ICCA Consortium

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Strengthening your territory of life:

Guidance from communities for communities

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The ICCA Consortium

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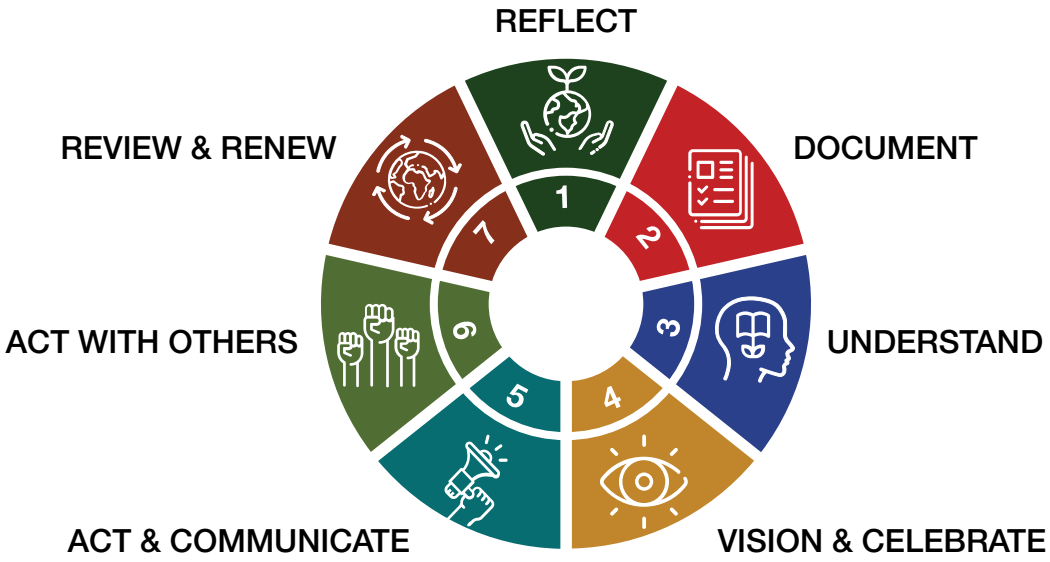
INTRODUCTION

Strengthening your territory of life: guidance from communities for communities

You are invited to embark on a self-strengthening journey, a process of reflection, discussion, and action that you can define and shape according to your needs and the aspirations of your community.

The process consists of 7 self-strengthening elements, each with guiding questions, tools and examples. The elements do not need to be followed 'in order' and can be taken up and adapted to fit your context, as determined by your community.



The main method for the self-strengthening process are 'grassroots discussions'. Download reminders for the facilitation team **here**.

The Meanings and Resources space comprises an illustration of key concepts, suggestions for facilitators and additional methods and tools: **toolbox.iccaconsortium.org**.

The pathbreaking experience of the **Kawawana territory of life** has inspired the development of this Guidance. Read more about it **here**!

Learn more about territories of life and the ICCA Consortium in this **video**.

About this guidance

This guidance is based on the field experiences of the Members and Honorary members of the ICCA Consortium. An earlier document was produced by the ICCA Consortium in three languages and diffused in 2017 (available as pdf **here**). This current version has incorporated comments and learning since then. It should be cited as:

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Your comments and suggestions are most welcome! Please send them to documenting@iccaconsortium.org and **gbffilter@gmail.com**.

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Self-strengthening the Kawawana territory of life

The evolution of this guidance began more than a decade ago: the custodians of the Kawawana territory of life in Senegal were facing major threats to both their territory and community livelihoods. They understood that to address these threats, their 'territory of life' was central and needed to be restored. For that, also their traditional rules for access and use of natural resources, integrated with new understandings and tools, needed to be better recognized and respected. This is exactly what they achieved! How did they do it? They engaged in a process of reflection, discussion, and action: a 'self-strengthening process'.

The custodians of the Kawawana territory of life began their self-strengthening process in late 2008, Their story illustrates the power of such a process and provides an example of how it can be approached.

The self-strengthening process started in late 2008, when the term Kawawana did not yet exist and the local estuarine territory was in a truly bad shape. At an initial meeting among leaders of the Mangagoulack rural municipality, representatives of the local fisher's organization, and visitors from the ICCA Consortium, the difficult circumstances were discussed. They agreed that their territory needed to be restored to bring decent livelihoods back to the community. In their view, this could be done only if the community was able to reinstate its traditional rules for access and use of natural resources. The traditional rules would put an end to the pillage of the natural resources that was happening under their eyes, by anyone able to fish, cut, gather or collect anything in their territory. For that, however, the backing and support of the government was necessary… They all knew that a leader of a neighbouring community was sent to jail for having unilaterally attempted to enforce local fishing rules. They were scared by that, and saw no way out of the quandary.

You can read more about the context, achievements and current situation of Kawawana **here**.

With a strong mandate from all participants in the initial meeting, the ICCA Consortium visitors were able to quickly obtain resources to support **the community self-strengthening process**. Early in 2009, they began with a **three-week set of intensive meetings among 150 representatives from the eight villages that comprise the community**. The meetings developed as **relatively informal but highly focused grassroots discussions**, with people examining their situation, envisioning what they wished to achieve and planning what to do. The process was supported by a team of three external advisers, comprising a fishery biologist, an agro-economist and a governance expert and overall process facilitator.

At the beginning, a group of more than twenty experienced and respected fishermen from the eight villages got together to analyze the present and historical situation of the local **fisheries**, and identified and described trends in the diversity and size of their catch. Then a much broader group of village representatives joined in and

heard from the fishermen. Together, they recalled the **history** of their community, their deep, multiple **cultural and spiritual connections** with their territory (the Djola culture is as complex and rich as one can imagine) and their shared current ecological and socio-economic situation. The larger group was then accompanied to **identify their desired future, or what they mean when they said they want a "good life" (*Bourong Badiaké*)**. It turned out that what they all meant was peace, community solidarity, prosperity, a better diet for all, a stop to the urban exodus, and a healthy and productive local environment. For all of this, they recognized that their territory of life– which they named Kawawana or *"our collective natural heritage to be conserved by us all"*– was essential. Through further **discussions and analyses**, they all agreed that they needed to **restore their Kawawana** via the **recognition and respect of their traditional rules** (integrated with modern tools for biological monitoring). Ultimately, they believed that this was the single most important factor to bring about all the good life results they wished to achieve. **This realization was a very powerful moment for all those involved.**

For all of this, they recognized that their territory of life– which they named Kawawana or *"our collective natural heritage to be conserved by us all"*– was essential.

Photo: © Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend

While these discussions were taking place, the initial fishermen group was also receiving **training on biological monitoring** and another group called Kaninguloor was created to discuss **what indicators** would reveal the desired change towards the **"good life" (*Bourong Badiaké*)** and how those indicators could be assessed. Two dedicated teams (a fishery monitoring group and the Kaninguloor group) agreed to keep measuring and assessing their sets of chosen indicators, tracking whether they were going to approach the desired/ expected change, if and when their traditional rules were to be reinstated.

Then the representatives planned together what they needed to do. Most fundamentally, they needed formal recognition and respect for their local knowledge and rules in the access and use of natural resources. For that, they decided to **establish Kawawana as their 'community conserved area'** and strive to get it formally recognized. Information received from the ICCA Consortium had made the community aware of some national and international legal and policy bases on which their conserved area could be recognized. These

Photo: © Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend

included Senegal's Law of Decentralization, as well as the country's status as a Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which recommends supporting community-based conservation. This information was crucial, and it empowered the community with the confidence it needed to act. The 150 representatives took advantage of their time together to **develop and agree upon a management plan for their community conserved area** (including different zones, rules, signage, surveillance, and penalties for infraction); **a governance structure** (with various roles for different institutions); **a monitoring system** for the governance and management results; **a communication plan**; and **complementary initiatives** to enhance livelihoods, support the activities of women, identify allies and partners at various levels and seek the formal recognition of the community conserved area.

In the eighteen months that followed, all that had been planned was actually implemented. The crucial factor was the **tireless work** of **a few leaders** who **acted as community diplomats**, with intelligence and determination and backed by strong community support. After formal recognition by the Mangagoulack rural municipality in 2009, the patient work of information sharing and advocacy continued for many months with the fishery and forestry departments and many others. Finally, however, in March and June 2010, Kawawana obtained **formal recognition certificates from the Regional Council and the Governor of the Casamance Region**. This was the fullest and most formal recognition they could have ever imagined obtaining! The community celebrated this result in earnest, starting with the wisest elder ladies setting up fetishes to signal the diverse zones and fishing rules. Then the men set up poles and panels to mark the same zones, with specific descriptions of the fishing rules. And, finally, everyone in the community who could do so attended the **major event/celebration**, where authorities and partners came to declare the formal entry into force of the Kawawana rules. It included speeches, food, music and general rejoicing.

> Finally, however, in March and June 2010, Kawawana obtained formal recognition certificates from the Regional Council and the Governor of the Casamance Region. This was the fullest and most formal recognition they could have ever imagined obtaining!

KAWAWANA TERRITORY OF LIFE

While seeking official recognition, the community had also been seeking support to implement their management plan. When the management rules were formally adopted, they could be readily enforced with the help of a small boat and engine and complementary equipment provided with help from a local Foundation (FIBA). Surveillance of the respect of the rules was not always easy, and some conflict situations developed with non-local fishermen, but the Fishery Agency and Prefect backed the surveillance team and local diplomatic capacities did the rest. To strengthen their role, the volunteer fishermen on the surveillance team pulled resources together to buy themselves some training from the government fishery agency, after which they would be considered semi-formal agents. As the FIBA Foundation pursued conservation objectives, it asked the community to also set up a monitoring team for non-fish biodiversity, which was promptly done.

Photo: © Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend

Less than three years after official recognition of the community conserved area, all monitoring teams were showing excellent results. The fisheries and local biodiversity showed impressive improvements (the original fish diversity reappeared, birds, dolphins and crocodiles went up in numbers and some fishermen said that their fish catch had quadrupled!). The indicators of overall wellbeing also improved, in particular regarding migration (fewer people migrated away and some returned to the villages) and the local diet (people were again eating the good fish they loved, which had nearly disappeared from their waters). The other indicators of *Bourong Badiaké* were also relatively good, but they had not been bad at the beginning and they proved less 'sensitive' than others to any type of change.

In the years that followed, the main governing body of Kawawana kept meeting to deal with various issues, and continued to function on its own, with no project support. There was an attempt to raise funds for Kawawana through a small bicycle renting business, but the business proved too complex and time consuming for the local volunteers. Remarkably, the fishermen active in the surveillance of the community conserved area have continued doing their job, year after year, on a voluntary basis. The community conserved area was even voluntarily expanded in size. But it is clear that governing and managing a community conserved area on a purely voluntary basis is demanding important sacrifices from people who have no time or resources to spare. For example, the Kawawana surveillance team is currently facing a problem because the engine of their surveillance boat and an important part of the monitoring and surveillance equipment have been damaged in an accident caused by bad weather. Local people are active seeking resources to reconstitute their means. No one can say how long their volunteer efforts will remain viable.

KAWAWANA TERRITORY OF LIFE

The small amounts of external funding sporadically received from the ICCA Consortium has been for targeted initiatives, such as a radio programme in local language, which has made Kawawana locally well-known and respected. Recognition has not only been local. Kawawana has received two international awards for its accomplishments and inspired other communities to become custodians of their own conserved areas in Senegal.

Together, and with the help of another GEF SGP grant, the community custodians of territories of life in Senegal have developed a national network. At the time of this writing, in 2020, the national network is advocating for national policies to formally back community conserved areas and enhance their security. However, the advocacy work is still not strong, and legal advice is needed.

