



INDIGENOUS AND TRADITIONAL TERRITORIES (ITTs) IN TARGET 3

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Introduction

Area-based approaches remain a central pillar of biodiversity conservation. Historically, conservation policy has primarily relied on state-designated protected areas. Over time, however, global biodiversity governance has expanded to recognize a broader range of territorial governance systems.

Many of these systems are not new. They have often existed for centuries and are grounded in long-standing governance institutions, knowledge systems and relationships with lands and waters that predate formal conservation frameworks and legal designation.

This evolution reflects both empirical evidence and political dynamics. Research increasingly shows that territories governed through diverse social, cultural, economic and spiritual values can generate biodiversity outcomes, even when conservation is not their primary objective. At the same time, critiques of exclusionary conservation approaches have strengthened recognition of the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) in sustaining ecosystems and the importance of their full and effective participation.

Within this context, biodiversity frameworks have gradually expanded beyond protected areas to include concepts such as Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs), Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs), and more recently, references to Indigenous and Traditional Territories (ITTs) in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). Under Target 3, Parties committed to ensuring that by 2030 at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, coastal and marine areas are effectively conserved and managed through protected areas and OECMs, while recognising Indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable.

These concepts do not simply refer to different types of areas. They reflect broader shifts in how territories are understood – from conservation as an objective, to conservation as an outcome, and increasingly toward the recognition of governance systems, knowledge systems and rights-based territorial approaches.

