

From experience to policy: strategic exchange between Indigenous Peoples and local communities on Target 3

On 18 July 2025, Indigenous Peoples and local communities' representatives came together to share experiences on the implementation of Target 3 of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) in their territories. The session, organised by Forest Peoples Programme and the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity provided a space for open dialogue, reflection, and peer learning. The following are the key messages that emerged from the discussion, where specific cases were presented by SRDC, IMPECT, PASD, and CIPDP. The outcomes of this event contribute to this briefing which is part of the Conservation Pathways project.

1. Indigenous Peoples have safeguarded biodiversity for millennia, guided by deep spiritual, cultural, and governance relationships with their territories.

These are not new conservation models—they are living systems that have sustained ecosystems across generations. In many Indigenous languages, there is no direct translation for “conservation”; instead, phrases like “taking care of the land” reflect holistic, relational worldviews grounded in reciprocity.

2. Indigenous and Traditional Territories (ITTs) are not the third option—they are the first and most enduring pathway to achieve Target 3.

ITTs predate both Protected areas and OECMs. Recognising them as the foundational mode of area-based conservation is both historically accurate and essential for meaningful, rights-based implementation of Target 3.

3. Customary governance systems and Indigenous and local knowledge must be placed at the centre—not treated as supplementary.

This includes sacred natural sites, rotational farming, ecological calendars, spiritual governance, and collective land management. These systems are not simply contributions to conservation—they are at the core of effective and sustainable stewardship in many regions.

4. A key policy challenge is how to reflect Indigenous and local diversity: should communities adapt to fit predefined conservation categories, or should those categories evolve to reflect territorial realities?

ITTs definition must be broad and flexible enough to encompass the full range of Indigenous Peoples and local communities' lifeways, governance systems, and land-use practices. Target 3 implementation must align with Indigenous Peoples self-determination—not constrain it.

5. Human rights and equity must be central to Target 3 implementation.

Conservation must not come at the expense of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IP and lcs). The qualitative dimensions of Target 3—including tenure security, governance, equity, and Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)—are just as critical as achieving the 30 per cent target.

6. National legal frameworks are among the biggest barriers to implementation.

In many contexts, Indigenous Peoples are not legally recognised, or their territorial rights are not recognised, respected and protected. Without robust legal recognition and appropriate legal reforms where necessary, ITT will remain invisible in national strategies, undermining both conservation objectives and indigenous rights.

7. Even where favourable legislation exists, there is widespread confusion about the three conservation pathways: Protected Areas, OECMs, and ITTs.

Governments, NGOs, and sometimes even communities lack a shared understanding of what these pathways mean in practice at the territorial level. There is also a strong push for recognition of OECMs, without recognising the potential of Indigenous and Traditional Territories. This hampers implementation and may lead to misclassification or exclusion, and even worse it could lead to rights violations.

8. Legal and policy reforms must be supported by accessible, community-driven advocacy and information sharing.

Existing legal analyses on Indigenous land and conservation rights need to be disseminated, understood, and used by Indigenous Peoples and local communities and their allies. Knowledge must be not only available but understandable and actionable at the local level.

9. Monitoring and reporting tools must be community-controlled and grounded in self-determination and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

While platforms like LandMark and the ICCA Registry are useful, they should only be applied with consent, under Indigenous governance, and in ways that respect local decision-making and data sovereignty.

10. Cross-regional peer learning strengthens collective action and resilience.

The experiences of Guyana, Thailand, and Kenya reveal both common challenges—such as legal invisibility, extractive pressures, and limited recognition—and shared strategies, including mapping, community governance, and policy dialogue. Continued exchange fosters solidarity, sharpens advocacy, and builds momentum for systemic change.

In addition to the key messages, participants also identified a set of potential next steps to build on the momentum of the discussion:

A. Carry out national (and sub-national) **policy and legal reviews** with the aim to effect reforms to recognise and support Indigenous and local community-led conservation, including **Indigenous and Traditional Territories**.

B. Provide **resources, including direct funding**, to support indigenous and local community-led conservation, including Indigenous and Traditional Territories.

C. Where the achievement of Target 3 is pursued through **protected areas and OECMs**, ensure the full and effective participation of IPs and lcs in national and sub-national processes, and their **Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)** in implementation and monitoring.

Note on ITT definition:

Indigenous and Traditional Territories is a term used to refer to the land rights of IPs and lcs, but this may have different terminology in the national context, for example: customary lands, ancestral domains. The CBD Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) and provisions related to indigenous peoples and local communities is currently developing guidelines on indigenous and traditional territories, which is expected to become available by COP-17 in 2026.

Meanwhile, from international processes, two definitions are relevant:

UNDRIP Article 26: 1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired. 2. Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired. 3. States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories, and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned.

CBD glossary for Article 8(j) and Related Provisions: "Lands, territories and areas owned, occupied and/or used by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (CBD Art. 8j glossary).

This document was prepared in July 2025. It is intended to be used as support document, particularly for Indigenous Peoples and forest peoples, and is written from a human rights perspective. For more information: <https://www.forestpeoples.org/our-work/our-programmes/environmental-governance/conservation-and-human-rights/conservation-pathways/>