Throughout the twelve-year process briefly described above, the Kawawana custodian community has been **self-strengthening its territory of life**. If the beginning was very intense, the continuation has been steady. The community began strengthening itself by reflecting on its situation, analyzing it, documenting it, informing itself, agreeing on a course of action, planning and committing together, weaving relations with allies and partners, doing careful diplomatic work, being accepted, recognized and supported and celebrating its achievements. It then continued strengthening by working together for years, governing and managing their territory, getting trained in new skills, communicating about their territory of life , learning lessons, sharing these lessons with other custodian communities and seeking ways to improve the overall policy context in Senegal. Some external facilitation and support at crucial times have been important, but the bulk of contributions and efforts have been provided locally. Today, the Kawawana custodian community has *not* solved all its problems and has its ups and downs, like all communities… but it is much stronger than ten years ago, and its territory of life is healthy and alive!

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REFLECT

Self-strengthening processes may be prompted by the need to address a pressing concern for your territory or to take up a new opportunity. In all cases, a useful starting point is holding a **grassroots discussion** to explore and confirm:

- whether your community is a custodian of a territory of life;
- what the status of that territory of life is; and
- whether and how your community wants to embark on a self-strengthening process.

'Territories of life' are very diverse... but 'well-defined' territories of life share **three common characteristics:**

1

There is a **close and deep connection** between a territory and a custodian indigenous people or local community

2

The custodian people or community is able to make and enforce decisions and rules (e.g., regarding access and use) about the territory… i.e. there is **functioning governance institution**

3

The governance decisions and management efforts of the concerned custodian people or community contribute to both **conserving nature** in the territory and ensuring community **livelihoods and wellbeing**

It is helpful to understand the 'status' of any existing or potential territory of life, i.e., whether it is:

- **defined**—the territory currently has all three characteristics, i.e., a deep community-territory connection, well-functioning community governance, and effective conservation and livelihoods/ wellbeing results;
- **disrupted**—the territory previously had all three characteristics, but currently some are not fully present because of disturbances that the custodian community believes can be reversed or counteracted; or
- **desired**— the territory never possessed all three characteristics, but has the potential to develop them, according to a community that is willing to become its custodian.

Regardless of the status of the territory of life, a **self-strengthening process** may help the custodian community to better understand it and care for it. **The community defines and leads the self-strengthening process.** This takes commitment and a (flexible) plan.

Note: For this online guidance, **'community'** is a general term used to refer to the self-identified custodian of a given territory of life. The term thus stands for Indigenous peoples, local or mobile communities, multiple communities working together, or other groups, as appropriate.

You can find more information, methods, and tools, in **'Meanings and Resources'**: **toolbox.iccaconsortium.org**

A 'territory of life'? Questions for a grassroots discussion

As part of a grassroots discussion, these questions can be used to help your community to identify whether it is a custodian of a 'territory of life' and, if so, what status the territory is in.

... connection between the community and its territory of life

Does our community have a specific 'territory' (area, species habitat) for which it feels responsible?

- Is there a strong sense of connection between our community and this territory?
- If there is a strong connection, is it related to (among other possibilities):
  - Our community's livelihoods and income?
  - Our community's sense of security and capacity to withstand hardships?
  - Our community's history, language, spirituality and/or culture - our sense of 'who we are'?
  - Other beings who live in the territory – animals, plants, ancestors, spirits, mountains, rivers?

... community governance

- Are there important decisions our community has taken, and keeps taking, regarding our territory?
- Does our community have **ways of making decisions about our territory** – e.g. via a general assembly, council of elders, spiritual teachers, committee, or trusted leaders?
- Does our community have **rules** about access to and use of the territory and its resources?
- Are we able to **implement and enforce decisions and rules about our territory?**

... positive results for nature and community livelihoods and wellbeing

- Is our **territory** well **conserved**? (For example, are the main elements of healthy nature — such as soil fertility, water quality and quantity, species populations, agricultural productivity, forests and vegetation, etc. — being maintained or improving?)

REFLECT

- Are the **livelihoods and wellbeing of the community sustained** by the territory? In what ways?

Overall: current status of the territory of life

- Does our territory embody the three main **characteristics** of a 'territory of life'?
- If any of these characteristics is not strong today, did it used to be? What has changed since then?
- Is our territory of life **well-defined**, **disrupted**, or **desired**?
- If it is not yet (or is no longer) 'defined', do we want to change this, and do we believe that we can?

In discussing the territory of life status, keep in mind that these are judgments of fact, not merit. A territory of life may be 'disrupted' for many reasons. Maybe the community governed the territory of life for a long time but right now it cannot because of either internal or external conflicts or pressures. Maybe the community is caring for the territory of life but does not have a strong or recognized role in decision making. Maybe climate change is disrupting the effectiveness of the community's efforts and more time is needed to adapt.

Explore some territories of life

The term '**ICCAs—territories of life**' stands for **"territories and areas governed, managed and conserved by custodian indigenous peoples and local communities"**. This refers to an age-old, widespread, diverse and dynamic phenomenon that has many different manifestations and names around the world. For the custodians of such 'territories of life', the connection between their community and territory is much richer than any single word or phrase can express. It is a bond of livelihood, energy and health. It is a source of identity and culture, autonomy and freedom. It is a link among generations, preserving memories from the past and connecting to the desired future. It is the ground on which communities learn, identify values and develop relationships and self-rule. For many, it is also a connection between visible and invisible realities, material and spiritual wealth. With territory and nature go community life and dignity, and self-determination as peoples.

Here you can find examples of some 'emblematic' territories of life.

Here you can watch a video about territories of life and the ICCA Consortium.

Planning self-strengthening? Questions for a grassroots discussion

Regardless of the territory of life status, these questions can help plan your self-strengthening process:

- What are our community's main hopes and concerns regarding our territory of life?
- Do we want to engage in self-strengthening for our territory of life?
- Who should be involved in discussing and taking action?
- Who should coordinate, facilitate, and keep track of the process?
- How and when should we meet during the process?
- When we consider the **seven elements** (see introduction) of the self-strengthening process, which are most important for us?
- From where, and when, shall we start?
- Do we have the resources we need to support the process? If not, how can they be secured?

Photo: © KESAN

DOCUMENT

Each territory is unique and complex… documenting it properly can feel like a large undertaking. But you can **start small and build the documentation over time, focusing on the aspects of the territory that are most important** to your community and starting with information that is already known.

Community-defined documentation about the territory of life can be of use within the community and in support of external connections. It helps **support other self-strengthening 'elements'**, including being able to communicate, seeing how the situation changes with time, and even defending the territory from harm.

Key formats for documentation include pictures, lists, maps, videos, artefacts, recordings of music, stories, interviews, and more.

A mere 'description' becomes **documentation** when the **information is put into formats and organised in ways that make it easily available for future reference and use.** 'Good documentation' is reasonably complete and clearly describes the key features of the territory and the community, and how decisions are made.

All documentation for a territory of life should be collected, shared and used only in ways that are determined by its custodian community and respect their rights, including their **free, prior and informed consent** (FPIC).

You can find more information, methods and tools for documenting territories of life here: **toolbox.iccaconsortium.org/resources/document/**

What do we know already? Questions for a grassroots discussion

As part of a grassroots discussion, these questions can help a community get started with documentation by identifying what is (and is not yet) known and deciding on areas where more documentation may be useful. **It is unlikely that all of this information will be available at the outset** and that is fine. The discussion serves to get ideas about where and how to find some answers and can be a starting point to build more detailed documentation over time. (See also **#template**).

... key features of the territory

- Where is the territory of life and what areas / resources does it include?
- Is the territory of life clearly defined, e.g., does it have clear boundaries?
- Have these boundaries changed over time? How and why?
- What is the approximate surface area of the territory of life?
- Are there maps or GIS coordinates available?
- Is there any overlap with protected areas or other areas governed by the state or other actors?
- What is the condition of nature in the territory of life (e.g., excellent, good, threatened, poor, devastated)?
- Is there existing documentation or information to back-up our responses to these questions?

Note: While it is helpful to know where the territory of life is, precise, fixed and delineated boundaries are NOT necessary.

... the custodian community

- Where and how large is our custodian community?
- Is our community sedentary or mobile? If mobile, do we have a specific transhumance territory?
- What languages are spoken or used by our community?
- Is our community homogeneous or are there major differences within it in terms of power, wealth, function, religion, language, ethnicity or other characteristics?
- If so, are these differences reflected in the diverse ways we relate to our territory of life?
- Does our community have a distinctive culture, ceremonies, institutions and/or norms?
- If so, in what key ways do these distinctive aspects relate to the territory of life?
- Is our community well off, comfortable, struggling, or poor and vulnerable?
- Does our community have strong internal solidarity and strength, or are there significant internal divisions and tensions?
- Is there existing documentation or information to back-up our responses to these questions?

... values of the territory

- Does our community use a specific name to talk about our territory of life? If yes, which name?
- What are the crucial values or benefits of the territory of life for our community? For instance, is it a source of food, water, income? Is it used for ceremonial gatherings or other cultural or spiritual purposes? Does it preserve the memories or the bodies of the ancestors? Does it conserve resources for times of scarcity or social upheaval? Does it prevent environmental disasters? Is it related to the community identity and worldview? Is it important to conserve biological diversity (e.g., are there endemic species or ecosystem functions that are well known and appreciated or protected?)
- Is the territory of life equally enjoyed and appreciated within our community? If not, who is more interested and why?
- What values (if any) does the territory of life have for people that do not belong to our community?
- Is there existing documentation or information to back-up our responses to these questions?

... governance and management—ways of making and respecting decisions and caring for the territory of life

- What are our community's main objectives for caring for the territory of life?
- How and by whom are the main decisions made about the territory of life?
- How are different groups – including women and youth – involved in this decision making?
- When was the governing body (or bodies) created and how and why has it changed?
- Was the governing body (or bodies) created by our community, or by another institution, or both?
- What specific decisions – e.g. zoning and other plans and rules – have we adopted for the territory?
- Are our decisions clear and well-known to all?
- Who physically manages the territory and implements the decisions taken by the governing body?
- Is there a monitoring system for the management results and, if so, who is involved and why?
- How do our community members learn about the rules and engage with the territory of life?
- Does our community take action to ensure that others know about and respect our decisions and rules regarding the territory of life (e.g., rules of access and use)? How?
- Are our community's collective rights and responsibilities to govern the territory recognized? If yes, what kind of **recognition** is this (customary and/or statutory; de facto/de jure)?
- Do external actors recognize and respect the community's collective rights and responsibilities and the territory of life in practice? Are there significant conflicts over land tenure and/or use of natural resources?
- Is there existing documentation or specific information to back-up our responses to these questions?

Documenting a territory of life: Questions for a grassroots discussion

These questions can help the community decide whether and how to create additional documentation about its territory of life.

- Is information about the territory of life readily available to our community?
- Has it been openly shared and discussed?
- What formats is the key information in – e.g. maps, lists, pictures, stories, written documents…?
- Are there formats that would be particularly useful to our community? For example, should oral information be documented through participatory mapping or video?
- Is there information not yet available/documented and that it would be useful to have?
- How can this documentation be obtained/created?
- What will our community do with the documented information?
- How and with whom will documentation be shared? (See also **#Act & Communicate** and **#Act with Others**)
- Are there **concerns** or **risks** from creating or sharing documentation? How can we address these?
- Are there **new opportunities** from creating or sharing documentation? How can we act on these?

The ICCA Consortium template to document a territory of life, and other useful tools

There are many tools that can be useful to document territories of life in different ways.

The following two tools deserve to be especially highlighted:

The ICCA Consortium template for recording key information about a territory of life

Download the template in **Word** (to be completed electronically) or **PDF** (to be completed by hand, e.g. during a grassroots discussion).