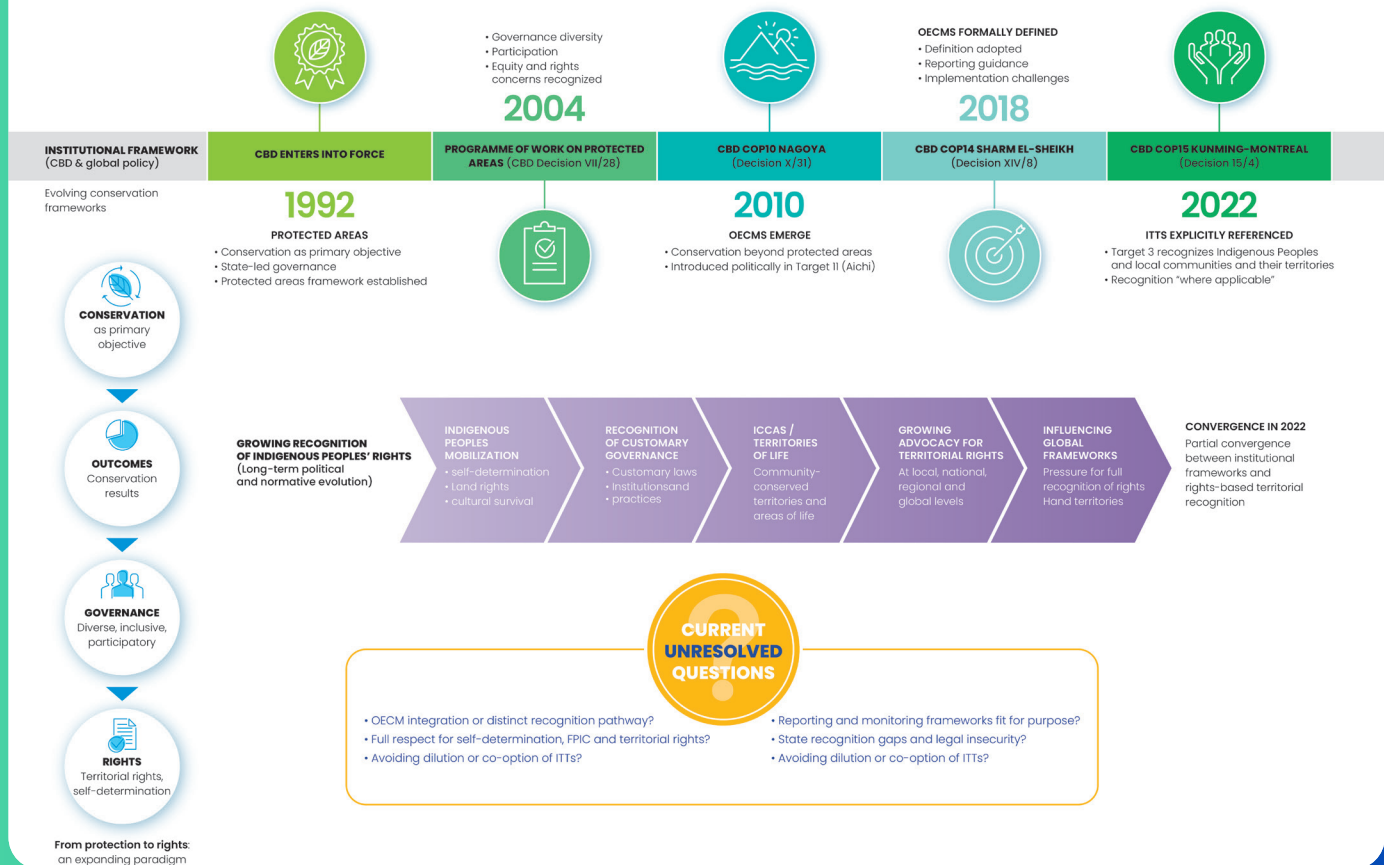


Funded by
the European Union

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The evolution of area-based conservation approaches

Two converging trajectories: institutional frameworks and Indigenous peoples rights



Key Messages

- Area-based conservation has evolved from conservation as an objective (protected areas) to recognising outcomes (OECMs) and, increasingly, governance and rights (ICCAs, ITTs).
- These concepts reflect different dimensions of territorial organisation — values, governance, knowledge and rights — rather than a fixed classification.
- ITTs are not a conservation category but are rights-based territorial systems grounded in governance, identity, and self-determination.
- Their inclusion in Target 3 of the KMGBF creates a structural tension between outcome-based conservation frameworks and rights-based territorial approaches.
- Existing frameworks lack a clear basis for recognizing and reporting ITTs, creating uncertainty for implementation.
- Two approaches are emerging: integrating ITTs into existing categories (e.g. OECMs) or recognizing them as a distinct contribution, each with trade-offs.
- How ITTs are addressed will shape how biodiversity policy engages with customary governance diversity and territorial rights of indigenous Peoples.
- There is a risk that ITTs could be counted towards global targets without adequate recognition of customary, governance systems, IPLC rights, and Free, Prior, Informed Consent (FPIC), and knowledge protection.

Definitions and articulation of the concepts

Protected areas, OECMs, ICCAs, and ITTs are not equivalent concepts and should not be treated as interchangeable categories. They reflect different relationships between conservation objectives, biodiversity outcomes, governance systems, knowledge systems, values, and territorial rights in landscape and seascape.

Protected Area

A clearly defined geographical space recognised and managed through legal or other effective means to achieve the long-term conservation of nature, alongside associated ecosystem services and cultural values. They are characterised by the fact that **conservation is the primary management objective**, regardless of the governance type.

Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs)

Geographically defined areas other than protected areas that are **governed and managed in ways that achieve sustained biodiversity conservation outcomes**. Their defining feature is that conservation is not the primary objective, but results from governance or management practices embedded in systems where social, cultural, economic and spiritual values coexist and are articulated, without conservation necessarily constituting the primary purpose.

Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs)

Often referred to as territories of life, they are territories governed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities, where governance systems result in the conservation of biodiversity and associated cultural values. They are best understood as a socio-ecological concept and may, in some cases, be recognised as protected areas or OECMs when they meet relevant criteria.

Indigenous and Traditional Territories (ITTs)

They refer to lands, waters and territories governed, used or inhabited by Indigenous Peoples and local communities under customary institutions, knowledge systems and cultural relationships. They are rights-based territorial systems associated with identity, livelihoods and self-determination, and are not defined by conservation.

