

A SUMMARY REPORT

# PACIFIC REGIONAL CONSULTATION: CO-CREATION OF AN INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION ACADEMY



IMAGE CREDIT: MOLOKAI GORILLA OGO HUI



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# PACIFIC REGIONAL CONSULTATION: CO-CREATION OF AN INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION ACADEMY

On August 5, 2021, Tribal Link Foundation, in collaboration with WWF, led a consultation on Inclusive and Indigenous-led Conservation in the Pacific region. The information garnered from the consultation will assist in the proposed development of an Inclusive Conservation Academy. There were 18 total attendees from 8 countries.

**Session moderators:** R.Múkaro Borrero, Tribal Link Foundation, Ghazali Ohorella, and Catherine Murupaenga-Ikenn

**Technical team:** Sandra Patricia Visbal, WWF, Joost Van Montfort, WWF; Carson Kiburo, Jamii Asilia Centre

## Consultation Objectives

The objective of the Pacific 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 from the Solomon Islands; and final round of discussion using guiding questions.



Community-led Natural Resource Management in Molokai, Hawaii. Image Credit: Molokai Gorilla Ogo Hui

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

# PACIFIC REGIONAL CONSULTATION

**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.



*Sese, a local fisherman in the Solomon Islands*

## **Case Study: A Best Practice Initiative from the Solomon Islands:**

The Solomon Islands has been developing various initiatives for effective community management to ensure that future generations can benefit from the ocean. For example, fishing is an important part of the local culture, diets and economy. Local fishers, community leaders, and WWF have been implementing an integrated approach to sustainable fisheries management in the Solomon Islands, as a way to respond to threats from climate change, unsustainable fishing and habitat loss. Community members collect data regarding fish number and size, in order to make informed decisions for their management plans.

The objective is to reduce fishing pressure on areas that are heavily exploited while ensuring fishers can still make a living. Sea grapes also have had an important role as a source of income for communities for many generations. Therefore, within their community management regime community members also raise awareness about sea grapes, define rules on how much can be harvested while having a livelihood component that also diversifies local income from sea grapes. This initiative also combines traditional knowledge and other science to reduce the stress on natural resources.

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



## 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?

Participants were of the view that Indigenous Peoples should be put in charge of their own territories, natural and cultural resources. They supported the idea of an academy which is led by Indigenous Peoples and welcomed the organizers for bringing Indigenous Peoples in the process early on. This ensures that Indigenous Peoples participate in the design of projects at the very front is important to build trust and cooperation, not at the back end which has happened in the past where Indigenous Peoples experienced being a means just to validate certain initiatives and projects.

The support for the idea also stems from the opportunity to bring indigenous definitions and understanding of conservation, sustainability, inclusiveness to the table. Experiences have been shared that the organising or developing party of an initiative have a different understanding of aforementioned themes, to such an extent that Indigenous Peoples cannot recognise themselves anymore.

It was expressed that though safeguards and protocols have been generated by Indigenous Peoples and should be entrenched in conservation, they are absent. The ICA should bring transparency and empower those that have been marginalised in conservation spaces. Past processes have been imposed by governments, NGOs, and other external partners on Indigenous Peoples.

The ICA initiative can become a platform that can establish and educate a norm in conservation to ensure that all initiatives and projects further respect for Indigenous Peoples, indigenous knowledge, and rights particularly the right to self-determination and free, prior and informed consent. The consultation also surfaced the need for capacity building non-indigenous entities on concepts like self-determination, indigenous knowledge and free, prior and informed consent, determining the right culturally-based process towards protecting and promoting these concepts. It was also shared that this capacity building could also be relevant for Indigenous Peoples not familiar with these concepts or not having full control of their territories as in some cases it has been shown that free, prior and informed consent has been bought.

As capacity building to promote knowledge of human rights and indigenous rights is pertinent to Indigenous Peoples, participants also see an opportunity for the ICA to mobilise its users, non-indigenous entities and other duty bearers to protect these rights which could be manifested in a specific section of ICA or training for businesses and the private sector towards instilling awareness that conservation isn't just to greenwash their activities but actually to add value to the wider society. Participants expressed that ICA should show that Indigenous Peoples are leading, and allow them to show the right way to conservation, the right relationship with the world around them for the benefit of everyone.