This template is not a substitute for other documentation, such as maps, videos, story circles, etc. Rather, it provides a simple place to store key information. This information can be useful for many

purposes, including preparing the documentation for national or international databases the community may choose to join (e.g., National ICCA Registry, **LandMark** database, **International ICCA Registry** and **World Database of Protected Areas**, etc.) and describing the territory of life for a variety of initiatives. The template can also be used as a questionnaire to guide one or several grassroots discussions.

Note: The template may be filled in by one or several members of the facilitation team based on the results of several meetings and activities. The completed template should be freely available for the community to access, consult and comment upon.

The Mapeo mapping tool

Mapeo has been specifically developed by Digital Democracy for the documentation and mapping purposes of indigenous and local communities, in close collaboration with indigenous peoples and local organizations in the Amazon. It is an easy-to-use tool that works from cellphones and laptops, without need for internet connection, allowing to map a territory with GPS position points, adding photos and notes through a simple interface. All data remains fully under the control of the community, who can choose whether to share any of their information externally. Mapeo also features functions to facilitate registration in the **International ICCA Registry** and **World Database on Protected Areas**.

There are many tools that can be useful to document territories of life in different ways. The **ICCA Consortium working group on documenting territories of life** aims to provide up to date information and facilitate knowledge exchange about different tools, methods and resources. A more complete selection of these is presented in the 'Meanings and Resources' website: toolbox.iccaconsortium.org/resources/document/.

See how others do it!

Photo: © Glaiza Tabanao

Read about the Manobo peoples' experience in documenting their Pangasananan (ICCA) in the Philippines, working with local and international allies and using a variety of participatory methods and technical tools.

Documenting and mapping the Pangasananan of the Manobo People of Bislig (Mindanao, the Philippines)

Prepared by Glaiza Tabanao, the Philippines

Pangasananan is the name of the territory of life of the Manobo people, situated in the north-east of Mindanao island, Bislig City. The name originates from the Manobo word *pangasan* (i.e., the act of obtaining food and materials to meet certain needs, such as timber, ritual materials, decorations, materials for household use, etc.) and *anan*, a suffix denoting a place. Originally much bigger, the *Pangasananan* was overlapped by a huge timber concession for pulp and paper, which decimated the original forest. It now covers just 70 km^2, but it remains the source of everything the Manobo need— food, shelter, medicines, water, recreational and spiritual space, and livelihoods for about 1,500 men and women. For the Manobo people, the destruction of the *Pangasananan* would mean their own downfall, the obliteration of their identity and an utter disrespect of their ancestors. Hence, it is of prime importance for them to govern, manage and conserve the *Pangasananan* for their community to thrive through generations.

When this drive to survive and thrive was threatened by large-scale logging operations, uncontrolled entry of migrants, and expansion of commercial agricultural areas in their territory, the Manobo youth of the early 1990s decided to fight back and explore means to stop the destruction and secure what remained of their *Pangasananan*.

Early on in that process, the Manobo recognized that it would be difficult to continue without allies. Hence, they forged partnerships with a local church group, different armed groups, some migrant settlers, and non-governmental organizations. As the logging company threatened them with guns, they naturally sought guns to defend themselves and their territory. From their new partners they were seeking advice, financial support and the new knowledge and skills they needed to win the fight. They obtained all that. For instance, in 2004 they became aware of a relatively new law called the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA), which would allow them to obtain a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) and legalize ownership of their territory. However, to obtain a CADT, a lot of information needed to be gathered, validated, and packaged as proof of their ownership of the territory. This became the impetus for information-gathering, documentation, and mapping activities.

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Documentation activities became intensive and were fast-tracked when the community got to work with an NGO called the Philippine Association for Intercultural Development (PAFID), Inc. in 2009. Though PAFID, the Manobo

also became acquainted with the ICCA Consortium the following year. It was at that time that the Manobo realized that, while seeking to secure the governance of their territory, they were also contributing to the global fight to save the natural environment. They became aware that they had been living of, cradling, protecting, conserving, and fighting for what others call an ICCA or 'territory of life', but that they had always known as their *Pangasananan*. Aside from being a source of empowerment, they saw this realisation as an opportunity to find more allies in protecting their territory, improving conservation initiatives, nurturing traditional practices, gathering more knowledge and skills, strengthening their claims, and improving their living conditions. Hence, the community decided to document their ICCA and submit it to be included in the International **ICCA Registry**. In 2017, their legal claim over the *Pangasananan* was given a boost by its inclusion in a national ICCA project that provided resources for their documentation work. The project was supported by the UN Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Philippine Government through the Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB-DENR) and NCIP (National Commission on Indigenous Peoples).

What information was gathered?

For their CADT application, the community documented and gathered the following information, with support from PAFID:

- historical evidence of occupation and use of the territory;
- history of the Manobo as a people and as a community;
- indigenous knowledge systems and practices (IKSP), spiritual beliefs, and traditional governance systems;
- photographs of important places, landmarks, traditional activities and livelihoods;
- genealogical trees and clan histories;
- anecdotal and quantitative data about natural resources;
- current community initiatives, situations, needs, opportunities, and threats;
- extensive socio-demographic data;
- geographical and physical description of the territory;
- current land uses and zonation; and
- boundaries and extent of the Manobo ancestral domain.

Initially done to satisfy government requirements for the recognition of their ancestral domain and to develop an Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP), this information proved useful for the documentation and registration of their ICCA and the consequent crafting of a Community Conservation Plan (CCP). Information was also gathered about their forest carbon stock, conservation activities, traditional knowledge and practices contributing to nature conservation, updated land uses, hazard-prone areas, and ecological significance and biodiversity values of the *Pangasananan*.

How was the information collected?

The needed information was gathered through participatory research, community mapping, and participatory rapid appraisal methods. An open and participatory approach was used in all of these, which allowed for in-depth analysis of the information, provided an opportunity for shared learning and cross-validation, and cultivated a strong sense of ownership of the data and information amongst the members of the community. This ensured the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the information gathered.

These are the steps we took:

1. Free, prior and informed consent

The FPIC document provided by the international ICCA Registry was translated into the local language and discussed with an initial group of leaders and members of the community. Each part of the document was explained and discussed, together with information on the benefits, advantages and limitations of uploading data to the ICCA International Registry and issues of data ownership, etc. In the end, the community decided that the benefits of inscription of their territory of life were more important than the limitations and risks also implied.

2. Identification and Training of Community Research Associates

Community Research Associates (CRAs) were identified by community elders and leaders. They were then provided an orientation on the goals and objectives of the research as well as various methods of research and spatial data generation using participatory mapping methods. Finally, they were trained in the conduct of participatory natural resource appraisal.

3. Participatory Research

Participatory research was accomplished through primary and secondary methods, including direct observation, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and review of existing literature, documentation, and research. These were conducted in both formal and informal settings, whichever was applicable. Informants were identified during the leaders' and elders' meetings and interviews. The research team also developed a checklist of existing, relevant documents from the community, the internet, government, and academia, as well as from prior databanks of PAFID.

Major research topics included the history of the Manobo; traditional and current livelihood activities and schedules; spiritual belief systems; rituals; management and use of natural resources; traditional and contemporary governance systems and structures; and history, location, description and stories about the Pangasananan. Also discussed were the threats to the territory of life and the Manobo people as its custodian. Finally, information was gathered about traditional arts, crafts, music, traditional healing practices; spirit myths; the history of culturally important places; important plants and their uses; and rituals (descriptions, materials used, and why were they used).

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4. Community Mapping

Participatory mapping entailed several steps, including:

- Field-based identification of important geographical features using GPS receiver;
- Construction of the 3-D map model;
- Land use coding;
- Digitalization of data and establishment of Geographic Information System (GIS) database;
- Community map validation; and
- Finalization of validated maps/GIS database.

Assisted by a PAFID technical team, GPS-trained members of the community conducted a field-based perimeter survey to delineate the Pangasananan. They took a perimeter walk to mark off the natural boundary lines and cultural markers of the domain. They also took point positions of important geographical features inside the domain. These included the location of barangay sitios (municipality buildings), schools, health centers, markets, bridges, concrete and rough roads, and rivers and streams. All the data gathered were overlaid on a topographic map. This was then used as the base map for determining the extent of the domain.

In 2009, a 3-D map with a scale of 1:10,000 had already been prepared by the community with the help of PAFID. In community workshops, PAFID technical staff had facilitated sketch mapping activities to enable the community to identify the limits of the Pangasananan and determine its full coverage. Community participants recalled and wrote the names of mountains, rivers, sacred areas, and old villages in the indigenous language and provided historical accounts of these. They identified important landmarks such as burial sites, caves, lakes, community boundaries, protected forests, and others. These sketch maps provided the basis for preparing larger topographic and base maps that were used to construct a relief model of their domain: a 3-D map!

Photo: © Glaiza Tabanao

Made mainly from overlapping rubber sheets, resin, and paint, the 3-D map offered a full view of the natural boundaries of the territory and detailed physical characteristics of the mountains and bodies of water. The elders described the current utilization of land and identified through pushpins, strings and paint the locations of sacred

grounds, hunting areas, old dwelling sites, etc. inside the ancestral domain map. The information from the group was then consolidated and validated to ensure that the map was both accurate and user-friendly.

Data from the 3-D map was then digitized using computer software (Quantum GIS version 2.14.0 and ArcGIS version 10.1). Digitized copies of spatial information about the ancestral domain/ ICCA/ territory of life (the three were confirmed as synonymous for the community) were deposited into a GIS database and used in the production of several maps with different themes. Processing and production of various thematic maps was accomplished by PAFID's GIS specialist. A total of 23 thematic maps were generated from the participatory map processing and through the GIS data obtained from the government, NGO partners, and online open-source GIS platforms such as Google Maps and OpenStreet Map. These maps are listed below:

- Location Map
- ICCA Boundary Map
- Overlap of ICCA and other CADT areas
- Present Land Use/Cover 2017
- Past Land Cover 1900
- Past Land Cover 1997
- Past Land Cover 2004
- Proposed Land Use
- Land Classification
- Mining Tenements
- NPAA (Network of Protected Areas for Agriculture)
- NPAAAD (Network of Protected Areas for Agricultural and Agro-Industrial Development)
- Soil Type
- Slope Classification
- Overlap of the ICCA and Tinuy-an Protected Landscape
- Overlap of the ICCA and Bislig[1] Key Biodiversity Area (KBA)
- Overlap of the ICCA and Bislig Important Bird Area (IBA)
- Fault Lines
- Landslide Susceptibility
- Flood Susceptibility
- Road Networks
- River Networks
- Resource Inventory

The precise and user-friendly maps merged local people's knowledge and spatial data through GIS technology to serve as a powerful medium for better communication and analysis. These maps were useful in better understanding and describing the local situations, the location of hazards, the areas in need of reforestation and the forests in need of rehabilitation. The community also realized the importance of their ICCA—territory of life as a water source for Bislig and as a cradle of biodiversity. The community could then use this information to craft their proposed land uses, activities and policies.

[1] Bislig is a town in Mindanao close to the ancestral domain of the Manobo and famous for birdwatching.

5. Participatory Appraisal of natural resources

A Participatory Appraisal was done to determine the situation and conditions of natural resources in the ancestral domain. The resource inventory assessed carbon stock in trees as well as floral biodiversity in forests within the Pangasananan.

A 1-kilometer transect line, two 500-meter transect lines and two 0.25-ha forest plots were established within the ICCA. Total above-ground carbon stock was derived with regression equations used by the Kalahan Education Foundation while biodiversity was estimated using species richness and diversity values derived from Shannon's as well as Simpson's **diversity indices**.

The faunal survey relied on anecdotal observations from the locals. Free-listing of names and uses of plants and animals observed by community were also done. Pictures of known birds and snakes were shown to community members to determine which ones were commonly sighted in the Pangasananan.

