



A former sells the produce she grew in the Salween Peace Park—a Karen territory of life in Burma. (Courtesy Jitraporn Kaikome)

Nourishing Life— Territories of life & food sovereignty

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This Policy Brief focuses on the contributions that the territories and areas governed, managed and conserved by custodian indigenous peoples and local communities— a complex phenomenon abbreviated as ‘ICCAs– territories of life’— make to the food sovereignty of the peoples and communities themselves—another complex phenomenon at the heart of the Via Campesina movement. Drawing from eight inspiring cases, we find community custodians of territories of life that are well organised, knowledgeable, self-aware, and possess a strong sense of identity and pride. All these characteristics nourish their capacity to develop ‘localised’ and culture-rich food systems that sustain the health of both their custodian communities and territories. We thus stress that **territories of life and food sovereignty can be mutually supportive in virtuous cycles**. We suggest that the movement to add visibility, strength and recognition to ICCAs—territories of life and the movement to foster food sovereignty throughout the world may find it advantageous to engage in knowledge sharing and enhanced mutual support. This Brief lists and discusses **specific options** to advance that cooperation. It offers **recommendations** for civil society organisations and networks, and for legislators, policymakers and government officials willing to halt the drivers of planetary disaster and enhance the positive forces that foster more just and sustainable food systems, better conserved biological and cultural diversity, and more empowered and healthier communities.

1. Territories of life

Human communities have played a central role in shaping nature’s diversity and its associated functions. Recent scientific evidence suggests that virtually every part of the globe— from boreal forests to the humid tropics— has been inhabited, modified and managed for millennia.¹ Many of the innumerable human communities that have drawn their sustenance from these landscapes have also been, in multiple ways, their ‘custodians’.² They have tended the land, planted and harvested crops, selected and associated species, identified seasonally-appropriate behaviours and migration routes, accumulated local knowledge and know-how, and established, among themselves and with others, many relationships essential for the continuation of life. Today, while much of the world is under the control of distant authorities or sacrificed for financial objectives, we still find communities on the frontline of environmental care, resistance and adaptation. In a world of enhanced technological might and

powerful communication, they need to meet expanded needs while facing new challenges, as they continue to sustain, protect, restore and defend their commons and associated biological and cultural diversity. Crucially, these communities are also providing loud and articulate voices in defence of the right to food, among other human rights.³

The term ‘ICCAs—territories of life’ (see Box 1) is used to describe the territories and areas **collectively governed, managed and conserved by custodian indigenous peoples and local communities**. The communities generally live in such territories, draw from them their livelihoods and their material and spiritual wellbeing, and relate to them in deeply cultured ways. Territories of life are grassroots efforts that sustain the diversity of nature and cultures throughout the world, providing for the conservation of habitats and species together with the satisfaction of human needs for millions of people.⁴ Recently, emphasis has also been placed on

1 Gomez Pompa and Kaus, 1992; Ali Razmkhah, personal communication, 2019.

2 Sajeve *et al.*, 2019.

3 Temper *et al.*, 2018.

4 Kothari *et al.*, 2012; www.iccaconsortium.org; Pimbert and Pretty, 1998; Posey, 1999.

the crucial role that indigenous peoples and local communities play for **sustainable self-determination**,⁵ and research has shown that indigenous peoples and local communities invest substantially in conserving their territories – up to \$US 1.71 billion in the developing

world.⁶ There is also increasing awareness about the high personal and social costs paid by many indigenous peoples and local communities that have been defending their territories of life.⁷

Box 1. ICCAs—Territories of Life⁸

'ICCAs—territories of life' refers to an age-old, widespread, diverse and dynamic phenomenon: **territories and areas collectively governed, managed and conserved by their custodian indigenous peoples and local communities**. Well-defined territories of life exist wherever:

- ▶ There is a **close and deep connection** between a territory or area and an indigenous people or local community. This relationship is generally embedded in history, social and cultural identity, spirituality and/or people's reliance on the territory for their material and non-material wellbeing.⁹
- ▶ The custodian people or community makes¹⁰ and enforces decisions and rules (e.g., access and use) about the territory and its natural resources through a **functioning governance institution**.¹¹
- ▶ The governance decisions and management efforts of the concerned people or community contribute to the **conservation of nature** (ecosystems, habitats, species, natural resources), as well as to **community wellbeing**.¹²

Territories and areas across diverse contexts and regions demonstrate to varying degrees these **three key characteristics**.¹³ Their community custodians have voiced their importance, calling for those to be maintained and strengthened.¹⁴ Telling examples can be found in [this short movie](#).

Territories of life are associated with an enormous variety of ecosystems, governance institutions and management approaches. Seasonal migration in semi-arid environments, rotational farming in upland forests, carefully managed harvesting, fishing, hunting and gatherings and biodiverse agriculture nourished by freely exchanged knowledge,

seeds, breeds and ingenious systems of irrigation, have allowed communities to link with territories of unique biological and cultural diversity. In turn, those unique territories and bio-cultural diversity have nourished the sense of identity, wellbeing and pride of the concerned communities.

5 Corntassel, 2012.

6 Tauli-Corpuz *et al.*, 2018.

7 Global Witness, 2018.

8 Farvar *et al.*, 2018.

9 The custodian indigenous people or community may or may not physically reside in the territory, although most ICCAs are inhabited and regularly used by their custodian communities.

10 Decision-making may be through a process of negotiation with other key actors.

11 The existence of the ICCA and the legitimacy of its governing institution and rules may or may not be recognised in statutory law of the relevant country. The important condition, however, is that they function de facto. In some cases, the governing institution may have been overpowered by other authorities or interests but may still be able to revive itself under propitious conditions.

12 Many custodians do not distinguish between the conservation of nature and community well-being. Distinguishing between them, or setting them in opposition to one another, may legitimise imposed conservation and undermine the social relations and cultural norms that have successfully conserved nature over time and space.

13 In this Policy Brief we recognise the right of communities to self-declare or self-designate as ICCAs, independently of whether or not they are included in the international ICCA Registry (see later). In cases they are not registered, we do not pre-suppose the existence of the three characteristics defining an ICCA—territory of life.

