancestral territories covering **134,973 hectares**, generating key data to support community land use planning and advocacy. While only a small percentage of these lands have been formally recognized through title deeds, the mapping process has **laid a foundation for advancing legal recognition and territorial restitution for Mapuche communities**. In **Futa Mawiza, Argentina**, ten Mapuche communities created biocultural maps using oral histories and territorial journeys. Framed through the flight of the Andean Condor, these maps preserve sacred sites, community memory, and ancestral knowledge—serving as tools for teaching, territorial defense, and cultural continuity.



Mapping 100,000+ Hectares and Documenting 97 Practices Shapes Congo's Newest Green Corridor

In the **DRC**, the **Alliance Nationale d'Appui et de Promotion des Aires et Territoires du Patrimoine Autochtone et Communautaire en RDC (ANAPAC)** worked with communities across seven ICCA sites in three biocultural landscapes. They **validated maps for seven sites covering 109,369 hectares** and documented 97 traditional knowledge and practices on governance in Mpembe, Losomba, and Bolonga. **Their work contributes to the newly established Kivu to Kinshasa Green Corridor, a major PA initiative in the Congo River Basin.**



Life Plans Anchor Territorial Self-Determination for 13 Amazonian Nations

In **Peru**, **Federación Nativa del Río Madre de Dios y Afluentes (FENAMAD)** is working with **13 communities of the Yine and Ese Eja Nations to develop Life Plans**, documenting the living history of their territories, where elders walk alongside youth and engage in intergenerational dialogue. **These plans are essential for consolidating each Nation under a shared vision, advancing self-determination, and reinforcing the recognition of these areas as ancestral territories.**

Integrating Traditional and Scientific Knowledge

The merging of TK and scientific knowledge is increasingly recognized as essential for achieving holistic and sustainable conservation outcomes. IPs and LCs possess deep, place-based knowledge systems developed over generations – systems that have long guided the stewardship of lands, waters, and biodiversity. Yet this wealth of understanding has too often been undervalued in mainstream conservation. The ICI addresses this gap by actively recognizing and integrating TK alongside scientific methods. This commitment is not only reflected in advocacy but practiced on the ground – through Indigenous cultural indicators, traditional education systems, and co-developed tools that ensure conservation is culturally grounded and locally relevant.



Traditional Knowledge Shapes National Education Policy in the Pacific

In **The Cook Islands**, ICI supported the **House of Ariki and UANKA Inc.** in organizing a **national workshop** with 15 Arikis (chiefs), TK holders, women, and youth. The **result was a cultural education proclamation grounded on customary practices, environmental stewardship, and cultural values, formally presented to the Ministry of Education** at the National Education Symposium in May 2025, shaping future policies that reflect Indigenous knowledge.

Photo by House of Ariki



Radio Broadcast on Indigenous Knowledge Reaches 10,000+ Listeners

In **Nepal**, the **Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN)** broadcasted 19 radio programs on Indigenous knowledge and climate change, reaching over 10,000 listeners. They also produced a documentary on the Rai community's Sakela tradition, viewed by 2,500 people – raising awareness of Indigenous cultural heritage and conservation contributions. A case study on traditional governance systems was also completed.

Photo by NEFIN



Reviving Ancestral Knowledge Through Youth Education and Traditional Medicine

In **Chile**, **Futa Mawiza** developed the **Kimeluwün School of Knowledge**, with programs aimed at training Mapuche youth on traditional cultural practices, environmental education and territorial protection. In **Argentina**, **Futa Mawiza** hosted workshops on silver smithing and ceramics to revive ancestral practices and **collaborated with the Intercultural Health Center Raguien Kien** on advancing medicinal plant knowledge and traditional medicine.

Photo by Futa Mawiza



Building Resilient Livelihoods and Indigenous Economies

Sustainable, culturally grounded livelihoods form the backbone of Indigenous self-determination and are foundational to enduring conservation outcomes. For Indigenous Peoples, economic systems are not solely about income generation – they are deeply interwoven with cultural identity, ancestral knowledge, and stewardship of the land and waters. Through the ICI, partners are advancing efforts to revitalize traditional economies, strengthen food sovereignty, and support Indigenous-led enterprises that align with community values and ecological integrity. By investing in nature-based value chains, environmental health, and community-led responses to threats like contamination, ICI is helping to secure livelihoods that enhance both community resilience and biodiversity conservation. These efforts not only reduce economic vulnerability but also reaffirm Indigenous Peoples' leadership in shaping sustainable futures on their own terms.



Photo by Hope Kiwely



Photo by Futa Mawiza



Photo by FENAMAD



Photo by ANAPAC

Women-Led Forums Drive Economic Revitalization and Rangeland Restoration

In **Tanzania**, **UCRT** is supporting indigenous livelihoods through a holistic approach that combines capacity building with targeted seed capital. **A total of 192 women from the 9 Women's Rights and Leadership Forums (WRLFs)**, each comprising 24 members, **completed financial training** through a five-day Village Community Bank (VICOBA) program. **Each group then received seed capital of USD \$1,870 totaling nearly USD \$15,000, to invest in income-generating activities** such as agriculture, livestock fattening, and small-scale enterprises for eight groups in Simanjiro, Longido and Mbulu Districts. **UCRT also supported five pastoralist groups (50 members each) with 25 bulls and 53 goats for fattening initiatives, and placed over 360,000 hectares of rangeland across eight villages in the Simanjiro and Longido districts under HRM to restore ecosystem health.**

Local Solutions Amplify Food Sovereignty and Drives Livelihood Innovation in Mapuche Territories

In **Chile**, **Futa Mawiza** developed the **Kume Mongen small grants program to support local livelihoods and conservation initiatives**. Seven initiatives have been supported to date, such as community nurseries that contribute to local reforestation, community garden networks to strengthen food security, and two local fairs that promote commercialization and strengthen market access. **While in Argentina, Futa Mawiza supported 10 communities with subgrants to implement community livelihood projects**, including the development of forest management plans, amplification of water networks, enhancement of tourism and community infrastructure, and the improvement of livestock management and practices.