Information was also gathered on the floral type, location/habitat and service/value that the Traditional Indicator Species (floral species identified by the community as indicative of the health of their forest) provide to the tribe and its environment. The Manobo's definition of a forest and the presence/absence of traditional indicator species were then used as basis to assess the indicative health of the inventoried forests.

The establishment of transect lines and assessment of biodiversity using internationally-used indexes, together with the identification of traditional indicator species, show how scientific and traditional methods can blend into simple techniques that the community understands, appreciates and can ultimately use to strengthen the governance of their territory of life.

Photo: © Glaiza Tabanao

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UNDERSTAND

Once sufficient information about the territory of life has been gathered and shared within your community (see **#Document**), self-strengthening can focus on the community's understanding of the **overall situation or 'health' of the territory of life.** Specifically, at the links below, you can find a simple tool and questions for grassroots discussions to understand:

- **the resilience and security of your territory of life;**
- **the main strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats facing your territory of life;**
- **the governance of your territory of life; and**
- **the management of your territory of life.**

While this guidance focuses on the territory of life, this element is aligned with the kind of broad situation analysis that usually takes place in a participatory process at the community level. As ecological, social, cultural, spiritual, political and economic aspects are naturally interrelated in a territory of life, the community will also discuss itself, its reality and its future.

Understanding the resilience and security of a territory of life: A dedicated tool

Resilience and security are crucial aspects of the overall 'health' of territories of life. **Resilience** concerns its capacity to recover from shocks and damage. **Security** concerns the likelihood that the territory of life will continue to exist and thrive.

The ICCA Consortium has developed a simple tool to help communities self-assess the resilience and security of a territory of life, based on five essential elements or 'building blocks':

- the **strength of the custodian community**;
- the **connection between the community and its territory**;
- the **functioning of the governance institution**;
- the **territory's conservation status**; and
- the **livelihoods and wellbeing of the community**.

This dedicated tool can be used as questionnaire to guide one or more grassroots discussions.

The facilitation team may fill the form electronically (**here**) and save the information. To use during a meeting, however, printing the pdf version of the tool (**here**) may be more practical.

The collected information will be important for understanding the current situation and for monitoring progress towards the community's desired future. For that, indicators of the building blocks of the resilience and security of the territory of life should be identified and monitored through time (see **#Review & Renew**).

Always keep in mind the need for **free, prior and informed consent** and ethical use of the community's information!

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities & threats: Questions for a grassroots discussion

Building upon the self-assessment of resilience and security, your community can further identify the most important strengths and challenges, opportunities and threats related to the territory of life. Ideally, these questions are asked immediately after using the Tool, or at a meeting that takes place shortly afterwards. You may start by reflecting on some **obvious trends** (for example, increasing or decreasing conflicts in the community, ecosystem regeneration or degradation, out-migration or immigration, decrease or increase in the respect of the governance institution's rules, impacts of climate change), before moving to the following questions:

Strengths and weaknesses

- What are the **most important issues** that arose regarding the 'building blocks' of resilience and security?
- If the tool was used by diverse small groups in our community, are the 'scores' and identified key issues similar for all groups? If not, what are the main differences? What does that reveal?
- What are the **key elements of strength** of our territory of life?
- What are the most **serious internal and/or external weaknesses** of our territory of life?

Threats and opportunities

- Is our territory of life currently facing any **threats**? Do we see any threats emerging?
- Would these threats have different implications for different groups in our community, such as women, elders, young people, ethnic minorities or those sharing their main means of livelihood?
- Are there **opportunities** to strengthen our territory of life that we can act on?
- Would these opportunities have different **implications for different groups** in our community?
- Can the existing governance of the territory of life meaningfully and rapidly counteract threats or take advantage of new opportunities?
- Can territory of life management practices be meaningfully and rapidly changed if the need arises?

Note: The last two questions are discussed in more detail in the following sections, on **#governance** and **#management** of the territory of life. The community should decide whether they wish to go into more depth in their understanding and analysis.

Governing a territory of life: Questions for a grassroots discussion

A legitimate, equitable and effective system of governance is necessary for a territory of life to remain alive and thriving through time. A governance institution for a territory of life usually includes one or more social structures (e.g., a community general assembly, a council of elders, a municipal council) as well as a system of values and processes that contribute to developing, agreeing upon, and enforcing rules and regulations.

> Governance is about who decides, how decisions are taken, and who makes sure that decisions are implemented. It concerns power, authority and responsibility. **Learn more!**

While the **#resilience and security tool** includes some basic questions on territory of life governance, a community may wish to have a more in-depth discussion and understanding of this important topic. The guiding questions below can help in this:

Legitimacy and fairness

- Is our territory of life governance institution accepted and appreciated by the entire community?
- Are the perspectives of all groups within our community fairly represented in the decision-making and communications processes for our territory of life?
- Do some groups in our community — e.g., men and women, elders and young people, ethnic minorities or

language groups — benefit more, or experience more negative impacts because of our decisions about our territory of life? If so, how can we remedy that?

- Can decision-making processes for our territory of life be made fairer and more effective? How?
- Can the enforcement of rules for our territory of life be made fairer and more effective? How?

Vision

- Is there a clear and shared vision for our territory of life? Is there a plan to reach that vision? (See also **#Vision & Celebrate**)
- Were our vision and plan developed with the participation and agreement of all concerned community members?
- Do our vision and plan inspire the involvement, support and commitment of our community?

Accountability and transparency

- Are the rules and ways of caring for our territory of life well known within our community? And by relevant external actors?
- Do community members feel able to talk about territory of life governance and management? Does this differ across groups—e.g., men and women, elders and young people, ethnic minorities or language groups?
- Does our community maintain documentation about our territory of life, including governance and management practices?
- Do community members have access to information about our territory of life, including any financial accounting?

Leadership and responsibility

- Is our territory of life governance institution energetic, committed, impartial, courageous? Does it embody other culturally important values?
- Are there strong and committed leaders or 'champions' of our territory of life within our community?
- Are these leaders able to inspire commitment and involvement across our community?

Performance and learning

- Is the territory of life well conserved, with its ecological health maintained or improving?
- Are threats and opportunities recognised and responded to in equitable and effective ways?
- Does the territory of life contribute to local sustainable livelihoods?
- Does it contribute to maintaining the cultural heritage and pride of the community?
- Does it contribute to the community's self-determination and the enjoyment of collective rights and responsibilities?
- Are both historical and new knowledge and learning incorporated into the vision and decisions about the territory of life?

Managing a territory of life: Questions for a grassroots discussion

Territory of life 'management' encompasses all the actions taken to care for it, as well as to maintain and realize benefits from it. This usually includes a variety of activities, directed and informed by governance decisions, that include surveillance and enforcement of rules, harvesting and caring for natural resources, and monitoring and on-going evaluation of results. Management activities are often laid-out and described in a management plan (or its equivalent) which can be adjusted over time to respond to changes and lessons learned.

> Management is about what is done to reach specific objectives. It usually concerns a set of activities and the means of carrying them out. **Learn more!**

While the **#resilience and security tool** includes some basic questions on territory of life management, the facilitation team may wish to accompany the community to have a more in-depth discussion and understanding on this important topic. The guiding questions below can help in this effort.

Management Plan

- Is there a (written or oral) management plan in place?
- Is the plan fully informed by our community's knowledge and experience?
- Does the plan respect our community's decisions and vision for the territory of life?
- Are management activities and their results/impacts monitored?
- Is the management plan integrated with broader plans (e.g. land use planning at municipal or district level) in a way that enables the contributions and needs of the territory of life to be recognized and addressed?

Human and technical capacities

- Are there enough people engaged in managing the territory of life and– in particular– are they able to enforce the rules agreed by our community?
- Do they have the skills and equipment they need to effectively implement the management plan?
- If not, could they be trained or otherwise acquire those skills and equipment?

Resources and contributions

- Are currently available resources and contributions able to meet the management needs of our territory of life – e.g. volunteer time, contributions in kind, infrastructure (boat, car, cell phones), funding?

- Is the source of these resources and contributions secure and sustainable?
- What could be improved with more, or more appropriate, resources?

While a community role in governance is necessary for a 'defined' territory of life, a community role in management is not.

Some custodian communities choose not to manage their territories directly. This could be for technical, legal or practical reasons. In all cases, however, direct or delegated effective management of a territory of life is necessary for a community to build and maintain its sustainable self-determination. It is thus important to understand how the management is done, including the knowledge, skills and human and financial capacities on which it depends.

Photo: © Ashish Kothari

VISION & CELEBRATE

A foundational moment of any self-strengthening process is when the community **recognizes itself as the custodian of its territory of life and collectively commits** to maintaining that role into the future. This commitment may look different for different peoples and communities, but it usually centres on the **collective capacities and will to govern and manage the relevant territory**.

Self-recognition as a community custodian is often strongest when built upon or along with a **shared vision for the territory of life**. Some communities feel that such a vision is implicit in their spiritual beliefs and way of life, but still find it useful to make it explicit. Others may find it useful to generate, or further develop, and articulate such a vision. While agreeing upon a shared vision is far from simple, this goal can often be achieved with **sensitive facilitation** and **time** to discuss and evaluate options.

The moment of collective self-recognition of your community may **culminate in an event where you will affirm a vision of the desired future**, commit to your role as custodians and kindle your enthusiasm and sense of unity. This may require a substantial amount of prior organising, developing elements of shared understandings that may take months or years to grow.

In all cases, if and when your **community recognizes itself as custodian of the territory of life** and commits to continuing in that role… the moment calls for a **celebration** or other appropriate event!

It can be argued that the **collective capacities to govern and manage** will contribute to— and strengthen— the **collective rights and responsibilities** for the conservation (diversity, integrity…) of the territory and for the **sustainable self-determination** of its custodians. Depending on the context, your community will then decide whether it will seek to have such rights and responsibilities **recognized in national legislation and policy, and/or in practice**. In other words, do you need and wish to receive respect and appropriate support (including FPIC for interventions) from other communities, the state, and other external actors? If so, you can best seek this from a firm grounding in your own self-recognition and commitment. Learn more about these key concepts on: **toolbox.iccaconsortium.org/meanings-and-more/**

Self-recognizing as custodian of a territory of life: Questions for a grassroots discussion

The facilitation team can offer the questions below to help the community strengthen its self-recognition as custodian of a territory of life. This can be done **before, during or after** the grassroots discussion focused on **developing a vision of the desired future**.

- Is it clear that some choices to be made today— by the government, the private sector, other communities or ourselves— will significantly affect the future of our territory of life and ourselves? Do we have any example of such choices?
- Are there some **basic decisions that the community can make today** to affect such choices? Do we have any example of such decisions?
- Can we imagine ourselves in the future as a thriving community acting as custodian of **a thriving territory of life**? Could we be living well, working and supporting our own livelihoods while maintaining our territory in thriving conditions?
- What would that imply for the way we live, work and organise ourselves? Are we **ready and willing** to do this?
- Are we ready **to commit** to support such choices, for instance by developing and signing a **pledge**, a **charter** or a list of **principles and criteria** we are willing to follow in our relation to the territory of life?

For discussing these questions, you may explore the concepts of '**Custodians/Stewards/Guardians**' and '**Sustainable self-determination**', see: **toolbox.iccaconsortium.org/meanings-and-more/**

An excellent way to help your community to vision its desired future and take the crucial decisions about it is to have some **representatives travel to see what has happened in other territories** as a result of choices and decisions made by other communities, governments and others. When your representatives return, they will share what they have learned, inform others and clarify the likely consequences of your actions.