14 Borri-Feyerabend *et al.*, 2010; Kothari *et al.*, 2012.



Water is both abundant and precious in the territory of life of the Manobo people of Soté, (Mindanao, The Philippines) (Courtesy Graiza Tabanao)

The reasons why communities keep collectively governing, managing and conserving specific territories and areas are many: preventing natural disasters; maintaining a place for privacy and ceremonial gatherings in spiritually or culturally significant areas; respecting the grounds and resting places of their ancestors; having a place to hide themselves or their goods (e.g., cattle) in times of danger; protecting the habitats of sacred animals; or even (although rarely) protecting biodiversity tout court. Most commonly, however, territories of life are landscapes and seascapes that communities recognise as essential for securing the means of livelihoods and wellbeing—food, water, medicine, natural resources used by people for housing, agriculture, transport, rituals, income... all necessary for the life

of people today and/or reserved as safety nets for times of stress that may come in the future.

Interestingly, territories of life coexist with—and generally need—the presence of plots of land and resources or means of production that are governed, managed and often owned by families or individuals. Typical examples are family rice fields fed by water from collectively managed forests, fishing gear owned by families and used in a coastal area where rules are collectively agreed, or plots cut and burned by families doing rotational agriculture in a collectively governed forest. **The combination of individual, family and collective roles and capacities strengthens the existence and reality of territories of life within specific landscapes and seascapes.**

2. Food Sovereignty

Food is a most basic need, crucial for health, wellbeing, development, and productive thinking and work of every human

being. Food security—knowing where the next meals will come from—is a basic concern of families, communities and societies

around the world.¹⁵ Beyond consumption and security, however, the **circumstances and ways in which food is produced, processed, distributed and prepared— and by whom— have important consequences and meaning.** It is in the context of exploring

these issues that the concept of food sovereignty has emerged. Its theory and practice reflect decades of struggles by social movements that worked in mutual solidarity to define new pathways to “a future without hunger” (see Box 2).

Box 2. Food sovereignty: principles for a “future without hunger”

During the 1996 World Food Summit, *La Vía Campesina*¹⁶ presented seven mutually supportive principles that define food sovereignty as an alternative paradigm for food, agriculture and human well-being, as summarized here:

1. Food – A basic human right

Food is a basic human right. Everyone must have access to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food in quantity and quality sufficient to sustain a healthy life with full human dignity. Each nation should declare that access to food is a constitutional right and guarantee the development of the primary sector to ensure the concrete realization of this fundamental right.

2. Agrarian reform

A genuine agrarian reform is necessary. This would give to landless and farming people,¹⁷ especially women, ownership and control of the land they work, and it would return their territories to indigenous peoples. The right to land must be free of discrimination based on gender, religion, race, social class or ideology. The land belongs to those who work it. Smallholder farmer families, and women in them, must have access to productive land, credit, technology, markets and extension services. Governments must establish and support decentralized rural credit systems that prioritize the production of food for domestic consumption.

3. Protecting natural resources

Use of natural resources, especially land, water, seeds and livestock breeds, must be sustainable. The people who work the land must have the right to practice sustainable management of natural resources and to preserve biological diversity, building upon a sound economy, security of tenure, healthy soils and reduced use of agro-chemicals. Long-term sustainability demands a shift away from dependence on chemical inputs, cash-crop monocultures and intensive, industrialized production models. Balanced and diversified natural systems are required. Farming communities have the right to freely use and protect the diverse genetic resources, including seeds and livestock breeds developed by them throughout history.

4. Reorganizing food trade

Food is first and foremost a source of nutrition and only secondarily an item of trade. National agricultural policies must prioritize production for domestic consumption and food self-sufficiency. Food imports must not displace local production nor depress prices. Export dumping or subsidized exports must cease. Smallholder farmers have the right to produce essential food staples for their countries and to control the marketing of their products. Food prices in domestic and international markets must be regulated and reflect the true costs of producing that food, ensuring that smallholder farmer families have adequate incomes.

15 Food security exists when “all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 1996). This definition is based on four dimensions of food security: 1. availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports; 2. access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet; 3. utilization of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met; and 4. stability, whereby a population, household or individual has access to adequate food at all times.

16 La Vía Campesina (LVC) is an international movement that brings together peasant organisations of small- and medium-sized producers, agricultural workers, landless people, women farmers, migrants and indigenous communities from Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe. LVC comprises about 164 local and national organisations in 73 countries and represents about 200 million farmers altogether. For more details, see: <https://viacampesina.org/en>

17 Farmers here refers to smallholder peasant and family farmers who grow crops and raise livestock, pastoralists, artisanal fishers, landless farmers/workers, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples, hunters and gatherers, and other small-scale producers.

5. Ending the globalization of hunger

Multilateral institutions and speculative capital have a growing control over agricultural policies, facilitated by the economic policies of multilateral organizations such as the WTO, World Bank and IMF. Regulation and taxation of speculative capital and a strictly enforced code of conduct for transnational corporations is needed.

6. Social peace

Everyone has the right to be free from violence. Food must not be used as a weapon. Increasing levels of poverty and marginalization in the countryside, along with the growing oppression of ethnic minorities and indigenous populations, aggravate situations of injustice and hopelessness. The ongoing displacement, forced urbanization, repression and increasing incidence of racism of smallholder farmers cannot be tolerated.

7. Democratic control

Smallholder farmers must have direct input into formulating agricultural policies at all levels. The United Nations and related organizations will have to undergo a process of democratisation to enable this to become a reality. Everyone has the right to honest, accurate information and open and democratic decision-making. These rights form the basis of good governance, accountability and equal participation in economic, political and social life, free from all forms of discrimination. Rural women must be granted direct and active decision-making on food and rural issues.

Subsequent declarations and documents by La Vía Campesina have built on these core food sovereignty principles.

Source: La Vía Campesina, 1996; www.viacampesina.org



Women use all possible occasions to grow food (Salvador da Bahia, Brazil).
(Courtesy Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend)

Food sovereignty aims to guarantee and protect people's space, ability and fundamental right to define their own models of production, food distribution and consumption patterns. It emphasizes the science and practice of **agroecology** to design sustainable agricultures and land uses that reduce carbon and ecological footprints in rural and urban areas.¹⁸ It seeks to re-localise as much as possible the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food in any given territory.