With New Tools and Knowledge, 10 Amazonian Communities Tackle Mercury Pollution to Protect Health and Ecosystems

Faced with rising mercury contamination from mining, **FENAMAD launched a groundbreaking community health and environmental monitoring program in the Peruvian Amazon**. In partnership with **10 communities from the Yine Nation**, the initiative supports Indigenous youth and leaders in collecting biological and environmental samples—from water, soil, fish, and even human hair—to **assess mercury exposure and its impacts**. This first-of-its-kind effort in the region strengthens Indigenous leadership, equipping communities with scientific and advocacy tools to defend their health, territory, and future. This innovation, advancing Indigenous Peoples-led environmental action, will be **presented at the 2025 Minamata Convention COP as a blueprint for environmental justice**.

Indigenous Women and Youth Equipped for Livelihood Sub-Grants

In the **DRC**, **ANAPAC** supported the formation and strengthening of women and youth groups in Diyoko, Losomba (Sankuru Province), and Mpembe (Mai-Ndombe Province) through capacity building on income-generating activities aligned with biodiversity conservation. A gender advisor was engaged to design and implement a training strategy focused on group governance, conflict resolution, and gender inclusion. To date, **over 500 women** have participated in these trainings, **leading to the formalization of community committees that are now officially recognized by local authorities**. These groups have since **emerged as new stakeholders in ICCA governance**—enhancing women's economic empowerment and **enabling them to advocate for improved access to education and greater participation in local decision-making processes**.

Gender Equality and Women's Leadership

Gender equality and women's leadership are central to ICI's vision of inclusive conservation. Across all 10 territories, Indigenous women are shaping decisions, strengthening institutions, and advancing conservation rooted in cultural values and community priorities. All current initiatives are implementing GAPs complemented by 9 WRLFs advocating for women's land rights in Tanzania. More than 1,800 Indigenous women have been supported through economic empowerment initiatives in the DRC, Guatemala, and Tanzania. Protocols to prevent and respond to GBV are now in place in Peru, Chile, Argentina and the DRC. These diverse efforts are not only shifting institutional norms, they are driving broader cultural and generational transformation – where both Indigenous women and men are actively engaged and empowered, recognizing the importance of their equal participation and complementary roles in conserving biodiversity in their territories.

Tracing Her Path: Indigenous Women in Conservation Leadership

1,800+

Indigenous women empowered economically in the DRC, Guatemala and Tanzania

10

Gender Action Plans (GAPs) being implemented

9

Women's Rights and Leadership Forums (WRLFs) have been established to advocate for gender equality and women's land rights in Tanzania

4

Protocols to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV) in Peru, Chile, Argentina, and the DRC



Photo by UCRT

Women's Land Rights Advance Equality



Photo by Sotz'il

Empowering Indigenous Women in Essential Value Chains

In **Guatemala**, **Sotz'il** supported capacity-building on gender and Indigenous Peoples' worldviews to the staff of implementing partners. In the case of Fundalachua, this support has strengthened the inclusion of women in the cocoa value chain – particularly 178 Q'eqchi' women that are now processing and producing cacao products, rather than selling raw cacao seeds. **Through training in entrepreneurship, linked to agricultural and forestry activities, implementing organizations have supported the economic empowerment of more than 1,100 Indigenous women.** These efforts prompted participating organizations to develop or revise gender policies, which have been integrated into their GAPs.

In **Nepal**, under the **SAINO** initiative, the **Community-Based Monitoring and Information System (CBMIS) shifted from a technical exercise to an Indigenous-led, culturally grounded, and gender-responsive process.** Indigenous women – who hold intimate knowledge of forest resources, cultural rituals, and seasonal rhythms – played a central role in documenting seasonal calendars, biodiversity, and cultural sites. In Chimang village, mapping sacred spaces like Sevithan and Chhekan became acts of cultural revival and intergenerational knowledge transmission, with women recounting memories of rituals and youth creating maps for future generations. Many women reported feeling not only included but respected and heard – some for the first time in a formal setting. The experience empowered both elders and young women to reclaim and take pride as guardians of intangible heritage, while also inspiring younger women to take pride in their traditions.



Photo by NEFIN

Documenting Rhythms and Cycles Through Her Eyes

In **Thailand**, **IPF** supported **Indigenous women in documenting FPIC processes and preserving TK systems related to biodiversity and land use.** This action has led to increased recognition of women's indigenous knowledge systems. Now women leaders are playing a pivotal role in initiating and promoting knowledge-sharing plans. For example, Lisu women in the Pang Sa community, Chiang Rai Province, developed a community-based plan to preserve and transmit TK related to local seed saving and management. In Sob Khong, Mae Hong Son Province, women spearheaded efforts to conserve and teach natural dye-weaving practices. At the same time, Mani women began passing on palm leaf weaving skills to younger generations in their community.