Visioning the desired future of the territory of life: Questions for a grassroots discussion

To develop a collective vision of the desired future for a territory of life and its custodian community, the following questions can be a good starting point:

- How would our territory of life look if it was **fully thriving today** ('the best it could be')? Let us imagine that in terms of appearance (e.g. landscape, nature, human settlements, roads, presence of the community, apparent behaviour of people…) but also of intrinsic characteristics (e.g. quality of soil, water, air, integrity of ecological functions, presence of biological diversity and cultural diversity, sense of wellbeing…)
- How would our territory **look in the future – e.g. five, ten, and fifty years from now**—if it were to be **fully thriving then**? Again, let us imagine it in terms of both appearance and intrinsic characteristics.

Various participants in the grassroots discussion may describe their desired future for the territory of life differently. If so, the facilitation team could then investigate:

- Are there **common elements** among our individual visions?
- Can we identify those and agree on **a set of basic elements of a vision we all share**?
- Based on such vision, can we re-affirm **our role as custodians**?

Various forms of **guided imagery** can be used to develop a collective vision of the desired future for a territory of life and its custodian community; see **guided imagery tool**.

The facilitation team may wish to list the common elements of the collective vision and confirm that everyone agrees with them.

Celebrating commitment to the territory of life: Questions for a grassroots discussion

A celebration can highlight what the community has achieved and what it wishes to further achieve, generating pride and new energy and visibly expressing the **collective commitment to conserve a territory of life**. Celebrations are crucial to place shared memories, self-awareness and unity at the centre of community life.

...what do we wish to celebrate, and why?

- Should our shared vision and commitment to the territory of life be marked by a **ceremony** or other event with the participation of the community at large?
- What would be the **desired, positive results** of that celebration? Would there be any potential problems with holding a celebration? If potential problems exist, what can we do to counteract them?
- **What type of event** would be appropriate – e.g., a traditional ceremony, possibly including spiritual elements? A 'modern' event with speeches and signatures? A mix of approaches? An elaborate event with various elements (food and drinks, songs, dances, art displays, fair of natural products from the territory of life, etc.)?
- What terms shall we use to refer to our territory of life and our custodian community? Do we have a specific **name** for the territory, already discussed and broadly agreed by the community at large that could be re-affirmed and widely used? (See also **#Act & Communicate**)
- How shall we organise the celebration to make sure we reach the desired results? For instance, should we share information or a statement on our vision of the desired future? Should we share a statement of our self-recognition as custodians, e.g. the pledge, charter or principles and criteria we have agreed? If so, who should pronounce such statements – e.g. community elders, youth, the governing body of the territory of life? Should we include in the programme a discussion of any official document that recognises our community as custodian of the territory?

...how do we organise the celebration?

- If we hold a celebration, **when** should it take place? Should it coincide with a market fair or holiday? Should we celebrate after a collective walk in the territory, as done in many traditional cultures? If so, which season and period would work best?
- Should everyone in the community be engaged? What role should elders play? Youth? Women? Men? Children?
- Who should be invited to join the celebration (e.g. only our community or also other communities, state authorities, allies, etc.)?
- Who should organise the ceremony? Can a few people volunteer to be in charge?
- Who should support it (e.g. with time, funding, food, drinks, music or other contributions)?

There is no 'best moment': A celebration at a time of enhanced threats or new opportunity can re-affirm the community vision and generate energy for action. A celebration that takes place after forming a concrete action plan to reach the shared vision that has been agreed upon can kindle willingness to engage and act (see also **#Act & Communicate**)

See how others do it!

Creating and committing to a vision for the Salween Peace Park

Kholo Tamutaku Karer (in English: Salween Peace Park) covers 5,485 km2 of the Salween River basin, a region in Burma/Myanmar that is of great importance to both global biodiversity and the livelihoods of many Karen indigenous communities. The Salween River basin has been the territory of life of its indigenous Karen custodians for about three thousand years, but the **self-declaration of the Salween Peace Park** is relatively recent (December 2018).

The approximately 60,000 residents went through a long and laborious process of successive consultations, developed a Charter including agreed rules, and finally proclaimed that their territory was dedicated to fulfilling three of their core aspirations: 1. peace and self-determination; 2. environmental integrity; and 3. cultural survival. In an area that has suffered from over 60 years of civil war, the territory is now dedicated to generating peace and protecting a stronghold of biodiversity and Karen culture (including customary land governance and management systems) from old and new threats.

Photo: © Jittrapon Kaicome

Gha Lay Der villagers are harvesting in their paddy farms

Photo: © Jittrapon Kaicome

ETH seed sharing organic garden upland farming groups

Photo: © Jittrapon Kaicome

Farmers sell their produce that they grew using traditional Karen cultivation techniques at a local market

From Battlefields to Refuge: Introducing The Salween Peace Park; KESAN, 2017, 4 min. A powerful and telling account of how the Karen communities organised themselves to affirm their vision in a Charter, declare the Salween Peace Park, plan for the future and celebrate their own achievements and commitment for the future.

Celebrating the Salween Peace Park Proclamation; KESAN, 2018, 11 min.

Photo: © Ashish Kothari

ACT & COMMUNICATE

For a self-strengthening process to produce concrete results, sooner or later your community will need to 'act'. This typically includes **developing and implementing one or more specific initiatives**.

These initiatives should draw from the understanding of your community's own strengths and challenges and the threats and opportunities it faces (see **#Understand**) in relationship to its role as custodian and vision of the desired future (see **#Vision & Celebrate**). In other words, your community should together consider and agree on what needs to happen for its shared vision of the territory of life to become reality.

For instance, if your community wants to maintain its territory for healthy living, it needs to prevent the establishment of ecologically damaging industries. This might involve figuring out how to stop such industries from obtaining government concessions. If the community wishes for local youth to stay local, rather than migrating to towns, it can enhance the local education and livelihood opportunities. This requires **foresight, dedicated planning and resources**.

In connection to developing action plans, and to self-strengthening processes more broadly, your custodian community is likely to relate with others – such as other communities, allied organisations and the government - and **communicate in strategic ways about its territory of life**. This may happen at various levels – e.g., local, landscape, national and international — and for a variety of reasons. Communication initiatives are often devised to inform others about the territory of life and the community's action and customary/legal rights and responsibilities. One common aim is to make sure that your community is appropriately recognized, supported and respected, and another is to obtain help in specific activities, according to what the community has decided.

…the many benefits of good communication: Communication initiatives often bring benefits to the community that go beyond the obvious. For example, through developing and sharing communications, the community reinforces its **internal awareness** and **transparency**, and thus, improves governance. Communicating also forges connections with other communities. You can inspire other communities… and, likewise, **hear from** them, **discover** similarities, **learn** from them and ultimately **collaborate** with them (see **#Act with Others**). Communication approaches need to be strategically designed and tailored to their specific context and needs. Useful information and material will likely exist from the prior **#reflect**, **#document** and **#understand** elements but more could be generated by a dedicated community Communication Team, who should be specifically knowledgeable and active.

Plan and act: Questions for a grassroots discussion

The questions below can support your community in sketching out a simple **situation analysis** and identifying the **priority actions** to move towards the vision of the desired future for the territory of life and the custodian community.

- Reflecting on the strengths, challenges, threats, and opportunities facing our territory of life (see **#Understand**) and our role as custodians (see **#Vision & Celebrate**), **what needs to happen, or change,** to achieve the positive vision of our community and our territory of life, now and in the future?
- Is there something impeding that change? If yes, what can we do to surmount or counteract it?

– ...What are our priority actions?

- Possibilities include:
  - Defending the territory of life against specific threats
  - Enhancing the recognition (e.g. legal recognition) of our community tenure or other rights
  - Enhancing respect for our community governance – external and/or internal
  - Restoring or better protecting the ecosystems or species in our territory of life
  - Enhancing the capacity of our territory to support our community livelihoods (e.g. by providing us with water, productive resources, protection from disasters)
  - Enhancing the connection between our territory and community
  - Receiving concrete backing of local rules from the police, technical agencies, the justice system…
  - Gaining better external or internal socio-economic support to do what we need to as custodians

After your community has identified one or more priorities on which to act, **concrete planning** can start. Discussion questions include:

– ...the What?, Who?, and When? of the action plan

- For each one of our chosen priorities, what exactly do we wish to achieve?
- **Who** could be engaged?
  - What can we do, as a community on our own? Is there any major change needed in the way in which we live, work and organise ourselves?
  - Who, within our community, can (or could) provide leadership and inspiration?
  - Do we see any specific role for the elders in our community? The youth? The women? The men? The children?
  - Who else is (or could be) engaged and committed?

  - What can we do together with other custodian communities and local allies?
  - What partnerships or alliances can we count on or seek anew? (See also **#Act with Others**)
- **What** specific 'priority actions' should we take?
- Are elements of **#communication** to be involved in our priority actions?
- **When** shall we act? If applicable, shall we communicate before ('announce what we will do') or after our action ('report what we have done')?
- **What human, financial and other resources** do we need?
  - Do we have resources to implement our priority actions– including knowledge, skills, information, time, and any relevant technology (e.g., cameras, GPS, vehicles, communication equipment…)?
  - What supplementary technical, human and/or financial resources do we need?
  - How can we obtain those supplemental resources – e.g. from other communities, partners, donors, etc.?
  - How shall we monitor and report on our progress? (See also **#Review & Renew**).

Here you can find **tools and methods** that can be included as part of these grassroots discussions: group brainstorming, problem and solution mapping, nominal group techniques, ranking exercises, and more!

See how others do it!

The Wampis succeed in expelling illegal gold miners from the Peruvian Amazon…

In early 2016, the destruction and contamination caused by illegal small-scale gold mining – using motor pumps and mercury in riverbeds – became a major worry for many along the Rio Santiago (Kanus) in the Integral Autonomous Territory of the indigenous Wampis people in the northern Amazon of Peru. At an assembly in one of the affected communities, Puerto Galilea, about 100 participants discussed the problem and decided to take action. They formally asked the leaders of the then recently established autonomous government of the Wampis Nation to coordinate a campaign to enforce the prohibition of this dangerous activity.

> The assembly issued an ultimatum to the gold miners: they had one month to leave the Wampis' territory.

During that month, further assemblies were held, to involve other communities beyond Puerto Galilea and to try to convince those who still supported the gold extraction. (Those supporters received economic benefits from the presence of the miners). At that time, a commission was also formed and was sent to Lima to pressure the

responsible authorities to act. The commission brough the petition directly to the recipients and amplified its impact by denouncing the authorities' indifference via media interviews. This public pressure was complemented by the announcement that the Wampis would "peacefully evict" the gold miners on their own if state authorities failed to do it.

The website of the Wampis Nation's Autonomous Territorial Government is a good example for effective online communication with background information, news updates, and links to different social media channels (in Spanish): **nacionwampis.com**

Shortly before the ultimatum ended, the miners abandoned the main extraction site, hiding their machinery. Despite this, the Wampis Nation mobilized about 200 men who travelled with a chartered boat from different communities for an inspection of the main illegal mining site. They were accompanied by the police and a state attorney, who confirmed that the mining activities were illegal. Some of the miners, however, were not fully discouraged and they later returned, as there was no permanent supervision of the site and the local civil defense force remained inactive.

It took the Wampis government about another year to solve the situation. Throughout the year, they continued to pressure state authorities, required and obtained the intervention of the police, formed a surveillance committee with members of the municipality and civil defense, and even organised a second eviction expedition before they finally obtained satisfaction. In 2018, they finally managed to terminate all illegal gold mining along the Rio Santiago… and hopefully this was once and for all. Interestingly, the success of the campaign seems to be based on the persistence of the Wampis nation. They kept meeting, planning and acting in an iterative way and they never let go of their ultimate goal.

Photos: Jacob Balzani-Lööv

Queremos vida sana, no queremos contaminación. The Wampis' campaign against illegal gold mining is covered in this 18-minute film (in Spanish; Portuguese subtitles).

