

A SUMMARY REPORT

ASIA REGIONAL CONSULTATION: CO-CREATION OF AN INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION ACADEMY



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On September 16, 2021, Tribal Link Foundation, in collaboration with WWF, led a consultation on Inclusive and Indigenous-led and community-led Conservation in the Asia region. The information garnered from the consultation will assist in the proposed development of an Inclusive Conservation Academy. There were 50 total attendees from 15 countries.

Session moderators: R.Múkaró Borrero, Tribal Link Foundation; Pratima Gurung, Nepal; and Atama Katama, Borneo,

Technical team: Sandra Patricia Visbal, WWF, Joost Van Montfort, WWF; Ghazali Ohorella, Tribal Link Foundation

Consultation Objectives

The objective of the Asia regional Consultation on Inclusive Conservation was to a) Report on and catalog best practices, challenges, and gaps in conservation practices, b) Identify areas and approaches for capacity building initiatives for IPLC and non-IPLCs, and c) Provide recommendations on how Indigenous Peoples can take the lead in building capacity in inclusive conservation.

Program Agenda

The program agenda included a welcome; a presentation on Inclusive Conservation by WWF; a Q & A round on Inclusive Conservation; a focus on a best practice initiative between Indigenous Peoples in Indonesia and Borneo; and final round of discussion using guiding questions.



Photo courtesy of WWF Vietnam

For related documents, videos, and other resources, visit
<https://www.triballink.org/inclusive-conservation-academy>

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Presentation summary: Inclusive Conservation, Delfin Ganapin, Global Practice Leader for Governance, WWF and Sandra Visbal, Inclusive Conservation Academy Coordinator, WWF

Inclusive conservation is conservation that is led by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities who see nature and people as one. It embraces the rights, needs and values of the communities and groups whose knowledge, practices and innovations have preserved biodiversity and ecosystems. Within this context, the initial concept for an Inclusive Conservation Academy (ICA) is a capacity development mechanism to support the strategic agenda to shift away from "fortress conservation" and into conservation approaches that are IPLC-led and rights-based in approach.

While initially starting to build such capacity in the WWF network, and especially for those involved in landscape/seascape conservation, a proposed goal is that initiative should become a multi-organizational platform that not only is led by and serves Indigenous Peoples, but also other big international conservation organizations, government agencies, donor institutions, and even the private sector.

"INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION IS CONSERVATION THAT IS LED BY INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES WHO SEE NATURE AND PEOPLE AS ONE." - DELFIN GANAPIN, WWF

Players of traditional music at the inauguration of the Cultural Field School in Terang Baru, Krayan. Photo: Sandra Tagal >

Case Study: A Best Practice Initiative from Borneo, both from Indonesia and Malaysia

The Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples of the Highlands of Borneo or FORMADAT is transboundary, grassroot organization established by Indigenous leaders living in the highlands of Borneo, both from Indonesia and Malaysia who came together to see how they could protect their common land across these 2 countries. The organization is formally registered in Indonesia and Sarawak. FORMADAT aims at encouraging sustainable development in the Heart of Borneo without risking degradation of the quality of social and natural environment. It encourages community-based ecotourism, organic farming, and agro-forestry, communication, and information technology, and the preservation of the cultural and natural heritage of the Highlands.

More info:

https://wwfint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/formadat__english_version2_1.pdf



Guiding Questions for Discussions:

a) What are the capacities that Indigenous Peoples should develop to be able to manage IPLC-led approach partnerships with non-IP entities?

In the consultation, it was shared that investing in community capacity building processes that are ongoing, to strengthen and scale them if so desired. It was also shared that an important group which capacities need to be developed are the capacities of the conservation organisations. Particularly, their organisation and internal processes to ensure that they are able to understand and respect the knowledge, values, norms and systems of Indigenous Peoples.

Participants also stated that effective conservation is really happening at the community level using the traditional knowledge systems of Indigenous Peoples, in saying so participants also underlined that continued capacity building for stewarding their territories is important. Many are deploying stewardship with success at the community level, as their area of service has been reduced to this level. They maintain the desire to holistically manage territories and the environment statewide, which includes the ability to govern their communities, and to promote their community based practices.

In this segment, participants also expressed concern about the difficulty of dealing with governments, yet are also alarmed of the high level of influence that donors and funders have in how projects are being developed, governed and implemented.

Examples were shared of them not being open, being difficult to deal with, rigid, distrust against indigenous leaders, not lending direct access to funds or fund management. Participants requested capacity building on this specific topic.

Several participants also shared that they are engaged in various legal battles with the government about their territories and the conservation of the biodiversity on their territories. One of the major obstacles is that the boundaries of their territories are not legally defined or not mapped. This is an important element that stifles their claims which the academy can be of support in terms of mapping and documentation led by Indigenous Peoples and local communities, so that the various grievances and claims over lands and territories can be registered and be dealt with better arguments.

b) What are key elements that should be developed for pilot training modules or activities for both non-IPs and IPs engaging in inclusive conservation?

Through a robust dialogue, participants underscored that Indigenous Peoples have distinct identities and contexts, and the inter-indigenous distinction that shows the diversity of Indigenous Peoples is the strength of Indigenous Peoples. Participants stated that governments and other stakeholders always put Indigenous Peoples in one bucket and present them as one homogenous group. Therefore, modules and activities under the academy should respect the individual identities and contexts of Indigenous peoples.