Food sovereignty encompasses the concept of biocultural diversity: the interrelated biological,

18 Altieri, 1995; IPES-Food, 2016; HLPE, 2019. In general, agroecology encompasses highly diverse, ecology-based systems of sustainable land use, including agriculture, horticulture, forestry, animal herding, and combinations thereof. For example, many indigenous peoples do not practice farming, understood as large, cleared and planted fields. They rather practice shifting horticulture, or forest gardens where a wide diversity of associated plants is cultivated in small, scattered plots in various areas of a given forest, while prior clearings are reverting to forest.

cultural (including linguistic!) diversity as well as the local knowledge, institutions, and practices which are vitally important in allowing societies to adaptively manage their farming systems, natural resources, landscapes, and social life.¹⁹ Along with

many supporters of territories of life, the food sovereignty movement recognises that there is a fundamental contradiction between capitalism and nature's thrust for diversity and differentiation.²⁰

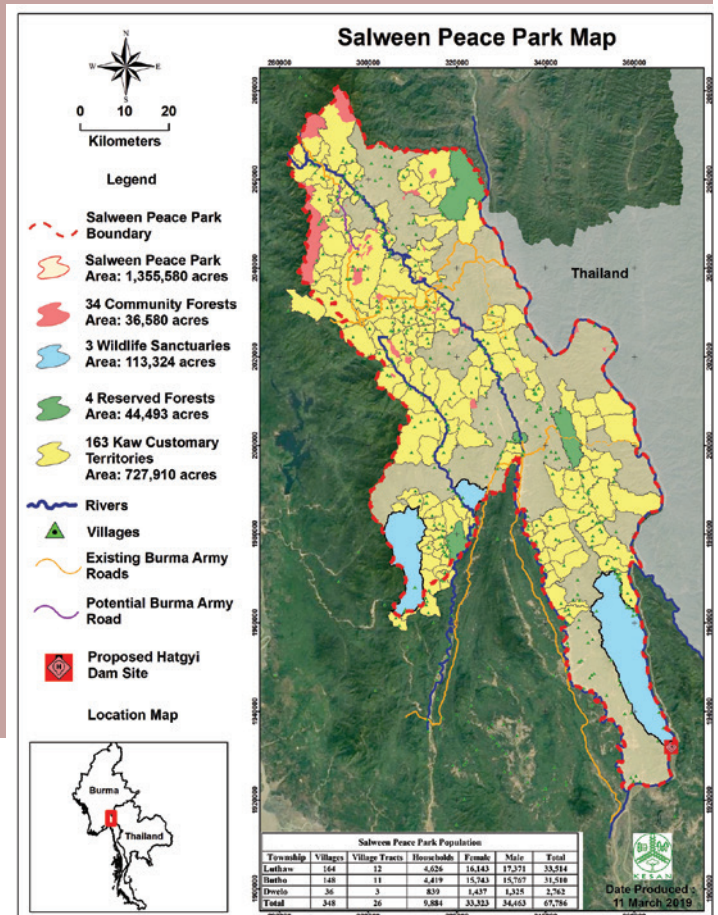
3. Do territories of life advance and secure food sovereignty? Eight case examples

Do territories of life advance and secure food sovereignty? To examine this question, we will review eight inspiring case examples of 'territories of life' and consider whether and how they help to achieve a level

of food sovereignty for their custodian communities. We will then review some of the commonalities among the cases and draw some conclusions.

Case example 1. The territory of life of the Karen people provides a grassroots' alternative to imposed destructive development in Burma/Myanmar²¹

The Salween Peace Park (*Kholo Tamutaku Karer*) covers 5,485 km² of the Salween River basin, a region of great importance to global biodiversity in Burma/Myanmar that hosts rare and endangered species— such as tigers, gibbons, pangolins, leopards, elephants and great hornbills. In local history, the arrival of the community in the area is the point at which the Karen calendar begins, 2758 years ago. In the early 1800s, the British colonial government did not significantly limit the Karen's traditional livelihoods and relations with the territory, but the policies and practices of the Myanmar government after independence have caused the displacement of many communities, and the loss of some community Kaw. In Karen language, *kaw* means 'land'... but the term has many layers. A *Kaw* comprises the ancestral home of a specific Karen community, its lands, forests, rivers, natural resources, flora, fauna, and people. Some *kaw* are small, with only one village



19 Pimbert, 2018a.

20 Bookchin, 1990.

21 Extracts from a report prepared for this Policy Brief by Caspar Palmano and Paul Sein Twa, 2019, [KESAN website](#) and [P.K. Feyerabend Foundation website](#).



Demarcating a kaw (territory of life) in the Salween Peace Park, Burma. (Courtesy HESPA)

located within, some kaw are large, and host more than ten villages. The kaw embodies the way the community governs and manages the land and natural resources, its culture and social interactions and the health of the community, deeply connected to the health of the lands, waters, and forests in which it lives. A kaw is a self-perpetuating territory, a bio-cultural unit of life.

If, in the sense just described, the Salween River basin has been the kaw or 'territory of life' of its indigenous Karen custodians for about three thousand years, the self-declaration of the Salween Peace Park is truly recent (December 2018). The approximately 60,000 residents went through a long and laborious process of successive consultations, developed their own agreed rules and finally proclaimed that their territory was dedicated to fulfilling their own three 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.

Indigenous Karen traditions are intimately tied to the land and nature in general. The local food system²² is based on upland Ku rotational agriculture supplemented by lowland cultivation of orchard, agroforestry, fishing, hunting, and gathering of non-timber forest products. Ku is the name that the Karen use for their upland rotational plots— selected and allotted to households within a kaw based on customary practice and cultivated for a limited time (typically between 7 and 10 years), before they are let to regrow naturally. Food and other products are bartered or traded for cash, both internally and externally. Both upland Ku cultivation and lowland agriculture are heavily based on traditional knowledge and know-how, and Karen's use of land, flora and fauna is guided by local taboos and seasonality. Various communities have established their fish and wildlife conservation zones, community forests and herbal medicinal forests, all regulated by traditional practices. As known to scholars and demonstrated by the Karen in their territory, shifting cultivation does coexist with exceptional biodiversity and may be positive for it.