Communicate in a strategic way: Questions for a grassroots discussion

There are different levels on which a community may wish to communicate:

- **Internally** – e.g., making sure that everyone knows the rules and regulations for the territory; celebrating the community's relationship with the territory; enhancing care for and commitment to the territory across generations; increasing community self-awareness, transparency, and accountability;
- **Across the local landscape** – e.g., raising awareness about the territory of life, including the rules and regulations; enhancing respect from and helping to coordinate with custodian communities of other territories of life and other actors; and
- **At the national and/or international level** and with relevant territory of life networks – e.g., backing-up appropriate recognition and support for the territory of life and/or territories of life in general.

Useful questions for planning strategic and effective communication include:

... the Why, Who and What?

- **Why** do we want to communicate about our territory of life?
- Who are the **audiences** we wish to reach and what are our specific objectives for our diverse audiences, i.e. what do we wish them to understand and do?
- Are we ready to move **from information to real communication**, i.e., to receive feedback and engage in open conversations?
- **What specific information or "story"** do we wish to share with each audience? (e.g., that we care for and protect our territory? that we face threats? that we could seize opportunities together with other communities?)

... the How and Where of sharing an information or story

- Holding direct exchanges in informal or formal meetings and/or celebrations within our community and with neighbouring communities
- Organising walks inside the territory of life with both elders and youth, ensuring enough time to discuss information in depth
- Creating and sharing radio programmes, video- and photo-stories, street or village theatre, poems, or songs about our territory
- Inviting journalists to do interviews or writing content for newspapers, radio, television, or our own publications
- Writing and diffusing leaflets, articles, books or posters
- Asking our schoolteachers to hold topical discussions with our kids in school
- Making sure that someone in the community sets up a web site about our territory of life and organises a group exchange in the most common social media available in our community

- Convincing our youth active in social media that information with direct relevance about the territory of life could and should be shared in their own networks—in particular when the territory is under threat or it is time to celebrate an important achievement.

...and the risks, opportunities, capacities and resources

- Are there **risks** in sharing information about the territory of life – e.g. exacerbating conflicts or drawing unwanted attention? How can these be avoided or minimised?
- Are there **opportunities** in sharing information about the territory of life – e.g. enhanced support and security for the territory of life and the custodian community? How can those be optimised?
- Within the community, **who can best contribute** to communication efforts? Are there specific communication skills and resources that we could effectively use (e.g., people with theatre skills, writing skills, a great voice, social media experience)?
- Should our community establish a specific communication team or committee?
- Is there a need for external support for our communication activities? If yes, for what?

Your communication is **strategic** when the intent is clear, the pros and cons have been thoroughly discussed, and meaningful communication decisions are taken and implemented. Your communication is **effective** when it achieves its expected results.

See how others do it!

Read these stories of the use of radio stations to strengthen action in the Peruvian Amazon and in Senegal, and browse through many examples of participatory video!

Tuntui Wampis raises awareness and strengthens action for the Wampis territory of life

Broadcast radio programmes in local languages can be a powerful tool for sharing information and inspiring action in support of territories of life. 'Tuntui Wampis' is a local radio station that serves the autonomous territorial government of the Wampis Nation in Peru—an indigenous self-governance institution established in 2015. One of the first decisions of the autonomous Wampis government has been to establish a radio station to serve its people. The name refers to the Tuntui drum traditionally used to send messages at a distance. Broadcasting in Wampis language and Spanish, the radio programmes reinforce a sense of pride and inform the Wampis communities, which are spread out in a large territory, about the process of governance and the decisions taken during the Wampis summits. The programmes describe and call for the respect of rules and regulations and

inform the Wampis about how to face their ongoing threats. Given the poor overall communication infrastructure in the Wampis Territory, a crucial service of the radio station is the transmission of greetings among family members and friends living in distant communities and the sharing of local, national and international news.

Tuntui Wampis is run by two Wampis communication professionals who were trained across the border, in Ecuador, thanks to the alliance of the Wampis with the neighbouring Shuar federation, which has been running a radio station for many years. The purchase of the transmission tower and equipment was made possible thanks to the support from the allied NGO IWGIA, and technical guidance was provided by the Peruvian indigenous news agency SERVINDI. After initial problems due to unreliable energy supply, the transmitter is now powered by solar energy and reaches villages in a radius of about 60 kilometres. Since 2019, the radio station also relies on satellite internet connection.

Tuntui Wampis is a key asset for the Wampis to exercise their communication autonomy, responding to the need of informing the Wampis Nation about the activities of their representatives, as well as providing an independent and culturally relevant source of general information. Currently, the Wampis government's objective is to further strengthen the radio station as a community media centre. Young Wampis will be trained in journalism and communications to be able to produce their own radio programmes, as well as videos, and diffuse them through social media, which is essential to remaining connected with students and migrants who have left the territory.

Photo: @ Philipp Eyer

Photo: @ Philipp Eyer

Photo: @ Thomas Niederberger

Photo: @ Jacob Balzani-Lööv

Radio Tuntui Wampis is featured in the beginning of this film about the Wampis Nation autonomous government (in Spanish): **El tiempo es Agua - Gobierno Autónomo Wampis – Perú**

Raising awareness and strengthening action for territories of life through local radio in Kawawana

A **local radio programme in local Djola language** has also been very useful for Kawawana but, unlike the Peruvian case, the Djola fishermen who run Kawawana do not have a local radio at their disposal and need to raise funds to be able to buy radio time. From 2010 to 2020, the programs have thus been sparse and sporadic… but still extremely effective. The Kawawana programs usually last one hour and are **open to the listeners to call in and immediately go 'live' with their comments and questions**. They are run by people experienced with the history of the territory of life and the various elements of its development, management plan, governance structure, surveillance activities, infractions, retributions for infractions, etc. The questions, answers and explanations need to be very concrete and specific for the program to make sense for the local audience. Overall, according to the Kawawana custodians, the radio programmes have strongly enhanced the visibility of Kawawana, and encouraged other communities to emulate them and establish their own territories of life.

Powerful communication through participatory video

Participatory narratives using pictures and videos are also powerful ways to communicate. For more than a decade, the ICCA Consortium has promoted video-stories and photo-stories about territories of life, and many can be found in its **website**. Click on the name of the country for specific examples from **Nepal** and **Tsum Valley**; **Iran**; **Niger**; Democratic Republic of Congo **(1)** and **(2)**; **Cambodia**; **India**; **The Philippines**; **Burma/ Myanmar**; **Ecuador**; **Indonesia**; **Senegal**; **Kenya**; Spain **(1)** and **(2)**; **Bolivia**; **Chile**… While these videos vary in approach, all helped internal awareness and unity in the custodian community.

You can also read **here** about a pan-African alliance seeking to use participatory video as a tool to share information about their territories of life.

Photo: © Bruno Manser Fund

ACT WITH OTHERS

Many custodian communities confront similar challenges. Your community is likely to benefit from sharing experiences and joining forces with others. In this sense, **self-strengthening ultimately involves mutual strengthening among peers and allies**, which generally starts from some kind of **networking**.

National (and sometimes international) **networking and organising for collaborative action** can help create a **critical mass of support** for territories of life, which in turn generates:

- mutual awareness and solidarity, including to address threats to territories of life;
- enhanced means to act (pulled together from many sources);
- better understanding of shared issues and priorities, including to address opportunities and make effective use of resources;
- enhanced national and international visibility of the broad benefits of territories of life; and
- effective advocacy for improved policies and practices.

Shared efforts often begin with **exchanges and learning** among neighbouring custodian communities and their allies— e.g. field visits, dialogues, workshops, or support to overcome a problem.

Over time, more regular or even formal networks or platforms can evolve and develop **mutually supportive action and advocacy efforts**. Examples include:

- **joint analysis and planning** to identify and tackle national and international issues and priorities;
- **communication campaigns** to raise the visibility of territories of life and seek support for addressing specific threats and other advocacy objectives;
- **peer-support and peer-review processes**, including those necessary for national and international ICCA registration; and
- **advocacy campaigns for appropriate recognition and support**, including to improve relevant national and/or international legislation and policies affecting territories of life.

Networking for territories of life: Options and questions for a grassroots discussion

An ICCA network is a network of individuals, communities and organizations ready to collaborate and provide each other with advice and peer support in **various subjects concerning territories of life** (e.g., practices, policies, trends, threats, opportunities, resources…).

…some options for networks include…

- **Working group** – This is an informal network in which custodians of territory of life, allied organisations, and individual activists and experts periodically gather to share ideas and work on common concerns.
- **Coalition** or **platform** – These are more formal networks dedicated to a common goal, especially tackling specific, pressing issues—e.g., a coalition against an imminent threat of land grabbing or a platform in support of a specific national policy.
- **Peer support and review network among territories of life** – These are mechanisms dedicated to mutual support and to making sure that custodian communities pull together meaningful submissions to national or international registries of territories of life. The network agrees on rules and processes for submissions that are peer supported and peer reviewed.
- **Association** or **federation** – These are formal organizations, such as an association or federation that represents common interests among custodians of territories of life. More than others, this model allows a network to receive and use important resources. It also provides trusted representation when interacting with others, such as regional or national governments.

Regardless of the network type, it is important that it emerges from a felt need among communities and that it meets that need and shared concerns and priorities.

If a territory of life network does not yet exist in a specific region or country, organising a **meeting among representatives of community custodians of territories of life** is an effective way to get started. The meeting creates an opportunity for custodians to listen to each other's needs and ideas and establish some common ground, often based on recognised shared threats and opportunities. As the custodian communities and their partners identify common needs and possible joint activities to meet such needs, they may decide to develop some form of on-going collaboration as a network.

…questions for considering engagement in a network

- Are there needs, concerns or priorities that we might be able to better address through networking and joint organising with peers and allies?
- Has our community ever engaged in outreach? What have we learned in the process?
- Does our community have resources for networking and joint organising?
- Are there specific conditions or circumstances that need to be in place for our community to engage in a network or joint organising activity?

- Does our community know those peers and allies we are considering joining in a network? Have we previously shared information, situation analysis and planning, or participated in an event with them? If not, should we try that out, before we embark on something more engaging?
- If we decide to create or join a network, who would represent our community in the network and how would such representatives provide feedback to the community?

Some networks are flexible and relatively informal. Others are formal and carefully designed to fit a specific context or address a specific issue. All networks should be able to benefit their individual members, but many manage to reach broader goals. The priorities of the members, their context, and their resources and capacities can all help inform which networking approach is most appropriate.

Read more about lessons learned in networking **here.**

Networking: See how others do it!

Networks emerge and collaborate to face challenges in Madagascar

Over the past two decades, a dozen local communities in Madagascar have received international awards for their outstanding achievements in conserving nature while ensuring the well-being and meeting the basic needs of their members. The will and perseverance of these pioneers have been a source of inspiration for their peers in the face of the problems that have been afflicting the country across the turn of the millennium: land grabbing, ecosystem destruction, illegal trafficking, and especially industrial fishing, which severely damaged artisanal fishing.

Faced with such challenges, hundreds of grassroots organizations have been 'networking': they met, discussed the causes of the degradation of human livelihoods and nature, and exchanged ideas and best practices to address their problems. In the process, and with the help of some forward-thinking conservation and development organizations, they formed inter-community unions, federations and support groups dedicated to building a critical mass of political influence and helping shape policies of concern to them. These include:

- **TAFO MIHAAVO— a federation dedicated to the promotion of community governance of land, water and natural resources.** TAFO MIHAAVO membership, which grew from 400 to 532 member communities between 2012 and 2019, currently covers 22 regions in Madagascar.
- **MIHARI— a union dedicated to the local management of marine areas.** MIHARI currently includes over 200 associations managing Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMA), several of which are also part of TAFO MIHAAVO member communities.