Photo by IPF Thailand

Weaving Indigenous Women's Knowledge Across Generations

Youth Leadership and Intergenerational Learning

Young people from IPs and LCs are playing a critical role in shaping the future of conservation. Through the ICI, youth are not only participating in environmental action – they are stepping forward as leaders, knowledge holders, and advocates. ICI fosters opportunities for intergenerational learning and capacity building, pairing the transmission of TK with tools that empower youth to lead in their communities and on the global stage. The ICI is investing in the next generation by supporting Indigenous youth as leaders, knowledge holders and bridge-builders between ancestral wisdom and future conservation pathways.



Mayan Youth Chart Their Territory

In Mesoamerica, the Ru K’ux Abya Yala consortium is strengthening youth leadership through two diploma programs in Guatemala, one in resource management and another on topographic equipment use, completed by youth from Izabal and Petén. These programs are complemented by intergenerational knowledge exchanges, including gatherings with elders and youth programs centered on Mayan cosmovision and conservation practices.



Photo by Ak’Tenamit

Voyaging Traditions for a New Generation

In Fiji, the Bose Vanua o Lau has partnered with the Drua Sailing Experience to revitalize traditional voyaging and navigation practices among youth. The Drua will serve as an interactive environmental education platform, reconnecting young Fijians with cultural knowledge of seascapes. The Bose Vanua also hosted the Lau Seascape Youth Exchange, bringing together 18 participants for learning and dialogue.



Photo by Roko Josefa Cinavilakeba

Teaching Tradition Through Creative Media

In Thailand, IPF developed educational media promoting Indigenous knowledge on conservation, sustainable biodiversity use, and equitable benefit-sharing. These resources were published in Thai on their dedicated website: www.ipfthailand.org, helping to preserve and share knowledge with younger generations.



Photo by IPF Thailand

PART III: BUILDING POWERFUL PLATFORMS

The International Environmental Policy Fellows Program plays a vital role in ensuring the continuity and strength of the global Indigenous Peoples’ movement. By investing in the formation and mentorship of emerging Indigenous leaders, the program supports a new generation to carry forward the vision, knowledge, and advocacy pathways laid by their elders. This connection across generations is not only a tribute to the leadership that has come before but also a critical strategy to ensure that Indigenous voices remain central in shaping environmental policy and can drive transformative change on the world stage. Importantly, this global engagement is grounded in – and responsive to – their Indigenous contexts, priorities, and struggles on the ground.

Acknowledging this, the Fellows Program supports emerging Indigenous leaders by connecting their community conservation work with global environmental policy. The inaugural cohort of five Indigenous fellows – from Chile, Panama, Kenya, Tanzania, and the DRC – embarked on a transformative three phase journey: learning from global indigenous leaders; applying that knowledge to case studies rooted in their territories; and engaging directly in international environmental policy spaces.

Photo by Hope Kiwely



International Environmental Policy Fellows Program

A major highlight of the year was the fellows' active participation at 16th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16) in Colombia, where they elevated Indigenous perspectives on climate and biodiversity on the global stage. Their contributions – ranging from leading community-based advocacy to publishing powerful case studies – demonstrated the depth and diversity of Indigenous conservation leadership. Beyond visibility, the program strengthened each fellow's confidence and connections, creating a domino effect of leadership impact across their home communities and networks.

To amplify its impact and ensure sustained momentum, the Fellows Program must continue to forge strong synergies with complementary initiatives that share its vision. Strategic collaborations not only expand opportunities for young Indigenous leaders but also strengthen the foundation for lasting change. A powerful example of this is the IUCN Stewarding the Earth campaign and fellow's program, funded through the PODONG Indigenous Peoples Initiative, which is currently supporting a total of five – both past and present – ICI Fellows from Latin America to pursue a specialized diploma in Territorial Governance and Climate Change Adaptation. These kinds of cross-initiative partnerships are vital – not just to scale the program's reach, but to empower a generation of Indigenous changemakers equipped to influence policy and action from the ground to the global stage.

2025 Fellows: Expanding Impact

The second International Environmental Policy Fellows Program cohort includes seven fellows, completing representation from all 12 ICI countries over the course of the two cohorts.

This program follows four clear milestones:

1. **Design** – Developing Case Studies
2. **Learn** – Joining Webinars and Trainings
3. **Engage** – Participating in Global Events
4. **Share** – Bringing Lessons back to their Territories



What we are fighting for now is not for us to be considered as if we are conservationists. We are not conservationists — we are part of the land, and conservation is our life. So we cannot say that Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities need to be recognized as doing conservation — it needs to be recognized as our lifestyle: it is conservation on its own.

— William Naimado, IMPACT, Kenya

2024–2025 International Environmental Policy Fellow

Photo by Sofia Troya

Building upon the Fellowship Experience

The International Environmental Policy Fellows Program continues to expand through **strategic partnerships** and **co-financing**, while **building a vibrant Community of Practice** that fosters ongoing learning, shared experiences, and cross-cohort collaboration.