The Salween Peace Park is a living grassroots alternative to the destructive development (mega hydropower, roads, mining, logging) and poaching and trafficking of wildlife proposed, or allowed by, the Myanmar Government and its allied foreign companies. On the one hand, the territory is the basis of food security for all Karen communities. On the other, the forests and mountains have protected communities from the Burmese soldiers, giving them somewhere to flee to, while their customary knowledge and practices have allowed them to survive even while in hiding. The main constraints to security of food and livelihoods, as well as to the lives of people, are the Myanmar Government's laws and policies, which do not recognise the rights of the Karen communities to govern their territory and criminalise the traditional shifting cultiva-

22 A 'food system' gathers all the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the outputs of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes (HLPE 2014).

tion techniques they practice at the heart of their way of life. In fact, you find misery and child malnutrition in Karen communities primarily in the unfortunate circumstances when communities are forcibly displaced, land is confiscated, or crops are destroyed by the Myanmar army.

For the custodian communities of the Salween Peace Park, a major measure of wellbeing and food sovereignty is access to good land, good forest, and good streams to practice agriculture, as everyone depends heavily on that for their food and for livelihoods in general. Other indicators of wellbeing are the level of cooperation within and among communities, the abundance of yield (rice, orchard products) at harvest time, and the happiness of the children. All residents have a similar relationship with the territory, as their culture, practices, and beliefs are deeply intertwined with the landscape and natural resources. Some of them, such as traditional leaders and elders, hold stronger knowledge about nature, but they all equally depend on the territory, and feel responsible to care for it.

Case example 2. The Wampis Integral Autonomous Territory, Peru—food security, until when?²³

The Wampis nation occupies the watersheds of the Morona and Santiago Rivers between the Cordillera del Condor range and the Marañón River, in the northern Peruvian departments of Loreto and Amazonas adjacent to the boundary with Ecuador. Covered by rainforest and very isolated (more than 1,500 kilometers from Peru's capital, Lima), the Wampis territory has not been spared exploration and exploitation by mining and oil and gas industries which take advantage of government legislation and policies that provide incentives for those activities. Their lands, forests, and waters are contaminated by both legal and massive illegal gold mining and by oil leakage from the 45-year-old North Peruvian Pipeline.

The situation escalated in 2009, when the Wampis and their Awajún neighbors organized a mass protest that blocked the Pipeline, pumping stations, river and road transportation for several months, demanding the reversal of government decrees that truncated their land and natural resource rights and opened up their territory to further mining, oil and gas, and agro-industrial concessions. The violent confrontation, provoked by the government, and known worldwide as the Baguazo, left 34 police and indigenous protesters dead.²⁴ In the years following the tragedy, the

Mapping the Autonomous Integral Territory of the Wampis Nation -- 1,370,000 hectares in the Peruvian Amazon (Courtesy of the Wampis Nation)



23 Extracts from a report prepared for this Policy Brief by Thomas Moore, 2019, and references therein supplemented by personal communications by Wrays Perez Ramirez and Thomas Niederberger, 2019.

24 <https://www.iwgia.org/en/peru/3265-wampis-nation-peru>

Wampis organized themselves to gain the level of autonomy they needed.

On 28 November 2015, the Wampis Nation self-proclaimed governance rights to its customary territory— comprising 1'327,760 hectares—and took-on the corresponding responsibility to govern it for the public good and to maintain a healthy environment and culture for the present and future generations.²⁵ The territory includes titled and untitled lands, a portion of a national park, a communal reserve, lands occupied by colonists, mining concessions, an army base, two municipalities, etc. The Wampis describe it as 'integral territory', unbroken from the top of the sky to the center of the earth and occupying an entire landscape. It is adamantly different than the 'leopard spot' fragmented land that the Peruvian government recognizes as belonging to native communities.

The self-proclaimed governing authority is the Autonomous Territorial Government of the Wampis Nation, whose Statutes include protocols of relationship with the non-Wampis individuals, enterprises and organization within the territory, lays out a vision for the future and stipulates rules regarding the health and duties of the Wampis people, as well as procedures for their physical and spiritual wellbeing, education, language and recovery of ancestral place names. The Statutes do not allow the government or anyone else to impose activities without the free, prior, and informed consent of the Wampis Nation and its Autonomous Territorial Government. With this, the Wampis Nation affirms that the Government of Peru is not allowed to grant any further concessions for oil, timber or mining in their territory-- a milestone in indigenous sovereignty. The Government of Peru has not recognized the Wampis Nation and its Autonomous Territorial Government, but the need for consent has been legally confirmed by the Fourth Constitutional Court of Lima in a judgement issued in August 2018, in application of the ILO Convention 169, ratified by Perú in 1994.

The traditional subsistence pattern of the Wampis Nation is shifting horticulture with multiple gardens where more than 30 varieties of manioc are cultivated together with a wide range of other crops— including sweet potatoes and other tubers, plantains, maize, squash, peach palms, papaya, pineapple, sugar cane, peanuts, and red peppers, among many others. Plants are cultivated and used for dyes and fishing, as well as for medicinal and cultural uses. Cacao, bananas and handicrafts are produced for regional and global markets. Proteins are obtained from hunting wild game complemented by freshwater fishing. Many wild plants add to this traditional diet.

Nearly all Wampis are still largely dependent on this varied and culture-rich way of producing food for their own consumption. Nevertheless, their diet is changing, and families have become familiar with foreign processed foods and started buying food in shops that offer what Wampis elders consider junk food. The causes for this dietary change are many and complex. One reason is that government agencies have started serving industrially produced food in school canteens: kids get accustomed to it and ask for it also at home. Another reason, likely much more ominous, is that less protein is available from the forest surrounding the villages, due to the enhanced presence of outsiders and overuse of resources by the Wampis themselves. Why is it so?

An important reason for Wampis overuse of game and fish is related to rapid population growth and subsequent growth of the size of villages and of the demand for wildlife in their proximity. Also, now that they need money for school supplies, commercial medicines, supporting children to study in cities outside their territory, and the likes, some Wampis no longer hunt for self-consumption only and have started selling game and fish in the North, across the border with Ecuador, or to the restaurants in the mestizo settlement in their own territory. With some of the money they make they buy processed food for their kids, and other consumer items. The variety of crops grown in the gardens has also diminished, and some families now do not grow much more than manioc and

25 [Statutes of the Wampis Nation](#) – abridged version accessed via Internet, May 2019.

plantains. One of the reasons for this may be that attention has shifted to cacao and plantains as cash crops. Wild foods are also no longer readily available around the larger villages.