- **FANONGA– a working group that comprises individual experts from academia, administration and communities.** FANONGA works closely with TAFO MIHAAVO on strategic issues, including communication and legislation.

These networks include varied community institutions. However, all of their members seek the de *facto* collective governance and care of their territories of life – with or without the government providing them legal permission via a 'management transfer' contract.

In Madagascar, the **institution of the *fokonolona*** is made up by the population of a territory of life that has socio-culturally self-defined itself through centuries. While they evolved through time, most *fokonolona* remain rooted in the local family lineages and rules that regulate the land, water, and natural resources in collective territories. The social **contracts, called *dina*, are established by the *fokonolona* assemblies** and still hold authority. The *dina* comprise rules, sanctions, and rewards for specific practices. Their effectiveness parallels the strength of the *fokonolona* that established the dina, which can be weakened under pressure from local or national politicians.

The members of the federation TAFO MIHAAVO are of two main types: 1) informal but legitimate *fokonolona*; and 2) formal local organisations that go under the abbreviation 'VOI', at times grouped in unions or regional federations. MIHARI members are fishermen's groups and national and international organizations.

Territories of life that are governed and managed by communities sometimes have special status as 'community protected/conserved areas'. They can comprise forests, lakes, rangelands, watersheds, mangroves, marine areas or collective cultural properties in territories of life, according to a Malagasy legislation called GELOSE (literally: legislation to Secure Local Management). Sometimes they are part of larger state-run marine or terrestrial protected areas. A typical GELOSE contract transfers *management* authority to a VOI (formal community organization) for a relatively short period of time and is accompanied by maps of the land and its resources. A simple development and management plan usually sets out what is permitted in each zone: in a core area, entry is permitted only for rituals; in another zone, only traditional uses are allowed; in yet another area, there can be only regulated cultivation or fishing; etc. Sometimes, conditions are set for the quantity and schedule for timber or fish harvesting and the role of diverse stakeholders.

Photo: © MIHARI

Forum National MIHARI 2017

The coherence or contrast between management plans and *dina* play a crucial role in securing the strength and respect of rules. Because of this and other challenges, the strengths, effectiveness and ultimate results of efforts to sustain their common natural heritage vary considerably among communities, and within the same community over time. For example, the more a natural resource is defined by the government as 'strategic', the less the communities that have governed, managed and conserved them from generation to generation are called upon to continue their role. On the contrary, decisions on such 'strategic' resources are made by a handful of individuals who are 'democratically elected' for a few years. This somehow paradoxical mode of governance favours the monopolization of the benefits from the country's wealth by a few individuals, groups or companies whose goal is to maximize profits in the shortest possible time.

Networking makes it possible to maintain a dynamic consultation among the first-line, directly concerned communities, providing a counterweight to injustice and the indifference of political authorities and judicial bodies. Specifically, the large number of members in the networks allows them to develop a considerable 'citizen force' for advocacy to claim and defend the collective rights and responsibilities of custodian communities.

Both the collective governance of a territory of life for the common good advocated by TAFO MIHAAVO, and the local management promoted by MIHARI for marine resources and by other federations for land resources, feed and complement one another. Based on the Malagasy Constitution, TAFO MIHAAVO has proposed amendments to legislation concerning the *fokonolona* to both the National Legislative Assembly and the executive government. In addition, both TAFO MIHAAVO and MIHARI have engaged in debates and proposed remedies to the sectoral policies that omit any consideration of ecology, equity and the well-being of people. Examples include debates on forests, fisheries, land-use planning, mining, decentralization, protected areas and collective land rights.

The networks are having some direct and positive impacts for their members. For example, they helped to secure the termination of a questionable fishing agreement signed by the government with predatory partners. In addition, with the support of the networks, several communities have demonstrated against the granting of mining or agribusiness licences in their territories in various parts of Madagascar. This, however, has often come at high cost for their leaders, many of whom have been put in jail… and some of whom have also been assassinated. Annoyed by the popular protests, the government and the companies running the extractive industries have been forced to slow down their progress… but the struggles continue.

Photo: © MIHARI

LMMA representative sharing idea

Networks have a critical need for resources to start and maintain them, including for:

- organisation, travel and subsistence costs for meetings (including prior to the events, for community information and preparatory discussions);
- technical support during meetings to explain relevant legislation and policies and illustrate the phenomena impacting the communities;
- technical support during meetings to facilitate discussions and resolutions in fair and non-directive ways;
- support to maintain communication and community interest in networking through time;
- technical and other types of support to organise follow-up, and advocacy initiatives in particular.

In the beginning, individual communities strengthening their role as custodians of their territories of life were supported by conservation and development projects and programmes. For the creation of TAFO MIHAAVO, networking support was provided by UNDP GEF SGP and the national Tany Meva Foundation. For MIHARI, resources were in great part managed by Blue Ventures, an international organisation devoted to marine conservation. The long-term vision of these supporting agents – to nourish an advocacy force for community engagement in conservation – appears very well-advanced today. Yet, even if external support has been essential to generate networking for territories of life in Madagascar, no amount of external support would have worked in the absence of national energy and commitment on the part of both custodian communities and national non-governmental organisations and experts.

Today, both TAFO MIHAAVO and MIHARI have their own management system, face questions of operational autonomy and representation of the voices of communities dispersed over large areas, and struggle with limited infrastructure and communication technology. Divergent views on the nature and role of local, national and international institutions sometime arise. But the grassroots networks now have internal strength and interest in collaborating in a joint advocacy movement. And FANONGA is there to assist them. Late in 2019, with the encouragement and support of the ICCA Consortium, representatives of TAFO MIHAAVO, MIHARI and FANONGA met, discussed their policy objectives and sketched a joint document to analyse the country situation and spell out their common vision. Even if their gains remain precarious and vulnerable, the fact that their networks exist and are active is an enormous source of hope for Madagascar.

What lessons can be drawn for other national movements for territories of life? One lesson is that **timely support for grassroots networking** from national and international partners and allies can play a **crucial** role in promoting and sustaining the development of effective network organisations. Another lesson is that the development of networks brings **challenging questions** to light. For example, who should their 'members' be? (In Madagascar: should legally recognized VOIs be members or legitimate *fokonolona*?) How could legitimate *sui generis* organisations be fairly 'represented'? Under what conditions could a network speak for its members? Who could assist the network technically and financially? How could their independence be ensured? Importantly, however, there is also a third lesson: **only the strong collaboration among a variety of networks, organisations and allies in society can generate the 'critical mass for advocacy'** necessary for territories of life to finally become fully visible and respected.

Prepared by Vololoniaina Rasoarimanana, with contributions from Vatosoa Rakotondrazafy (MIHARI), Louis de Gonzague Razafindramanandraibe, Mihanta Tsiorisoa Bakoliarimisa, Jean Claude Rasamoelina (TAFO MIHAAVO) and Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend.

Registering territories of life: Questions for a grassroots discussion

Custodian communities that wish to make their territories of life more visible nationally or internationally can choose to 'register' them. Registering means adding community-determined information (see **#Document**) to a national or international online platform.

The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (**UNEP-WCMC**) hosts an **international ICCA Registry**. Participation in this registry requires support and review from groups of peers, generally from an ICCA network at country level. Communities can also enter information about their territories of life in other registries of UNEP-WCMC, such as the **World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA)**, as well as other national and international platforms.

> Registering a territory of life should only procced with the **free, prior and informed consent** of the custodian community. In the ICCA Registry, the community can determine what information, if any, is publicly available on the site.

Considering international registration? You may find it helpful to discuss these questions:

- Would our territory of life and community benefit from **greater recognition of the site's local and global values**—e.g. for conservation, livelihoods, climate change mitigation and adaptation and other values? (Consider that the registration process may also benefit the country, which might be able to "count" the territory of life towards global biodiversity targets.)
- Would the custodian community benefit from being **better recognised** in its role governing and managing a territory of life?
- Would the territory of life and its governance and management systems benefit from being **better documented**, as this is likely to be necessary for the registration process? (See also **#Document**)
- Would the registration process have a positive influence on the community, e.g. by rekindling conservation **knowledge and skills** and fostering **internal solidarity** and sense of common identity?
- Would registration facilitate **relationships with a network of ICCAs**, allowing custodian communities to learn from one another in peer support and review processes?
- Are there **risks** from the increased visibility that may follow recognition, such as undesired attention or outside people coming to take advantage of natural resources?
- Could the registration process spark conflicts with neighbouring communities, the government, or other stakeholders (e.g., private entrepreneurs, NGOs, military, etc.)?

- In light of the discussed benefits and risks, should registration be pursued for our territory of life?
- If the answer is yes, would it be more appropriate to seek it in the **WDPA**, in the **ICCA Registry**, and/or in another platform at the national or international level?
- Would it be better to **make records visible** to the public, **or keep them private**?

Importantly, WCMC does not require custodian communities to be vetted by their respective governments before submitting information for their registries. It stresses, however, that the submission of information is more trusted when a process of **peer-support and review** has taken place prior to submission.

You can read more about the UNEP-WCMC's ICCA Registry here. The Template and Mapeo tool introduced before can be of help in preparing for international registration. Check also the 'meanings and resources' page on registry options, including potential benefits and risks: **toolbox.iccaconsortium.org/resources/act-with-others/**

Peer review: See how others do it!

No uniform method can be applied for peer support and review processes. National ICCA networks and facilitating organizations should adapt and experiment with what works best for them. Relevant experience exists, among others, in the Philippines, **Ecuador**, Colombia, **Indonesia**, and **China**. See below for more information about the peer support and review processes in Iran and Spain.

The peer-support and review process in Iran

A four-step process has been outlined by **UNINOMAD**, which is the Union of Indigenous Nomadic Tribes of Iran, in collaboration with **Cenesta**, which is the Centre for Sustainable Development and Environment.

- In the **first step**, the communities themselves carry out **three assessments**:

  1) a territorial assessment, involving participatory mapping of their territory of life;

  2) an ecological assessment, involving adding ecological assets to the maps, current ecological trends and all indigenous knowledge they consider relevant; and

  3) a governance assessment, involving identification of the customary governance institution and—if necessary— steps towards strengthening it.

- In the **second step** if the results of the three assessments reveal that the area can be considered an ICCA—territory of life, then the community takes a **free, prior, and informed decision** to **self-recognize** it

as such; it then **sends its documentation** of the territory of life **to UNINOMAD** for eventual comments and questions.

- In the **third step**, when all the comments and questions are solved, **UNINOMAD submits** the documentation and any further information **to the National Registry of ICCAs in Iran**, which is maintained by Cenesta.
- In the **fourth and final step, Cenesta prepares the documentation for** inclusion in **the international ICCA Registry and/or WDPA**. At this point, the information is also sent to relevant government agencies, for their information and for inclusion in reporting on international agreements.

Photo: © Cenesta

A visit by Cenesta to support step one of the peer support and review process.

The peer-support and review process in Spain

In 2015, Iniciativa Comunales drafted the first *"Protocol for the peer review of the candidacies to the ICCA Registry in Spain"*. **Iniciativa Comunales** is an association of local communities who collectively govern natural resources, representing thousands of commoners in Spain. Other members include supporting organizations and concerned individuals. In 2017, the two first communities were registered in the **ICCA Registry** and, by 2020, six registration processes were completed and some more initiated. The current version of the protocol was approved in 2019 (**download in Spanish**).

From the beginning, there was a strong consensus among the communities about the need to guarantee the quality of the registry. To avoid "false positives", it was paramount that the process ensured that the registered territories possessed the three characteristics of 'territories of life': 1) a strong bond between a community and the territory; 2) a well-functioning governance institution and 3) resulting nature conservation and contributions to livelihoods and wellbeing.

Photo: © Iniciativa Comunales

"Watchwoman" of a shellgathering community doing their daily caretaker round in coastal Galicia

Why is it needed?