Highlights:

- Fellows participated in **ICI-led training** on **gender, biodiversity, and Indigenous diplomacy**.
- Through co-financing from the **Dedicated Grant Mechanism (DGM)** two fellows (Guatemala and The Cook Islands) joined the **Second DGM Global Women’s Training** in Kenya, focused on inclusive climate governance.
- A partnership with IUCN’s **PODONG Indigenous Peoples Initiative** enabled five fellows (Guatemala, Panama, Chile, Peru, and Argentina) to earn a **Diploma in Territorial Governance and Climate Change Adaptation, hosted by the Centro de Autonomía y Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CADPI)**. These fellows will also be participating in IUCN’s World Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nature: Our knowledge is the language of Mother Earth and IUCN’s World Conservation Congress in October in Abu Dhabi.
- **Ongoing collaboration** between **2024 and 2025 cohorts** is supported through virtual peer exchanges, joint learning spaces, and mentorship.
- **Alumni from the first cohort helped launch the second**, sharing experiences and strengthening inter-cohort connections.

These **synergies** contribute to building a **continuous learning network**, enriching fellows’ experiences, and strengthening their roles as change agents in their territories, while enhancing their impact in national and international policy advocacy spaces.

Photos provided by the Fellows



Matauri Miria, The Cook Islands

Matauri studies traditional staple foods, focusing on taro cultivation on Atiu Island. She documents ancestral knowledge through interviews with elders and youth. Her work will continue to promote passing these practices to younger generations amid climate and social change.



Apisai Kalivakarua, Fiji

Apisai is conducting his case study in Mabula, Cicia Island, focusing on empowering youth leadership in environmental management. His project tackles climate change impacts like flooding through awareness sessions and community clean-up of the Dulo drainage system.



Chanchira Tawangthan, Thailand

Chanchira will study Indigenous perceptions and adaptations to climate change under Thailand’s “Zero Burn” policy, documenting traditional knowledge and policy impacts. Her findings will support greater Indigenous involvement and awareness in environmental policy.



Krizzley Ordóñez Garcia, Guatemala

Krizzley is working with the remote community of La Pintada to promote reforestation and agroforestry grounded in Q’eqchi’ ancestral knowledge. Her case study focuses on strengthening youth and women’s roles in conservation and community-based environmental management.



Luna Larrat, Argentina

Luna is working with the urban Mapuche community “Lof Newen Mapu” in Neuquén to address the impacts of extractive industries like fracking. Her case study focuses on revitalizing ancestral knowledge and strengthening community strategies for territorial and environmental defense.



Maglin Alvarado, Peru

Maglin is conducting a case study on mercury contamination in non-mining Yine communities affected by illegal mining. She will document community perceptions and advocate for the inclusion of this issue in the Yine Life Plan, promoting Indigenous rights and visibility in national and international spaces.



Sanjog Thakali, Nepal

Sanjog is documenting climate and cultural impacts in Thini, Mustang, to strengthen traditional ecological knowledge and support community adaptation. His case study promotes intergenerational learning and will inform local and international climate policy advocacy.

MAKANISI

LEARNING ACADEMY



The **Makanisi Learning Academy** was established as part of ICI's commitment to strengthening IPs' and LCs' capacity to lead conservation efforts. It is the dedicated learning and knowledge hub and a growing community of practice of the ICI. Makanisi is designed to serve as a platform for a continuous learning and exchange by producing and providing access to technical and organizational knowledge resources both for the IPs and LCs organizations within ICI, as well as for the broader global IPs and LCs community.

Makanisi offers a culturally appropriate, cross-cutting virtual learning center where IPs and LCs can access knowledge materials, tools, training modules, and links to related platforms. It curates and shares resources developed by IPs and LCs organizations with expertise in capacity building, ensuring that knowledge remains rooted in Indigenous and local perspectives while supporting learning and collaboration.

Through ICI's organizational needs assessments – conducted with IPs and LCs organizations, along with inputs from IPs and LCs capacity-building partners and initiative – six priority topics were identified and approved by the GSC. These are to be developed into self-paced learning courses, forming the core of the Makanisi curriculum. The courses are being hosted in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP)'s Learning for Nature platform and linked to the Makanisi knowledge hub under the ICI website.

The first course, *Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, Gender and Biodiversity Linkages*, is now publicly accessible, with more than 1,200 participants currently enrolled. The other five self-paced learning modules – covering topics such as project cycles and results-based management frameworks; Indigenous Peoples' governance systems, sustainable finance principles and strategies; Indigenous negotiations, and global and regional frameworks for Indigenous Peoples' rights and protections – are under development. They will be available in Spanish, English, French and additional languages.



Photo by Priscila Tapajowara

MAKANISI

LEARNING ACADEMY IDENTITY

What does "Makanisi" mean?

Makanisi is a Lingala word derived from the verb *ko kanisa*, meaning "to think." It encompasses a broad spectrum of meanings—reflection, vision, wisdom, memory, and planning—and represents the transmission of knowledge across generations. For IPs and LCs, Makanisi symbolizes a living library of traditional knowledge, ancestral memory, and spiritual imagination.

About the Logo

The **Makanisi logo** was co-created through a participatory design workshop with ICI partner ANAPAC and local artists. The tree represents rooted traditions, wisdom, and growth, while the circle symbolizes unity, continuity, and collective learning.