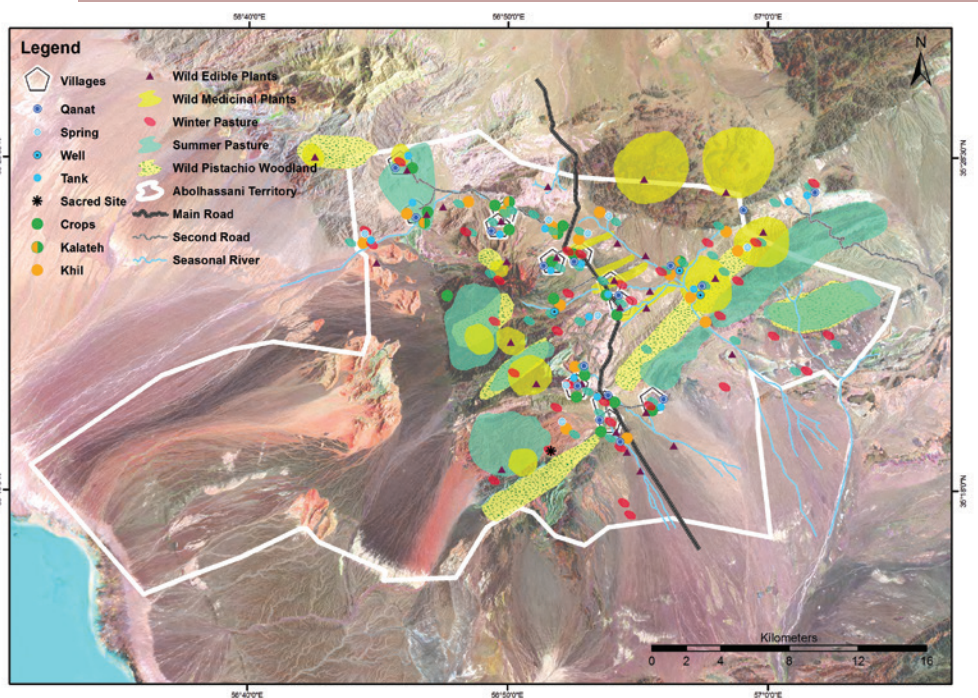
Some people stress that illegal gold mining has contaminated rivers and water sources with mercury, and the oil industry has been responsible for sizeable oil spills, like the one at Mayuriaga in 2016. They believe that game and fish availability is reduced because of that and are very worried about contamination. While this is a valid and serious concern, it is also true that the Wampis nation faces a crucial challenge in finding ways of regulating fishing and hunting to stop overuse—by Wampis as well as by other indigenous peoples from Ecuador or Peru. It may be a challenge to implement self-regulation, but there is growing awareness, among the Wampis leadership and the Wampis in general, of the need for self-monitoring and enforcement, as outlined in their freely adopted Statutes. The main reason for this may well be the maintenance of the way of life and dietary preferences of the Wampis, and not just 'conserving biodiversity'.

Whatever the reasons, the diet of Wampis children appears to lack protein and many kids have been diagnosed with anemia. Food quality – besides availability -- is a concern. Some Wampis even say that state-sponsored foods served in schools and produced in distant countries like New Zealand or the United States (e.g. tinned tuna, industrially produced chicken, milk, spaghetti, rice and biscuits) have caused allergic reactions among their children. In contrast, the local foods are considered tasty, nutritious and culturally meaningful. Initiatives are underway to recover traditional food diversity, with young women learning from their elders how to cultivate nearly extinct crop varieties, fishermen managing again their fish resources, and projects restoring local habitats (e.g., lakes) and species (e.g., turtles). 'Living well' (tarimat pujut in Wampis) is intimately linked with self-determination and collective territorial governance, but crucially also with quantity and quality of available food. The Wampis pamuk (president) Wrays Pérez Ramirez affirms: "We still have food security, but we fear we will lose it soon... in terms of quantity, quality and control over food. That is what we are fighting against!"

The river is the heart of the territory of life of the Wampis Nation (Courtesy of the Wampis Nation)



Case example 3. Governing a territory of life is key to responding to climate change—the experience of the Abolhassani Tribal Confederacy, Iran²⁶



For centuries, the Abolhassani indigenous tribes have lived and migrated seasonally in a peri-Central-Desert area known as Touran, one of thirteen UNESCO Biosphere Reserves found in Iran. Their ancestral domain—now a territory conserved by the Abolhassani Indigenous Nomadic Tribal Confederacy—covers about 74,000 hectares within the Reserve. The entire territory of the Abolhassani was declared to be state property by the regime of the Shah in 1963, as part of a vast campaign of nationalisation of natural resources in the country. Through the work of many years and the support of a

visionary civil society organisation that helped about that, the Confederacy is now re-empowered and fully involved in governing its territory. Each one of the 12 tribes is represented by two trusted elders in the tribal Council of Elders, in charge of decision making over the territory. The restoration, strengthening and registration of the tribal system have been key for community empowerment. The Council of Elders and its constituent Women's Committee give voice to the tribal confederacy. All decisions are discussed in the Council of Elders and approved only after consultation with each of the 12 tribes. This setup provides the basis for participatory and deliberative democracy.

The territory of Abolhassani Confederacy has a remarkably high animal and plant diversity. An estimated 800 plant species have been identified, more than 20% of which are endemic (and some may still be unknown/ unrecorded). There is an exceptional diversity of wildlife, including the endangered Asiatic cheetah, Iranian leopard, Houbara bustard, and gazelles, among others. The Abolhassani rarely hunt animals and respect the daily division of their water sources between wildlife and livestock—facilitated by the improvement of water supply and management system. In recent years, under the pressure of unprecedented droughts, they have even reinstated a pastoralist tradition called *hanar*—watering the animals once every two days, instead of every day, during the cooler autumn and winter seasons. For that, they have reintroduced drought-resistant indigenous breeds in their herds, which allows the animals to go twice as far from the water sources, relieving pressure on natural rangelands due to better distribution of grazing. The revival of the *hanar* system has also facilitated sharing available water sources between livestock and wildlife.

²⁶ This case examples is summarised from presentations by M. Taghi Farvar, personal communications by Ghanimat Azhdari and Ali Razmkhah (2019), and information available from the [P.K. Feyerabend Foundation website](#).