To better understand the communities' concerns about the quality of the Registry, is important to mention that in Spain there are many areas governed by communities (e.g. "commons"); however, in some cases effective community governance is almost non-existent due to cultural erosion, emigration and over-ageing population. Some of these communities sign agreements by which external actors (usually companies) govern the area's natural resources under their own market criteria for a period of years. This has serious impacts on local governance, conservation goals and other social and livelihood uses of the territory. For example, under these agreements huge common areas are typically planted with monocultures of Eucalyptus, an exotic invasive species – for logging on a short-term economic basis. Consequently, communities lose their daily governance practices, and their attitude shifts from a complex and culturally rich relation to the territory, to one of merely seeking revenue.

If the Registry would include these cases as bona fide territories of life it would incorporate "false positives" and diminish both the value of the Registry and the capacity of the registered communities to use it as an advocacy tool. For this reason, communities agreed to receive external, anonymous comments and questions from members of two other communities for a "revision report". These reports are confidential, and our experience is that constructive criticism by peers can be a strong driver for internal strengthening of community processes.

How does it work?

Candidate communities agree to go through a participative peer support and revision process, based on:

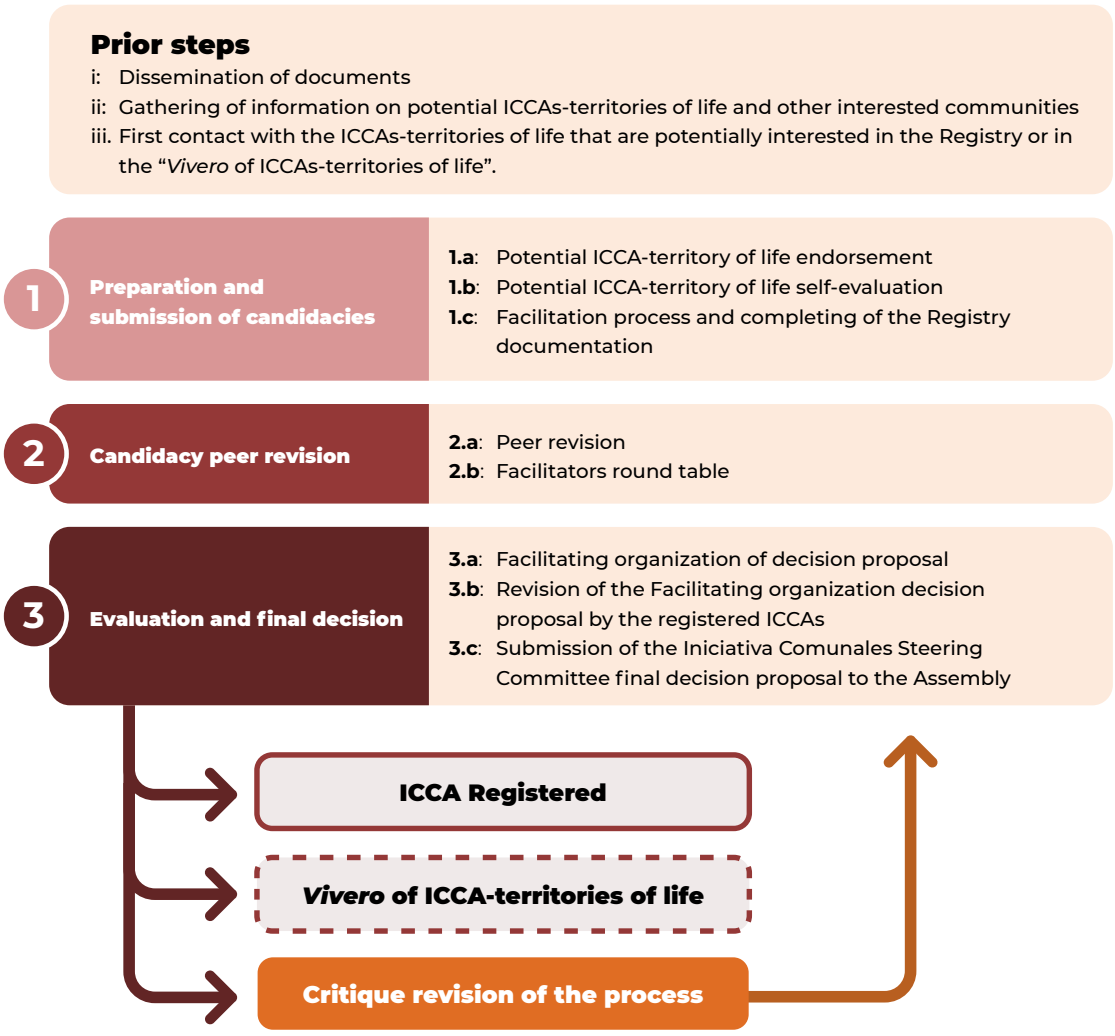
- The information provided by the candidate communities in the official forms of UNEP-WCMC (the ICCA Registry managing entity) and of Iniciativa Comunales (the facilitating organization).
- The revision peer reports from two anonymous commoners from other communities.
- Any other relevant information provided by the candidate community or others.

This process is facilitated by Iniciativa Comunales. Once the information and revision reports are complete, the Iniciativa Comunales Steering Committee brings a reasoned opinion about the candidacies to the general assembly of the association. The final decision is then to be taken by all members collectively (by the association rules, votes by non-community members, including individuals, CSOs, research centres, etc., cannot exceed 40% of the total).

The protocol guides this process; and as needs arise, the protocol is reviewed and revised. Proposed changes are debated regularly, to be approved by the assembly. The protocol also foresees a peer revision of all registered ICCAs every five years.

Lessons learnt

- Many communities, including obvious candidates, do not see the Registry as an interesting opportunity, as it 'only' provides recognition. Something more is needed.
- A transparent peer review process is challenging; it needs a strong commitment of ICCA Network members (which is there for Spain), or a major budget (not there for Spain); in all cases, it needs a lot of time and experienced, responsible people. There are scant previous references and it is difficult to strike a balance, between "keeping it simple" and developing a reliable system that takes into account the needs of everyone involved and avoid collective exhaustion. We are worried about this and are exploring new approaches to improve the process resilience.
- There are serious limitations of a "medal system" which is focusing only on the most emblematic examples of territories of life. This can have the perverse outcome of promoting elitism. A binary "yes/no" answer to the question "is this a territory of life?" excludes most cases, based on a static picture in a given moment, ignoring current efforts, processes or trends.
- A Registry based on this approach has a limited transformative capacity. A new, integrative approach is needed, to provide appropriate recognition and support to any community seeking inclusion in the Registry – irrespective of its current qualification as an ICCA or not. We are working on this approach right now, which we call the *Vivero* ("plant nursery" in Spanish, see figure below).
- A mechanism should be in place to constructively integrate disagreements. Good will and "fair play" should not be taken for granted. We should rather take the best from constructive disagreement but prevent and counter destructive positions and actions.
- A clearly defined governance system should be in place, including a trusted board for solving disputes and taking final decisions, and a policy to avoid conflict of interests. To limit the concentration of power, this board should be accountable to a wide representation of communities which are potential candidates for the Registry. Its decisions should be subject to "appeal" and its composition subject to "contestation".
- All participants should explicitly agree to comply with the established common rules.
- Attention should be paid to imbalances in the geographical and sectorial characteristics of the candidates for the Registry because they can lead to distortions in the power of representation: if certain regions or sectors (e.g., forestry, irrigation, fisheries) dominate the view on what a territory of life is and should be, others may be excluded. We initially failed to foresee this but are learning to improve.



Thoughts on the future approach for the ICCA Registry

We are working to build a constructive and collective process to support all communities willing to strengthen the three key characteristics of their territories of life, irrespective of how strong each of them is at a given moment, or whether they are interested in the Registry or not. In this support process, the Registry should not be a short-term goal, but one of the many tools to improve the ICCA characteristics of a given territory as part of a long-term approach.

To articulate this process we propose the *"Vivero de ICCAs"*, ("ICCA plant nursery"): instead of a "yes-or-no-decision" (either you deserve recognition or are discarded), attention would be given to a progressive scale of thresholds for challenges and achievements in each of the three characteristics, and the processes and trends a community is promoting. This would also be an opportunity for the already registered ICCA communities to share their experiences and help others to improve governance systems, conservation strategies and other aspects, while continuing to learn and strengthen their own territories of life – in the true sense of "peer support".

Prepared by Iniciativa Comunales; for further information, write to: **hola@icomunales.org**

Photo: © Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend

REVIEW & RENEW

Self-strengthening is an ongoing process of both learning and action. Territories of life are dynamic – as are the custodian communities that care for them and the broader contexts in which they exist. Changing landscapes and circumstances can bring new opportunities and challenges over time. In light of that, rather than a one-off exercise, the process described in this guidance can be viewed as a set of approaches and commitments that enable ongoing learning and growth.

The nature and processes of this ongoing learning are determined by your custodian community. Appropriate monitoring, or periodic review, can enable reflection on the 'health' of your territory of life and renew your community's efforts to care for and strengthen it.

Addressing changes in resilience and security over time: Questions for a grassroots discussion

The strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities for resilience and security (see **#Understand**) are likely to change over time. To help keep track of these changes, it is useful to identify appropriate **indicators** and monitor them over time. For example, as part of its grassroots discussions, your community may wish to identify at least one meaningful indicator for each of the five key "building blocks" of a secure and resilient territory of life (see **#Resilience and Security tool**). These building blocks are:

- the integrity and strength of the custodian community;
- the connection between the community and its territory;
- the functioning of the governance institution;
- the territory's conservation status; and
- the livelihoods and wellbeing of the community.

For each, you may ask:

- What **phenomenon, property or value could we measure or assess** that would tell us whether this 'building block' is changing for the better (or the worse)?
- How could we measure or assess that, in practice?
- Who could do that? Is someone willing to keep track of changes? What can others do to help?
- At what interval shall we get together again to discuss the changes?

You can download here example indicators of the resilience and security of territories of life, which were developed for use by specific custodian communities. Each community should develop its own indicators, reflecting its own circumstances: **Example indicators of ICCA resilience and security.**

Reviewing the impact of strengthening actions: Questions for a grassroots discussion

There are many approaches to monitoring and evaluation. In a self-strengthening process, these exercises should be community-based and participatory, involving a diversity of actors from the custodian community. Importantly, they should be planned in advance of specific activities. Some useful questions for a grassroots discussion include:

- Is our community willing to monitor change while taking action?
- **Who is willing to participate** in monitoring and evaluation? Is there a community group willing to take responsibility for this?
- Are dedicated **resources** (time, financial support, training, etc.) available? If not, who can help? Why would they assist our community?
- Who will **compile** the monitoring results?
- Who will **discuss and interpret** the monitoring results, evaluate them and **propose revisions** to the relevant initiatives? Should the entire community be involved? Should others, outside the community, be informed and engaged in interpretation and follow-up?
- How will lessons be compiled and conserved for future consultation and use?

Monitoring and evaluation are important for ensuring that the specific activities designed to strengthen territory of life are having the desired results. It helps that the custodian community can adjust its plans and approaches as needed over time. The facilitation team can help the community with questions such as:

- Are we **implementing** the activities agreed within the community and/or with others to move towards our vision for our territory of life?

- Are we obtaining the **desired results** and **impacts**?
- In particular do we see any related change in the indicators we have identified for each of the five "building blocks" for our territory of life?
- Are there remaining information gaps or new challenges?
- What **additional or amended action** do we need to take to address these gaps and challenges?
- Is there any element of our self-strengthening process that we should revisit, now or in the future?

The end is just a new beginning

Read how it all began: the pathbreaking experience of the **Kawawana territory of life** has inspired the development of this Guidance.