Makanisi Logo Design by Wolotech



MAKANISI COURSE:

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES, GENDER AND BIODIVERSITY LINKAGES

The first Makanisi course: *Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, Gender and Biodiversity Linkages*, aims to promote a gender-responsive approach. It aligns with the objectives of ICI and contributes to achieving the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) Targets 20, 21, 22, and 23.ⁱⁱ

Developed by Indigenous experts, the three-module course focuses on enhancing understanding of gender-related international legal instruments and the connections between gender and biodiversity; developing skills to integrate a gender-responsive approach throughout the project cycle; and, strengthening gender considerations in organizational policies, with particular attention to issues affecting women and youth. At the end of the course, participants receive a certificate of completion from ICI.

ⁱⁱ CBD/COP/Dec/15/4 – Convention on Biological Diversity, www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-zh.pdf.



MAKANISI COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

In addition to offering learning resources, Makanisi fosters a community of practice – a growing network of IPs and LCs committed to sharing knowledge, strengthening solidarity, and co-developing approaches to inclusive conservation. This community connects leaders across regions to exchange experiences, build capacity, and amplify Indigenous-led solutions. Below are examples of gatherings from the last year that contributed to this community of practice:

First Annual Stakeholder Forum for the Inclusive Conservation Initiative

From July 24–26, 2024, more than **80 stakeholders**, ranging from community partners to government leaders from across the Mid-Ewaso Ng'iro River Basin joined the **First Annual Stakeholder Forum for the Inclusive Conservation Initiative. Hosted in Nanyuki, Kenya, by IMPACT**, the forum marked a major milestone in fostering dialogue and collaboration across conservation actors in the region.

The forum had three key objectives:

- Share updates on ICI progress and results from the first year
- Reflect on lessons learned and community experiences
- Open space for dialogue on what inclusive conservation should look like in northern Kenya, where exclusionary models have historically dominated

The event culminated in the **collective drafting of a “Manifesto for Inclusive Conservation,”** laying the foundation for a shared vision and guiding principles in the landscape. This forum marked the beginning of a new tradition: an annual gathering designed to foster solidarity among rights-holders and duty-bearers alike, amplify local voices, and co-create pathways toward equitable, community-led conservation.

Photo by IMPACT

First International Congress on Indigenous Territories in Conservation

The **First International Congress on Indigenous Territories in Conservation** was organized from September 9–11, 2025, by **Futa Mawiza, Chile** which brought together more than **100 Indigenous leaders** who proposed environmental conservation in territories under Indigenous governance. These leaders from territories such as the Arawak of the Sierra Nevada in Colombia, the Shuar of the Ecuadorian Amazon, the Wachiperi of Peru, the Aymara of the Andean Highlands, as well as representatives of Mapuche territories in Chile met to discuss common solutions to shared problems. The Congress also focused on community life and the impact of drivers of environmental degradation in Indigenous territories. It **served as a platform to discuss Chile’s new biodiversity legislation and the Indigenous consultation process concerning the development of regulations for the National System of PAs.**

Second DGM Global Women’s Training

The **Second DGM Global Women’s Training** took place in Nanyuki, **Kenya**, from May 5–8, 2025. Funded by the DGM, co-organized with ICI, and **hosted by ICI partner IMPACT** in Kenya, the event brought together over **35 Indigenous and local women leaders** from 15 countries. Participants included ICI fellows from The Cook Islands and Guatemala, women leaders from Tanzania, Kenya, and the DRC, as well as members of the UNDP’s Equator Initiative network. Over four days of peer learning and field visits to ICI-supported communities, the training fostered dialogue on inclusive governance, climate justice, and community-led conservation. **The gathering deepened cross-regional collaboration, reinforced ICI’s commitment to Indigenous women’s leadership, and created inclusive, supportive spaces for shared learning and connection.**

Photo by Priscila Tapajowara



MAKANISI Global and Regional Learning Exchanges

ICI's Global and Regional LEs are envisioned to strengthen cross-regional IPs and LCs organizations partnerships and networks to significantly expand the reach of their capacity-building program within and beyond program participants. It intends to engage IPs and LCs organizations beyond the initiatives' geographies, so they can participate and collaborate in the learning experiences and the delivery of the LEs events.

Global Learning Exchange

Cali Global Learning Exchange

From October 16–17, 2024, the **ICI convened its Global Learning Exchange and formal Global Steering Committee Meeting in Cali, Colombia, hosted on the ancestral territory of the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC)**. CRIC welcomed participants to their lands, setting the tone for two days of **meaningful dialogue and collaboration**. Following the exchange, many participants joined ICI's strategic engagements at **COP16**.

The LE brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including representatives from the **GEF Secretariat and Agency, CI, IUCN, the Indigenous Peoples Advisory Group (IPAG), ICI Fellows**, Indigenous leaders from ICI's 10 initiative partners, and **CRIC**.

Key discussion topics included:

- **Customary law** and **Indigenous legal systems**
- **Women's leadership** in conservation
- **The integration of TK** in biodiversity governance
- **Economic development** through conservation
- **Models for community empowerment and self-governance**

Throughout the exchange, ICI partners shared experiences and challenges, proposing solutions grounded in lived realities and cultural contexts. The **gathering concluded with a shared commitment to collaboration, learning, and strengthening Indigenous-led conservation at a global scale**.

Photos by IF NOT US THEN WHO?