As another response to the enhanced dry spells, the Abolhassani have also 'reinvented' their agricultural patterns. In the past dozen years, they have undertaken to cultivate new crops () or reallocate them to animal feeding. With some help from the government, they managed to enhance their production by adding irrigation via traditional underground water management system (qanats) and water storage systems. Instead of depending only on rain-fed wheat and barley, as they did in the past, the Abolhassani have learned to use agricultural products and residues as supplementary feeding for their migratory herds of sheep, goats and draft animals—thereby reducing grazing pressure on natural rangelands. While doing this, they have also implemented a successful micro-credit programme and re-instituted the traditional intertribal mutual aid and solidarity agreements for sharing rangelands among drought affected tribes—a practice that had been forbidden by government agencies.

Abolhassani people with their livestock (Courtesy Genesta)



The innovations of the Abolhassani include agricultural crops for income and fodder. Pistachios, cotton and watermelon, sunflower seeds and barley are used for both direct sale and to improve the feeding of livestock, bringing in better income and securing livelihoods. The microcredit programme supporting this has also helped to revive the customary governance system of the tribe. The sustainable livelihoods fund (sanduaq) ensures collective ownership of tribal assets and initiatives. Women benefit by undertaking credit and engaging in diversified livelihood activities (e.g., handicraft, dairy production, sustainably collection of non-timber products from forests and rangelands). Through innovative cultivation of garden vegetables and some fruits, the health, nutrition and food security of the people have also improved. The community—now stronger because again well organised— has also managed to exert pressure on the government for better services for education and health care, and obtained small-scale piped water for drinking, public electricity and telephone coverage.

The Abolhassani affirm that the crucial conditions for their capacity to adapt to climate change has been their relatively recent re-organisation along traditional lines and the capacity to govern and manage their territory of life as they see fit. They are sharing their experience with other tribes and encouraging them to join the federation of indigenous nomadic tribes of Iran (UNINOMAD) to take control of their own affairs and, in particular to govern their migration territories according to traditional knowledge and skills.

Participatory mapping of land uses in the Abolhassani territory of life. (Courtesy Genesta)



Case example 4. Kawawana community conserved area—restoring an ancient territory of life among the Djola people of Casamance, Senegal²⁷

The eight Djola communities of the Mangagoulack municipality, in Senegal's Casamance region, remember when a time when – about ten years ago – they were still depressed and hungry. Over-fishing, rising saltwater levels and deforestation of mangroves had contributed to an economic downward spiral in their communities. They bordered a magnificent estuarine ecosystem and had developed their own fishers' association... but fishers from outside the area had been coming for years with powerful motor engines and destructive gear, and thoroughly depleted the local fisheries. The locals had no way to enforce any type of fishing rules and the only option left for their youth was... migration.

In 2009, however, the communities participated in a gathering where they were supported to assess their socio-ecological situation and plan together what they wanted to achieve. What they wanted, they said, was to be able to go back to their traditional territorial governance and management practices, based on traditional knowledge and spiritual world view. They were convinced that this would restore plentifulness to their ecosystem and their lives.

They were right... and they were lucky. During the gathering, they were informed that the government of Senegal was a signatory of the Convention on Biological Diversity—which promotes various forms of governance for protected and conserved areas, including “community conserved areas”. Empowered by that knowledge, they developed a governance structure and management plan for the territory they considered as their “local heritage to be preserved by us all” (in Djola language Kapoye Wafwolale Wata Nanang, abbreviated as Kawawana). Then, through feats of patience and diplomacy, they succeeded in getting Kawawana to be fully recognised as a community conserved area— first by the local municipality, based on Senegal's Decentralisation Law, and then by the Regional Council and finally by the Governor of Casamance. By 2010, they were able to restore their fisheries rules and, by 2012, the river was once again full of fish, oysters and wildlife!

The Kawawana territory encompasses 9,665 ha and is governed by the fishers association in collaboration with the municipality, the elders and the state fishery agency. Its management plan— fully developed by the communities—is based on a clear zoning system and agreed rules to conserve fisheries and other natural resources. The estuarine ecosystem is divided into three zones, each with specific rules: 1. red zone, where the spirits live and no one is allowed entry or any type of resource use; 2. yellow zone, where fishing is allowed by all, but only with permitted gear and no motor boats; 3. orange zone, where fishing is allowed only by locals, for local consumption or selling in local markets at a locally agreed price. Noticeably, the orange zone was developed with the food needs and food preferences of the local communities in mind!

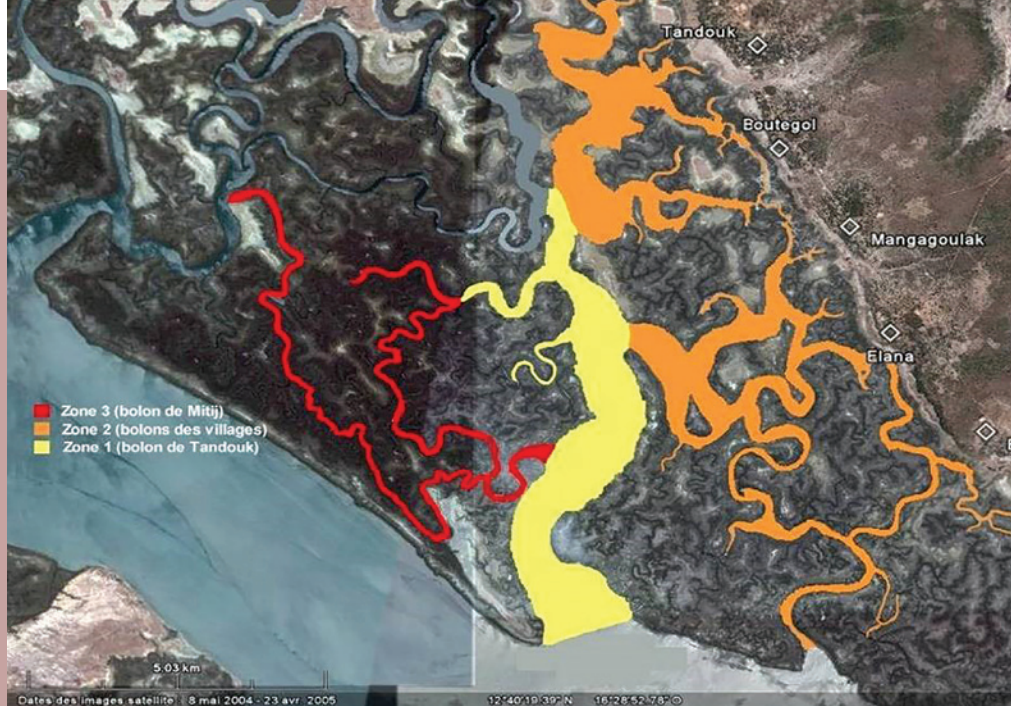


Restored fishery in a restored territory of life. (Courtesy Salatou Sambou)