In connection to the respectful interaction of governments, conservation organisations and private sector interact with Indigenous Peoples, participants stated that modules on how to negotiate with governments and win is an important contribution to the empowerment of Indigenous Peoples and the direct management of their territories. These skills would have a positive effect on the attitudes of other interested parties' who may then be moved to be more respectful to the methods and rights of Indigenous Peoples. In relation to this, participants flagged their interest for modules on how to argue for legal rights, direct management and direct access to funding for management of their ancestral lands.

Participants further clarified that Indigenous Peoples in the region and around the world have varying views on land management. Some would like to have their territories declared as a conservation area under protected area frameworks or systems, whilst others would like to have full sovereignty over their territories. This further clarification invites the development of more specific training or modules so that Indigenous Peoples are educated in all levels and types of governance.

c) Besides the presentations that were shared during the consultation, are there other best practices to learn from?

In both the Borneo as well as the Dayak case, the Indigenous Peoples were divided by political borders. For example, the Forum unites the Dayak communities in Borneo, Malaysia and Indonesia and has also engaged in multilateral partnerships with international organisations. Participants underscored the importance of customary governance and indigenous sovereignty as an indigenous conservation method.

It was shared in the consultation that these practices have been done without outside assistance and made the Indigenous Peoples and their territories not only survive but also thrive, participants indicated that the academy could highlight this form of best practice as a guideline and help strengthen them.

Another good practice on customary land recognition was shared in the consultation. An example from the Centre for Indigenous People's Research and Development Sector in Nepal is providing research in preparation of a local forest act in five municipalities as a practice to encourage governments to legalise the customary lands of Indigenous Peoples.

d) What is it that non-IPs (Conservation NGOs, donors, government, private sector) should understand well when working with Indigenous Peoples (IPs)?

Participants shared that they are already stewarding their territories through community based practices, and traditional knowledge, and support can be provided by recognising and promoting and protecting their rights. Through the various examples one important aspect emerged of indigenous conversation. Knowing that generations of Indigenous Peoples across the globe have been more successful and effective than efforts of the government, the question remains is how can governments, conservation organisations and private sector interact with these Indigenous Peoples respectfully.

In relation to Indigenous Peoples' lands, territories, and resources, the participants also included an important distinction between governance and management with the understanding that they call for management as well as governance.

Recognition of Indigenous customary and governance practices within their territories are deemed to be of higher importance than having a representative on management boards of protected areas. Participants flagged that this must be understood by others.

Participants also underlined the importance of understanding the important role that Indigenous governing institutions play when it comes to indigenous customary land management and conservation, and highlighted the need for other parties to understand diversity. There is diversity in knowledge, languages, conservation practices, and Indigenous Peoples. An example was shared of the Dayak Indigenous Peoples that “Dayak” is considered by some as an umbrella term. This to explain that there is a diverse range of communities living on the territories of the Dayak each having a close relationship with the lands and territories they reside on with a very nuanced place-based practice of conservation.

e) What skills and values would be important in these engagements?

Participants stated that recognition is vital in these engagements. Examples highlighted laws and regulations that exist in countries that do not recognise indigenous lands. They usually only recognise government or private lands. Some countries lack laws pertaining to indigenous territories or the legal recognition of Indigenous Peoples.

Recognition of Indigenous values by other stakeholders in these engagements is also important. Particularly on the examples of lands, territories and resources of Indigenous Peoples and laws and regulations that are being implemented that contradict Indigenous values.

f) What are the best ways to conduct capacity-building modules or activities?

As different Indigenous Peoples have different needs, participants suggested a process to assess the needs of Indigenous Peoples and in which areas they require or request capacity building, then to continue mapping organisations and institutions that can provide direct or indirect support. This mapping procedure would highlight links and gaps and when it comes to the gaps the academy can provide or propose additional support to fill that gap.

Participants further expressed that the academy should not just look at traditional knowledge in terms of management of natural resources but more importantly at the values and principles underneath it, how to have a harmonious relationship with the natural environment. It was highlighted that conducting modules and activities should start with these underlying values and principles.

g) What organizations and capacity building programs/projects already exist that can provide support?

It has been shared in the consultation that as a starting point, the participating organisations can provide support as well as customary institutions and customary governing institutions.

As a general observation, participants welcomed the initiative as they indicated that they have been successfully conserving their territories and natural resources despite outside threats, however as threats are increasing and becoming more robust, some participants are concerned that they may not survive these threats.

Participants also indicated that there are already a number of organisations and initiatives that are doing similar conservation work and a consortium like ICA would be of great service to strengthen that work. This would avoid duplication of existing initiatives.

A concern was raised by a participant who expressed that resources for conservation projects and initiatives of Indigenous Peoples are already scarce. The participant requested some more consideration on this issue as the participant was worried that operationalising the academy could further marginalize the communities that need the resources.

h) What resources, in terms of manuals, guide materials, presentations, and other such capacity-building materials are already available?

While no specific resources were identified, participants offered to provide materials they have available. It was suggested that outreach can be done to youth councils, or the “sekolah adat” in Borneo.

i) Is the idea of a pool of IP expert leaders being the trainers or “faculty members” of an Inclusive Conservation Academy feasible and desirable? Who can be in the initial pool of such IP faculty for the Academy?

Participants supported the idea of having indigenous resource persons to share their skills and knowledge in the academy. They also flagged that many knowledgeable and skilful people may only be fluent in their indigenous language and hope that the academy would find a solution to this matter as participants indicated that a language barrier preventing users from getting important first-hand education would be unfortunate.

j) Would you like to receive follow-up on this consultation and the process for the establishment of an Inclusive Conservation Academy?

Attendees expressed great interest in the subject and of the possibility to continue to engage in the work of the academy.



Photo courtesy of WWF-Philippines



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