Regional Learning Exchanges

Africa Regional Learning Exchange

Photo by Hope Kiwely

From August 4–9, 2024, the **Africa Regional Learning Exchange** was **hosted in Tanzania by UCRT**, with support from the other two ICI **African regional partners ANAPAC and IMPACT**. **The exchange brought together 37 participants** including fellows, community members, and leaders from Tanzania, Kenya, Benin, Cameroon, Nigeria, Mozambique and the DRC. The LE aimed to build Indigenous Peoples' capacity to drive biodiversity conservation and environmental benefits through shared learning and collaboration. It featured thematic discussions on land tenure security, livelihoods, gender inclusion, and rights-based conservation, alongside cultural immersion experiences such as visits to the Hadzabe community and Yaeda Valley. These visits showcased successful community-led conservation efforts and milestones – like the handover of village land certificates in Mbulu district. **The LE fostered stronger partnerships and a renewed commitment to transformative change across Africa.**



Asia Regional Learning Exchange

Photo by NEFIN



The **Asia Regional Learning Exchange** was held from October 4–11, 2024, in Pokhara and Thini village, Mustang district, Nepal, **coordinated by NEFIN, Nepal and IPF, Thailand**, alongside local partners. As part of the ICI Asia Regional Learning Exchanges (ARLEs), the event focused on IPs and LCs approaches to managing lands, territories, resources, and biodiversity. **The exchange brought together 110 participants**, including elders, youth and women leaders, customary authorities, and representatives from organizations like IUCN. It began in Pokhara with an Indigenous ceremony and presentations of sub-projects such as NEFIN's SAINO and IPF's work in Thailand. Cultural activities included visits to museums and sacred sites. In Thini, participants experienced local lifeways through homestays, learning about the Mukhiya system, a customary governance structure overseeing essential roles in irrigation, conflict resolution, community celebrations and other community affairs; community roles, and the significance of festivals. **The exchange concluded in Pokhara with reflections on Indigenous governance and resource management**, offering participants valuable insights into the worldviews and traditions of Nepal's mountain-based Indigenous communities.

Latin America Regional Learning Exchange

Photo by Hector Thompson

The **Latin America Regional Learning Exchange** was held from March 21–25, 2025, in Gunayala, **Panama**. **The event convened 22 participants**, including Indigenous leaders from seven ICI-supported organizations across five countries, and allies like FILAC and FIAY. **Coordinated by Fundación para la Promoción del Conocimiento Indígena (FPCI) and Sotz'il**, the gathering focused on land tenure, governance, biodiversity, and cultural conservation, with sessions on GBV, environmental monitoring, and territorial defense. Hosted in Nusagandi, the LE included a visit to Masargandi's mangroves and to Usdub for the inauguration of the Usdub Mola Workshop. **The exchange emphasized community-led conservation, culturally rooted gender inclusion, and the shared threats of extractivism and underfunding**. It concluded with a shared commitment to regional advocacy, including joint diplomas, funding strategies, and a women's observatory centered on the theme of "Duality and complementarity for self-determination in our biocultural territories."



PART IV: ADVANCING POLICY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

Policy Impact

Strengthening IPs and LCs influence in Environmental Policy

Policy and advocacy are central to the ICI, as they amplify the voices of IPs and LCs in national and international environmental governance. Through strategic engagement in the United Nations (UN) Conventions on Climate and Biodiversity, the results from ICI projects are demonstrating IPs and LCs contributions to global environmental goals, and through capacity-building programs, such as the International Environmental Policy Fellows Program and the Mekanisi Learning Academy, are helping connect IPs and LCs knowledge, rights, and leadership into biodiversity policy decisions and frameworks. These efforts not only enhance conservation outcomes but promote equitable access to decision-making processes and environmental finance.



Photo by Agustina Rato for IIFB

Shared Learning and Engagement across the Rio Conventions

Capacity-building programs such as the Fellows Program, the ICI Regional and Global LEs, and support of IPs and LCs leaders participation in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have contributed to a strengthened engagement in key policy discussions. Over 600 ICI partners and IPs and LCs leaders participated in seven ICI shared learning activities. These enhanced their influence on global policy and increased global awareness of IPs and LCs-led conservation; including its contributions to global biodiversity and GEBs within the Rio Conventions and other relevant international fora.

Advancing Inclusive Conservation at COP16

At COP16 in Cali, Colombia, 23,000 participants from 196 countries convened for the first biodiversity COP since adopting the GBF. Key negotiations focused on turning the global agreement into national actions and securing the financing needed for implementation.

ICI partners hosted and participated in six side events and in many other strategic engagements. Indigenous Peoples leadership and active engagement in the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB) played a key role in the advocacy and negotiations that led to the establishment and adoption of a new permanent Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j). This outcome represents a historic milestone in strengthening the participation of IPs and LCs in decision-making and implementation under the CBD. It also affirms the recognition of their TK, rights, and leadership in advancing the GBF.

ICI's participation at COP16 also served as a concrete demonstration of how inclusive, rights-based approaches can deliver on the ambitions of the GBF – particularly on GBF Target 3,ⁱⁱⁱ which calls for 30% of the planet to be effectively conserved through equitable and inclusive means by 2030.