*"... terms like conservation brings varied meanings to different people... [Concepts like this] need to be decolonised and brought to our daily lives. A lot of times we see conservation as a distant thing. We can diversify and bring more capacity, to fight the language and cultural barriers..." - Consultation participant.*

The discussion also brought forward the need to build capacities of indigenous leaders to identify their own talents and let them excel in them based on the view that it all contributes to a larger movement for conservation of our natural environment. This is an important aspect of capacity building as every indigenous person has something important to contribute to the overall leadership of their community and the conservation movement, it has been shared that it is in the interest of this conservation movement for Indigenous Peoples to grow their skills as there's a place for everyone whatever skillset they have.

**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?**

Participants also welcomed the regionally focused consultations. As indigenous knowledge is place based, regional consultations for conservation and development initiatives should be held - at a minimum - at a regional level. As they shared negative experiences regarding consultation sessions around similar attempts, but at a global level and or as a one-off event resulting in Indigenous Peoples feeling that they were there just to check the consultation box and to validate a "pre-cooked idea."

Linked to the place-based nature of indigenous knowledge, participants shared that it is important that the ICA ensures that users become educated about the different territories they engage in around the world. It is also important that the Indigenous Peoples in the region and their histories, as well as what needs to be corrected about those histories be shared or accessible.

One participant pointed out that conservation is currently tied to a white dominated "saviour complex." Correcting these histories requires input from the communities themselves especially if a goal is to design a module to correct erroneous histories.

When it comes to conservation, participants have the concept of sovereignty in a high regard especially when it comes to conservation and environmentalism. One example that the consultation brought forward is led by the 'Āina Momona community organisation in Hawaii that brings the political sovereignty question for Hawaiians to the discussion and keeps it at the forefront of the conservation work that they do. This includes education programs for children, and a fellowship program for young Native Hawaiian leaders to learn the skills of conservation, and the creation of career opportunities in natural resource management and food security. In this regard, participants expressed that ICA can become a platform that builds the capacities of young leaders in conservation that can contribute to a global indigenous industry of natural resource management where these leaders can excel and positively contribute to the environment. This is a link video about one of the projects Aina Momona is supporting on Molokai <https://youtu.be/PLMvXGVo8Ac>

One participant also shared that "the ICA should work on bringing conservation into our daily lives; on the other hand, it should also to build up people's capacity to be able to participate in "official" or governmental process."

*"...many of our communities have our own indigenous learning spaces, so there are some good models to draw on regarding how an Inclusive Conservation Academy might be governed or administered."  
- Consultation participant*

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

In Aotearoa-New Zealand there is the Rangitahua (Kermadec islands) marine sanctuary. The sanctuary was initiated to nurse the local fish, allow them to thrive and repopulate. This is an indigenous practice seen across the Pacific region (i.e “tapu” in Hawaii and “sasi” in Maluku). In almost all cases these practices are monitored by an indigenous governance entity, in the case of the Rangitahua it is monitored by the Ngāti Kuri trust board which is an Iwi (tribal) authority. The project was supported by an NGO, several universities, schools and a museum, a collaboration which gave the sanctuary necessary support from government agencies, civil society, educational sector and cultural and arts experts.

The Rangitahua marine sanctuary triggered controversy amongst the general public as it is situated between several islands where commercial fishing activities take place. When the announcement of this sanctuary came, the local commercial fish sector had serious public concerns about the initiative whereas the initiative deployed an indigenous practice for sustainability. Several interesting elements of this presentation can be distilled: 1. Indigenous governance entity empowerment in conservation and 2. Capacity building in framing indigenous conservation methods and practices in a way so that non-indigenous entities understand. 3. ICA can become a platform where entities from other sectors can partner in a project to reinforce cultural, social, environmental and economic values of Indigenous Peoples.

The Rangitahua initiative is an example that bringing different sectors to the table can make any conservation project culturally-sound and robust. For more information:

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/122757347/kermadec-islands-research-programme-gets-133-million-in-funding-from-mbie>



A research programme focused on the Kermadec Islands has been awarded \$13.3 million (file photo).