Through time, the red zone provided for the renewal of the resource. The elimination of destructive gear, such as monofilament nets, and the prohibition of motorized engines resulted in a more peaceful environment, where fisheries could develop again. The communities hired some government agencies to train the members of their volunteer

surveillance team to be able to monitor the respect of their own rules. After their training they are authorized to apprehend violators, and today the volunteer surveillance team calls the fisheries agency personnel only in case of troubles. With the success of Kawawana, they also managed to obtain support for a project that developed a dam to protect their land from salty water, restoring the production of the local highly praised rice variety. They even succeeded in developing a strong social consensus on desired development priorities and saved their local forest from a destructive carbonification project promoted by the Mayor and some foreign agencies... a fact that filled everyone with pride.

The Kawawana zones are key for the management plan of this community conserved area / territory of life (Courtesy Kawawana Governing Board)



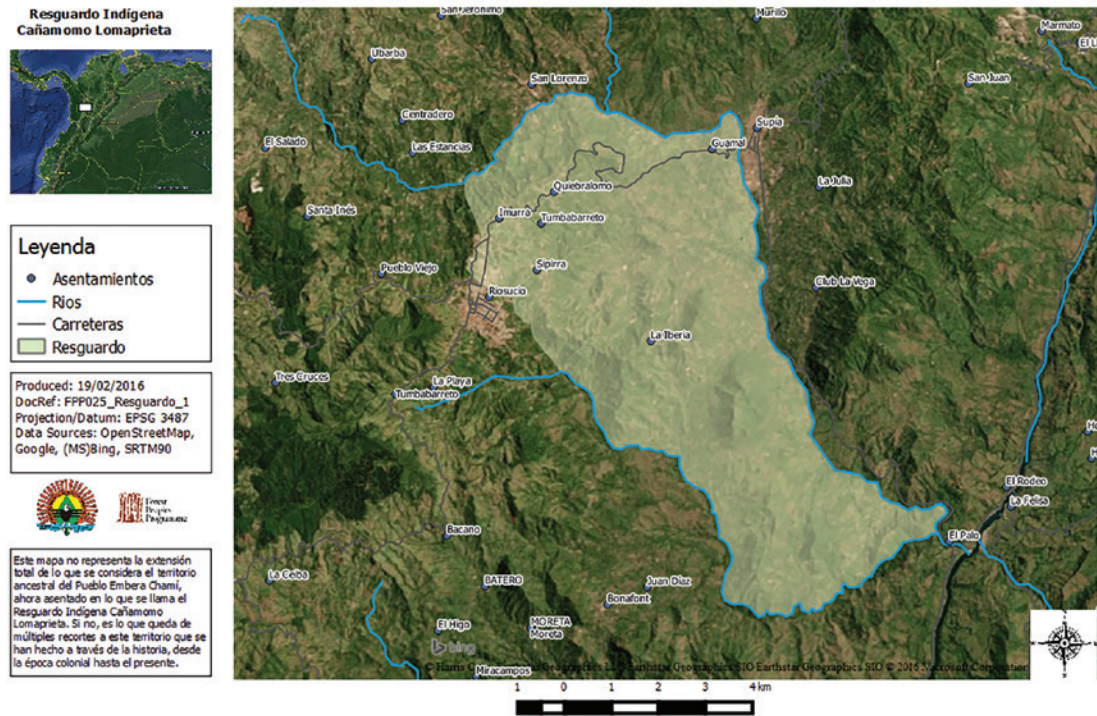
Problems have not disappeared. Climate change is impending, and cash is still scarce. The surveillance of Kawawana costs money (gasoline and maintenance are needed for the surveillance boats, which have the only two small engines allowed in Kawawana). There is no external support to maintain the local efforts—neither from the Senegalese governments nor from conservation donors—even if the renewed biodiversity of Kawawana benefits everyone. The success of the local rules is such that the number and size of crocodiles has multiplied. They are dangerous... but cannot be controlled because of national protective policies.

Today, the 12,000 residents of the Kawawana custodian communities are proud of their renewed bounty. Fish, rice, vegetables, honey, chicken, goat and small cattle feed the locals, and oysters, fish, peanuts, citrus fruits and mangoes also provide for cash trade. Fish diversity is now back, and some fishermen have quadrupled their catch. Both the quantity and quality of fish that local people eat have improved. Women have created their Oyster Collectors Association, which is represented in the governing body of Kawawana together with the Association of Bana bana (local fish buyers and sellers). Migration has reversed: the number of local fishermen has climbed from 130 to 215 in 10 years, there are now 114 Bana bana employed locally and 385 persons collect, process and sell oysters. Overall, the community feels stronger, more united, and proud of its renewed food abundance, greater social inclusion, and new income-generating possibilities. Even the incidence of malaria is reported to be falling everywhere in the municipality, possibly a result of better nutrition. A phrase from a local woman sums it all up: "We eat well, now!".

A local variety of rice, fairly resistant to saltwater, is most appreciated for food and gifts (Courtesy Grazia Borrini-Fejerabend)



Case example 5. Cañamomo Lomapieta—an ancient Resguardo committed to a modern agroecological conversion in Colombia²⁸



The long history of struggle and recovery of the territory of the *Resguardo Indígena* (indigenous reserve) Cañamomo Lomapieta is a powerful example of grassroots resistance to imposed agricultural, industrial and mining development. Located in the heart of Colombia's coffee-producing Andes, at an altitude of 600–1800 meters above sea level, in the foothills of the Western Cordillera, the *Resguardo* has a warm-to-temperate climate and hosts rich tropical humid forest ecosystems. The *Resguardo* is one of the oldest in Colombia. Created

in 1540 and with boundaries defined since 1627, it acquired in 1953 a registered public deed and collective title to an area of 4826 hectares (37.6 km²). Its 32 communities of Embera-chamí residents have been affected by five hundred years of colonization, usurpation, acculturation and cultural loss (including the loss of their own language), but they never abandoned their role as custodians of the territory and always refused to yield to a variety of invasions. The history of their struggles and resistance to claim ownership over the territory is proof of their close and deep relationship with the land. Thankfully, they have now a strong system to guarantee their permanence and self-governance as an indigenous people with its own political authority, called Cabildo, which includes a Governor, a Council of ex-Governors and representatives from all its 32 communities.