ICI's presence at COP16 included:

- Co-hosting the official Nature-Culture Summit
- Aligning institutional policy positions and engaging in targeted advocacy
- Collaborating with key policymakers and stakeholders
- Organizing and contributing to six official side events, including on:
 - ◊ Inclusive biodiversity conservation
 - ◊ Enhancing GEF and multilateral support
 - ◊ Reimagining conservation
 - ◊ Direct access to climate and biodiversity finance
 - ◊ Presentation of the GEF-7 ICI Phase 2 Report

Through these actions, ICI demonstrated how Indigenous-led, community-rooted models can operationalize the GBF and deliver meaningful progress toward Target 3 – grounded in justice, equity, and Indigenous leadership.



Photo by Andrea Rodriguez

ⁱⁱⁱ www.cbd.int/gbf/targets/3, Convention on Biological Diversity, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2 Nov. 2006,



ICI Partners' Engagement in NBSAPs

The GBF establishes a set of targets that depend on national-level commitments, as outlined in countries' recently updated NBSAPs. ICI has served as an innovative entry point to highlight IPs and LCs' contributions to national biodiversity goals. Across the 12 countries ICI Partners have been engaging in the NBSAPs updating processes, promoting a whole-of-society approach to meet GBF goals. The ICI Impact Strategies have helped to clearly articulate how each project delivers beyond GEBs, positioning IPs and LCs-led initiatives as key to achieving both national and global conservation targets.

Photo by Hector Thompson

PART V: LEARNING AND EVOLVING

The ICI embodies a dynamic, “learning by doing” approach, adapting to partner needs through decentralization, co-creation, and localized support. It has refined strategies to strengthen IPs and LCs governance, improve operations, and ensure sustainability. Drawing lessons from both successes and challenges, ICI fosters inclusive learning, stakeholder collaboration, and simplified systems – creating a responsive, evolving conservation model.

Adaptations and Lessons Learned

Transforming Granting and Administrative Capacities

ICI made significant strides in adapting project requirements and strengthening the absorptive capacities of Indigenous Peoples project partners to perform as executing agencies. ICI planning grants, organizational capacity assessments, and the phased rollout of the implementation phase have played a critical role in ensuring compliance and contextual relevance for the successful delivery of project objectives.

Synergies and Harmonization: Coordinating between Funding Partners

The ICI outlines strategies for enhancing collaboration among funding and implementing partners, drawing on their ongoing experiences. Key practices include joint field monitoring, regional LEs, and harmonized capacity building. Inclusive governance is ensured via the GSC, while unified advocacy and aligned monitoring systems support strategic coherence. These coordinated efforts highlight the effectiveness of joint governance and shared learning in advancing IPs and LCs-led conservation, offering a model for partnerships like those with the Tenure Facility in Peru and the PODONG Initiative.

Flexibility: Adapting to Partner Capacities and Priorities

ICI's “learning by doing” approach has been centered on flexibility and responsiveness to partner capacities, needs, and local contexts. Key adaptations include tailored technical support, flexible scheduling of field visits, and diverse learning formats. ICI has shown responsiveness to challenges like procurement delays and political instability; adjusted reporting and fellowship nomination timelines to enhance inclusivity; and, embraces co-creation in learning and governance. Tools and processes were localized to better reflect Indigenous values, and cross-regional exchanges promoted open learning. Altogether, this adaptive management style strengthens trust, equity, and long-term sustainability across diverse Indigenous-led conservation efforts.

Simplification and Streamlining of Reporting Requirements

The ICI has refined and adapted its reporting processes to meet the needs of project partners while delivering on GEF obligations. These adjustments have been made in close consultation with the GSC and project leads on the ground. Standardized quarterly and semi-annual reporting templates, aligned program criteria, and digital reporting tools have helped improve coordination and reduce reporting burdens. **Key lessons include the value of tailored support, coordinated documentation, and the use of multimedia tools to communicate progress more effectively.** The ICI Project Hub, one of our tools, serves as a central resource for all projects, providing access to reporting tools, templates, and document management systems. The finalization of the Mid-Term Review is expected to offer additional insights and guide further learning and adaptation going forward.

Influencing GEF Institutional Policy and Practice

The GSC actively participated in the GEF STAP consultations to inform GEF’s future engagement with Indigenous Peoples. Drawing on ICI’s field experience, the GSC shared practical insights that shaped STAP’s recommendations – such as the need for tailored safeguards that respect Indigenous institutions, the importance of supporting Indigenous-led mechanisms to channel funding, and the value of grounding monitoring and reporting in culturally relevant indicators. These contributions helped STAP formulate guidance that better reflects the realities and priorities of IPs and LCs, ensuring future GEF projects are more inclusive, equitable, and effective.

Evolving Policy and Practice: CI and IUCN

The ICI has also been a catalyst for institutional transformation – supporting both CI and IUCN in rethinking how conservation partnerships with IPs and LCs are built and sustained. For CI, this has meant moving from inclusion to IPs and LCs-led governance, adopting more flexible and culturally grounded granting practices, and investing in long-term institution-building. It has also spurred internal policy changes – shaping how accountability is shared, how compliance is approached, and how institutional systems adapt to reflect IPs and LCs’ priorities. Building on this momentum, CI is now mobilizing USD \$500 million over the next 10 years to transform finance for IPLCs deepening its commitment to systems change at scale.