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

Participants shared the importance of demonstrating indigenous governance through conservation organisations. Seeking guidance from indigenous authorities or putting indigenous people in governance positions and roles in terms of managing areas can contribute to decolonizing conservation and restoring the power balance. The consultation identified cultural safety workshops that are happening in Australia as an example of allowing a space for non-indigenous people and entities in conservation to have an opportunity to reflect on what they bring to their work in terms of world views, perspectives, and other factors that influences how they engage in conservation activities.

It was also shared that non-indigenous people unconsciously bring their understanding or perspectives on conservation and that most of the time they don't realise the bias in their decision making. These types of workshops have shifted perspectives of non-indigenous people's towards being more culturally-sound and inclusive.

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

Participants underscored the need for ICA to have a focus on empowering emerging leaders, they shared that it is also required to build the capacity of young indigenous leaders to do conservation projects or other types of activities. It is important to build an industry in our community where our young people can have income and access to food and stay home in their traditional ancestral areas and contribute to the environment.

Another value that was raised in the consultation is to cultivate gatherings. Gatherings to share best practices, lessons learned and reflections; these gatherings also ignite co-creation of new ideas and testing them. Participants experience these gatherings as powerful. These spaces are created to make people feel safe to share stories, make personal connections, learn from failures, and use the lessons to cultivate better collective knowledge and a stronger community. Participation of non-indigenous people in these gatherings can promote trust, and cooperation. The idea that ICA would create or co-create a digital environment for gatherings was highly valued by participants as it could nurture the creation of a safe space for to share stories and experiences.

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

Participants also highlighted that when talking about conservation it is also important to talk about decolonisation. The current concept of conservation is perceived by many Indigenous Peoples at the local level as being a craft that requires specific skills that only well-trained academics and experts possess. Indigenous Peoples' understanding of this concept is in some cases exploited as part of continuing the government's colonisation strategy. It has been expressed that an aim of the ICA could be to bring the concept of decolonisation into the daily lives and conversations of Indigenous Peoples as part of the conservation discourse.

Emphasis was placed on the idea that the ICA should aspire to overcome language barriers. Many tools, manuals and documents are in English, Spanish, French or Russian but have not been provided in other languages that Indigenous Peoples understand. On this point it has also been shared that the ICA should seek to ensure that translations are faithful and use the right terminology.

Safeguards and protocols that have been generated by Indigenous Peoples should be in place during capacity building modules or activities. The ICA could go a long way in championing transparency and empowering those that have been marginalised in fortress conservation spaces.

*"...decolonisation cultural safety workshops could be a service offering that non-Indigenous groups pay to participate in." - Consultation participant*

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

There was insufficient time in the consultation to canvas programs and projects in the Pacific region, however participants expressed willingness to contribute relevant resources, including manuals and documents that they already have available.

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

A useful protocol was shared in the consultation. It aims to ensure that indigenous communities' informed consent is obtained for access to their traditional knowledge, and that there is fair and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms for use of that knowledge in natural resource management.

See

<https://www.indigenousknowledgeforum.org/garuwanga-forming-a-competent-autho>

Further capacity building materials can be developed if they are not yet available. For example, the gatherings organized by the Pollination Foundation as an incubator to build an ecosystem of Indigenous owned nature based solutions to flow resources and finance directly to the community. These gatherings also inspire the community by sparking ideas and sharing what works, what fails and testing ideas together as already outlined in the chapters above. Capacity building materials can be developed with the participation of the Pollination Foundation and other participants of the consultation.

Towards this end, one of the participants shared a link to an inspiring fellowship for social equity focused on Indigenous perspectives, It is relatively new and there are many learnings (successes and failures):

<https://socialequity.atlanticfellows.org/>

A participant from Hawaii shared that they “run a small farm, we are majorly native there. We are also concerned with Invasive species clearing out the reefs and we are working to counter that. We teach young native Hawaiian people about natural resources management and conservation, thus creating healthy and quality life. A lot of our cultural programs are very helpful and co-align with this ICA idea.”

**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 expressed interest in knowing what the governing structure of the academy would be and what criteria ICA would use for Indigenous Peoples to become trainers or instructors.

One participant, for example, pointed out that “not everyone has to be an 'academic' in the western sense to be a trainer, of course; although that raises the question about what would the criteria be for being a 'trainer' or instructor in the academy.”

Unfortunately there was not sufficient time to reflect deeper on this subject area; however, participants were eager to participate in further consultations and contribute to the work of the ICA.





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