While referenced in Target 3 of the KMGBF, ITTs are not formally defined under the CBD.

ICCAs and ITTs are therefore related but not equivalent. ICCAs describe situations in which governance systems generate identifiable conservation outcomes. ITTs refer more broadly to territorial systems grounded in rights, governance and knowledge systems, regardless of whether conservation outcomes are formally recognised or measured.

While overlaps may exist in practice, conflating these concepts risks reducing broader territorial systems to conservation functions alone and overlooking their legal, cultural and political dimensions.

Legal basis of Indigenous and Traditional Territories

The recognition of ITTs in biodiversity governance draws on multiple, overlapping sources of international and national law.

CBD framework

Within the Convention on Biological Diversity, Article 8(j) call on Parties to respect, preserve and maintain the knowledge, innovations and practices of Indigenous peoples and local communities relevant to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.

Subsequent decisions of the Conference of the Parties have further emphasised the importance of customary sustainable use and the participation of Indigenous peoples and local communities in conservation governance. The KMGBF builds on these commitments by explicitly referencing Indigenous and traditional territories in Target 3, while not establishing a specific legal definition or regime for them.

International human rights law

The recognition of Indigenous and traditional territories is also grounded in international human rights law. Instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirm the rights of Indigenous peoples to lands, waters, territories and resources traditionally owned, occupied or used. These rights are linked to the right to self-determination and include participation in decision-making and the principle of FPIC.

Implications for implementation and negotiations

The inclusion of ITTs in Target 3 of the KMGBF raises a set of interconnected challenges for implementation, reflecting the absence of a shared definition and operational framework.

Reporting

The lack of a formal definition of ITTs under the CBD creates uncertainty regarding their potential inclusion in reporting against Target 3. Unlike protected areas or OECMs, ITTs are not a recognised category within CBD reporting frameworks.

Key questions remain unresolved, including:

- whether ITTs can be counted towards the target,
- under which conditions,
- and on what basis they could be reported or verified.

Some Parties have raised concerns regarding the potential inclusion of ITTs in reporting towards Target 3. In particular, they do not necessarily correspond to areas where biodiversity conservation outcomes are ensured, as they may be subject to external pressures or activities affecting ecosystems. In addition, in countries where such territories cover significant portions of national land or marine areas, their automatic inclusion could affect the level of ambition of national commitments, by reducing incentives to designate additional protected areas or OECMs.

This uncertainty reflects a broader limitation: existing monitoring and reporting systems are primarily designed to capture measurable conservation outcomes, rather than governance systems or rights-based territorial arrangements.

Governance

Recognising ITTs implies engaging with governance systems that are not necessarily reflected in formal institutions, including legal orders, collective decision-making processes and knowledge systems.

This raises specific considerations related to:

- self-determination,
- recognition of governance authority,
- and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

Such dimensions cannot be fully addressed through ecological indicators alone and require approaches that go beyond conventional conservation frameworks.

Role of Parties

Parties retain a central role in determining whether and how ITTs are recognised, supported and potentially reflected in national implementation frameworks.

Given major differences in domestic legal systems, approaches are likely to vary significantly across countries.

These differences may shape both reporting practices and the overall ambition of Target 3 implementation.

Negotiation dynamics and policy choices

Discussions on the implementation of Target 3 of the KMGBF have increasingly focused on how ITTs should be reflected in practice. Two main approaches are emerging:

- **Integration into existing categories (e.g. OECMs)**
This approach allows conservation outcomes within ITTs to be reported using existing frameworks. While operationally feasible, it may reduce ITTs to their

ecological functions and overlook their governance, rights-based and political dimensions.

- **Recognition as a distinct contribution**
This approach acknowledges ITTs as a separate contribution to biodiversity targets, better reflecting their nature as rights-based territorial systems. However, it raises challenges in terms of operationalisation, comparability and reporting.

