

What is the Whakatane Mechanism?

The Whakatane Mechanism is an IUCN One Programme initiative that supports the implementation of “the new paradigm” of conservation, focusing on situations where indigenous peoples and/or local communities are directly associated with protected areas as a result of their land and resource rights, including tenure, access and use. The mechanism promotes and supports the respect for the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities and their free prior and informed consent in protected areas policy and practice, as required by IUCN resolutions, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

What issue it is seeking to address?

Many of the over 160,000 protected areas that have been established in the world, overlap totally or partially with traditional lands, territories and resources of indigenous peoples and rural communities. Their intimate and sustainable relationship with their land is often why its biodiversity is effectively protected. Processes of establishing and managing protected areas have often created or aggravated the exclusion, dispossession, marginalization and poverty of such peoples and communities, due to (i) policies and practices of nation states that often do not recognize their rights, and due to (ii) the old ‘fortress conservation’ paradigm whereby protected areas were based on the removal of indigenous peoples and local communities who had lived sustainably in their lands.

Where does it come from?

The Whakatane Mechanism emerged out of the 2008 IUCN World Conservation Congress’s call for IUCN members to develop a “*mechanism to address and redress the effects of historic and current injustices against indigenous peoples in the name of conservation of nature and natural resources*” (Resolution 4.052).

At the “Sharing Power” conference of the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP), in Whakatane, New Zealand, in January 2011, a meeting was held between indigenous representatives, the chairs of three IUCN Commissions (CEESP, WCPA, and SSC), their specialist groups (TILCEPA and TGER), and IUCN Members Conservation International (CI) and the Forest Peoples Programme (FPP). Here a decision was taken to develop such a mechanism, called the Whakatane Mechanism. The Whakatane Mechanism emerged from this as an IUCN “One Programme” initiative involving the Union’s global and regional programmes, Commissions and Members.

The 2012 IUCN World Conservation Congress in Jeju – following on from the success of the two pilot Whakatane Assessment at Mt Elgon, Kenya, and in Thailand - subsequently endorsed the Mechanism in Motion 128 on *IUCN's implementation of the UNDRIP* which also welcomed the Mechanism as a significant contribution to mainstreaming IUCN’s “rights-based and equitable conservation” approach.

What are its objectives?

The objective of the Whakatane Mechanism is to enable indigenous peoples and/or local communities affected by protected areas to address and redress the effects of historic and current injustices against them in the name of conservation of nature and natural resources. The Whakatane Mechanism also celebrates and promotes best practice and successful partnerships between indigenous peoples and local communities and protected area institutions. The resolution of conflicts linked with protected areas and promoting good practice leads to far more sustainable conservation and ensures human rights are respected.

This approach is not only based on the need to ensure conservation recognises rather than denies rights. It is also based on the science underpinning the New Conservation Paradigm. All the most recent research from the World Bank, CIFOR and the scientific world shows that forest peoples are the ones best placed to protect the forests. CIFOR’s 2011 analysis of 16 countries demonstrates that communities protect forests six times better than Protected Areas. Meanwhile research for the World Bank’s Independent Evaluation Group found that “*In Latin America, where indigenous areas can be identified, they are found to have extremely large impacts on reducing deforestation*” (2011: 9)

The New Conservation Paradigm recognizes that the key to effective forest conservation is to ensure long term secure tenure rights for those communities who have inhabited and conserved their forests for centuries, and to recognize that such communities need support to protect their forests from encroachment by elites, outsiders and by their own members, some of whom may well be responsible for felling their forests since they don't believe they have any long term future there. As Chhatrea and Agrawal point out: *"When local users perceive insecurity in their rights (because the central government owns the forest land), they extract high levels of livelihood benefits from them, and when their tenure rights are safe, they conserve the biomass and carbon in such forests"* (2009:17669).

How can the Whakatane Mechanism be effective?

Through multi-stakeholder fieldwork in specific protected areas and high-level dialogues, the Whakatane Mechanism can enable park authorities, local and central government, conservation organisations, IUCN and the peoples affected to develop a common strategy to resolve conflicts in protected areas and/or promote good practice.

For example, in one of the three pilot Whakatane Assessments that have been undertaken since 2011, the creation of a conservation area had led to the indigenous Ogiek of Mt Elgon, Kenya, being made illegal and evicted from their ancestral lands. Thanks to the strong relationship established between FPP and the Ogiek, and the strong relationships IUCN ESARO had established with government and conservation authorities, the Whakatane Mechanism was able to not only bring everyone to the table, but to also brig everyone to the field. This enabled the Ogiek to resume dialogue with government departments and conservation organisations, based on a shared understanding of the situation on the ground and of the New Conservation Paradigm's approach. The Ogiek are in the process of reasserting their ownership rights to some of their ancestral lands. The Kenya Wildlife Service has agreed to provide technical advice and support to the Ogiek to manage their lands.

How will the Whakatane Mechanism work?

The mechanism is initiated in a protected area when indigenous people and/or local communities request an assessment.

The request will be considered by a Steering Committee from IPOs, IUCN Commissions, Secretariat and members. Once the decision is made to conduct an assessment, a task force will be created and include representatives of all the parties concerned - e.g. indigenous peoples, local communities, support NGOs, conservation bodies, and government departments. It will undertake a similar process to that in the two pilot assessments:

- **Initial contacts** with relevant actors (communities, protected area authorities, other institutions) to present the situation and request their engagement in the process;
- **1st Roundtable** bringing all relevant stakeholders to the table to discuss and agree on the process of the Whakatane Mechanism;
- **Assessment** of the situation through a 4 or 5 day field visit to the area with relevant actors (IPOs, FPP, IUCN, and conservation, local, central government authorities, etc.);
- **Validation** of the findings with the indigenous and local communities concerned
- **2nd Roundtable or workshop, at local or national level**, to discuss the report and its conclusions and recommendations, and to make decisions on possible next steps;
- **Implementation, follow up and monitoring** of the recommendations and decisions

A solid shared evidence base and the dialogue surrounding it is expected to contribute to the resolution of conflicts at the local level and to a better understanding of how to enable effective rights-based conservation.