For IUCN, this journey has likewise prompted important institutional shifts. IUCN has taken a brave step to scale up its institutional efforts and partnered with Indigenous Peoples as rights holders and equal partners by establishing the PODONG Indigenous Peoples Initiative, which seeks to access USD \$200 million in the next 10 years for investment in Indigenous-led conservation and climate solutions. This bold move signals a deep institutional change – one that prioritizes shifting power to Indigenous leaders. It ensures that Indigenous women are no longer included as mere numbers, but are central to transforming the root causes of inequality.

Through the ICI, CI and IUCN have undergone a significant transformation in how they engage with Indigenous Peoples. The ICI has redefined the institution’s approach to conservation by centering Indigenous governance, knowledge systems, and territorial rights as foundational pillars of effective and equitable conservation. It has strengthened internal policy coherence; catalyzed changes in legal contracting agreements with Indigenous Peoples; facilitated funding mechanisms to be more accessible and responsive to Indigenous priorities and realities; and opened spaces for direct Indigenous representation in high-level decision-making processes. ICI’s impact has also influenced program design across CI and IUCN – promoting a rights-based, culturally grounded, and gender-just framework that is being adopted beyond the initiative itself. These institutional shifts mark a departure from tokenistic engagement toward long-term structural change – rooted in justice, partnership, and Indigenous

leadership.

Innovating Conservation Finance

Despite global uncertainty around international cooperation and ambition, countries face growing urgency to define key climate and biodiversity finance elements for the timely implementation of the GBF and the Paris Agreement^{iv} – both critical for mobilizing public and private resources within and beyond 2030.

As pledges, disbursements, and negotiations evolve, initiatives like ICI demonstrate how IPs and LCs-led holistic approaches can strengthen climate-biodiversity synergies while delivering conservation outcomes that benefit people and nature. The experience built from the collaboration across direct access mechanisms – such as the DGM, the Indigenous Peoples Finance Access Facility (IPFAF), the PODONG Indigenous Peoples Initiative, and ICI – is shaping essential strategies to enhance multilateral funding for IPs and LCs. These efforts offer practical models for simplifying access and reporting requirements, making resource mobilization more inclusive and effective.

^{iv} “Paris Agreement.” United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement





Inflection Points

Overall challenges named by ICI partners include:

- **Global uncertainty on international cooperation and ambition:** Evolving donor priorities and changing global climate commitments have created uncertainty around long-term support for Indigenous-led conservation efforts. This creates difficulties for ICI's partners to plan ahead, sustain resources, and scale their work.
- **Navigating administrative hurdles and gaining public policy recognition for Indigenous biodiversity contributions:** Many ICI partners face delays when it comes to complex permitting processes, requirements, and limited government mechanisms for direct engagement with Indigenous Peoples. These challenges and others hinder the recognition of Indigenous Peoples contributions to the conservation of biodiversity and their subsequent integration into national strategies.
- **Breaking Down Barriers to Direct Access:** Many Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs) face challenges navigating the complex financial and administrative systems required by large-scale initiatives like ICI. While these systems aim to ensure accountability and transparency, they are often not adapted to the unique contexts, capacities, and governance structures of IPOs. As a result, they often face delays and added hurdles that limit their ability to access and manage funds directly. To truly foster equitable partnerships and enable full Indigenous leadership, these systems must become more flexible, culturally grounded, and supportive of self-determined approaches.
- **Land ownership and boundary disputes when conducting bio-cultural mapping and for land registration:** These disputes take significant time and resources to mediate and to reach an agreement.
- **Rural to urban migration and youth moving away from communities:** Due to social and economic development disparities, the younger generations in many areas are leaving communities and relocating to cities for further education and employment opportunities.
- **Geographic remoteness, ecological disasters:** Project partners are frequently affected by climate-related issues, such as floods, snow, or drought, while remote locations with poor road infrastructure and dispersed populations have posed logistical hurdles.



The most important thing out of this is our unity, as Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, to come together to work together and push for things to happen. I think that's very important, it's critical. Let us all go with that. Let us all have that in our minds when we plan and when we do our different things. That we have the power of UNITY.

Paine Mako, Indigenous Maasai woman leader
Executive Director of UCRT, Tanzania

PART VI: LOOKING FORWARD WHERE WE'RE GOING NEXT

As the ICI reaches the midpoint of its five-year implementation, the next phase will deepen support for the initiatives' delivery and community-led monitoring, while strengthening Indigenous governance and gender-responsive leadership. The ICI will continue to invest in capacity building through platforms such as the Community of Practice and the Mkanisi Learning Academy. It will continue to refine its strategy based on lessons learned from the Mid-Term Review.

ICI will remain actively engaged in shaping global conservation and climate agendas. This includes participation in the IUCN World Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nature: Our Knowledge is the Language of Mother Earth, the IUCN World Conservation Congress, the IUCN World Parks Congress, as well as high-level advocacy at the upcoming COP30, where ICI will contribute to, and benefit from, the emerging global financial pledge to support Indigenous-led biodiversity and climate solutions. These are key moments to elevate ICI's results, promote the delivery of global biodiversity benefits, and secure additional resources to sustain and scale impact.

Looking ahead, financial sustainability remains a priority. ICI will support its partners to leverage funding, access small grants, and build institutional capacities. **By investing in local leadership, adapting based on experience, and aligning with global frameworks like the GBF, ICI will continue to deliver lasting, scalable conservation outcomes rooted in Indigenous values, rights, and knowledge.**

Photo by Hope Kiwely



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