Underlying tensions

These discussions reflect broader and persistent tensions between:

- measurability and standardised reporting,
- and the recognition of diverse governance systems
- and territorial rights.

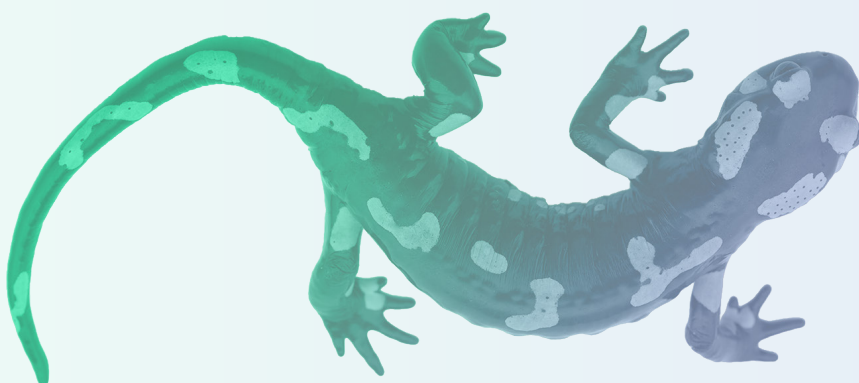
These tensions reflect fundamentally different approaches to conservation, rather than purely technical implementation challenges.

They also raise concerns regarding the potential misappropriation of Indigenous territories, where areas could be counted towards global targets without full recognition of governance systems, rights, and consent.

Overall implication

The way ITTs are addressed in the implementation of Target 3 will shape how biodiversity policy engages with rights-based territorial approaches.

It will influence whether existing conservation frameworks are extended to accommodate these systems, or whether new approaches are required to reflect their specific characteristics.



Unrecognised governance systems: the European context

The European context illustrates some of the challenges associated with applying global categories to highly diverse territorial realities.

In Europe, the Sámi — whose traditional territories (Sápmi) span northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and parts of Russia — are the most widely recognised Indigenous people in the region. However, formal recognition of their territorial rights remains limited and uneven across states.

However, traditional knowledge systems and long-standing territorial governance practices exist across Europe beyond formally recognised Indigenous contexts.

These include commons-based governance arrangements, customary fisheries institutions, pastoral systems and cultural landscapes that may contribute to biodiversity conservation while remaining outside formal conservation categories.

As a result, the implementation of Target 3 in Europe is likely to rely primarily on protected areas and OECMs. European overseas territories may introduce additional complexity where Indigenous populations and customary governance systems exist under highly variable legal arrangements. This illustrates a broader challenge under Target 3: existing conservation categories may not fully capture the diversity of territorial governance systems contributing to biodiversity outcomes.

Examples of community-based governance systems beyond formal conservation categories in Europe

These examples illustrate governance systems that contribute to biodiversity outcomes while operating outside formal conservation categories, underscoring the limits of existing frameworks in adequately capturing such systems.

Prud'homies de pêche, France

They are long-standing institutions of artisanal fishers along the French Mediterranean coast. They regulate access to fishing grounds, seasonal practices and conflict resolution through collectively defined rules governing when, where and how marine resources can be used. These 33 institutions include spatial and temporal restrictions that contribute to maintaining fish stocks and associated biodiversity. While not established as conservation instruments, they illustrate how formalised customary institutions can generate conservation outcomes through collective governance.

Gyimes cultural landscape, Romania

In the Eastern Carpathians, the Hungarian Csángó community maintains highly biodiverse semi-natural meadows through collective grazing practices, rotational haymaking, and detailed traditional ecological knowledge of local species and seasonal cycles. Their landscapes are shaped by long-standing customary rules governing land use and resource management. While not formally recognised as conservation areas, they illustrate how biodiversity outcomes can emerge from cultural practices, local knowledge systems and collective territorial stewardship.