As mentioned, the region has a high potential for mining, gold in particular—an activity that has flourished locally since pre-Colombian time. What is truly remarkable is that the Cañamomo Lomapieta community has gained today its official recognition as mining authority at the same level as the government mining authority. This is because of its very ancient tradition and capacity to demonstrate judicious planning and rules to avoid contamination. The recognition is a great achievement and an unprecedented milestone in Colombia. The court ruling on which it is based also gives the community the prerogative to veto mining titles granted to individuals, while continuing to manage low impact, small scale mining in restricted areas with good levels of environmental safety (no chemicals, etc).

The ecological integrity of the territory is threatened by the demographic pressure of its twenty-four thousand inhabitants (in such a limited area!), but the communities and their governing authorities have now developed a participatory process to identify local issues and problems and provide appropriate responses. A common response is that each family diversifies livelihoods by sending some members to urban areas to earn money and subsidize the members who remain on the land. Besides providing needed resources, this avoids subdividing the family plots into smaller and sma-

²⁸ Extracts from a report prepared by Carolina Amaya and colleagues of CEMI, Colombia, 2019, based on Cabildo documents, workshop exchanges, and information provided by Héctor Jaime Vinasco, ex-governor of the Cabildo Cañamomo Lomapieta.

ller holdings. Another crucial response is the subdivision of the territory into zones, to conserve and restore the remaining forested areas, stop the advance of agriculture and protect the watershed's streams and 415 identified water sources. As agriculture

The ground can be both steep and luxuriant in the Cabildo Cañamomo Lomapieta (Courtesy Leonardo Parra, CEMI)



is the main livelihood for residents—both for local food production and income—they have also committed to an agroecological conversion of their productive plots, declaring the Resguardo free of transgenics and strengthening the movement of custodians of local seeds. All these initiatives are included in the Environment Management Plan and spelled out in a Resolution developed in a highly participatory way in 2018.

Two issues deserve to be highlighted. The first, particularly important for the Resguardo, is that there are 102 areas and 415 water springs protected by the so called “yellow lines”, which have been agreed to limit agricultural expansion. In this way, locally agreed Water Rules—which also include waste management, prohibition of pollutants and toxic products in agriculture, promotion of sewers and biogas digesters, management of livestock drinking troughs, etc.—ensure access to water in good quantity and quality, which is technically a task for the State, but which the State is not providing.

The second is that the community has committed itself to be “GMO-free”, and this is respected by everyone! More broadly, the community is committed to a full agroecological conversion and to free itself from all types of toxic products in agriculture, with the active sponsorship of training programs supported by the local council. The flagship initiative here is the seed custody program. Three hundred families participate in that, and each family specializes in the care and reproduction of several native and creole seeds to plan, barter, study and defend. Several Community Houses of Seeds are centre pieces in this, serving as spaces for packaging, conservation and bartering with other communities. They are nodes of a powerful grassroots movement to stop the invasion of imported foreign seeds and their corollary of agro-industrial, transgenics and toxic agricultural products

The community is extremely well-organised. They know the laws of Colombia as well as they know their own customary laws (*Mandato Mayor*), as both are taught to the children together with the non-negotiable and inalienable principles and values inherited from the elders. They all affirm this offers ethical foundations to the community and its willingness to exercise and defend its own collective rights to its territory of life “until death, if necessary”. The organization is called Cabildo and includes a main Governor and substitute Governor, a first and second Mayor, a first and second Alderman, a first and



A gathering as part of a self-strengthening process for the environmental committee of the Cabildo Cañamomo Lomapieta, following the Consortium's self-strengthening methodology (Courtesy Leonardo Parra, CEMI)

second Sheriff, Councillors and the Council of ex-Governors. This Council of ex-Governors is important to guarantee experience, wisdom and honesty. Having a local judicial system strengthens traditional authority and territorial autonomy. And all this is supplemented by inclusive participatory processes in developing regulations, as has recently been the case for environmental regulations and seeds conservation initiatives, known and defended by all in the *Resguardo*— children, youth, adults, elders, men and women alike.

Case example 6. The Krajan Highlands want traditional black rice and reject industrial agriculture!²⁹



Is this a conservation landscape? Or an agricultural landscape part of a territory of life? Or both? (Courtesy Cristina Eghenter)

The Highlands of North Kalimantan (Indonesia), along the border with Sarawak and Sabah (Malaysia) are the ancestral homeland of the Lundayeh, Lun Bawang, Kelabit dan Sa'Ban Indigenous Peoples. While administratively divided between two countries, they are home to over 70 villages with a common linguistic, historical and cultural heritage. Their typical landscape features wide valleys interlaced with traditional paddy fields, bamboo groves and fruit trees surrounded by gentle forested slopes. The fresh and clear water from the

mountain streams is channelled by bamboo pipes or earth canals into the rice fields. The natural scenery is enhanced by the variety of land uses and crop biodiversity. And there are also several salt springs, which produce 'mountain salt' commonly used for cooking and trade.

The communities have traditionally been food secure thanks to a highly diverse agricultural system of wet rice agriculture, unique in the interior of Borneo and based on local knowledge, local seeds, water buffaloes and a healthy environment. Men and women have been the custodians of local agrobiodiversity—the over 40 varieties of rice planted and cultivated in this area, as well as the 3 varieties of sorghum and millet. The fruit diversity is also very high. The many local varieties that grow in fruit gardens and forest edges have enough phenotypical and other distinct characteristics to warrant different names in Lundayeh language. For centuries, local agrobiodiversity has provided the basis for food security, resilience, and adaptability. Today, it also helps to reduce vulnerability to climate change.

In 2003, indigenous government representatives and community leaders attended a workshop on highland development held in Ba' Kelalan (Sarawak). Realising that the use of chemical inputs to intensify vegetable cultivation could destroy their fragile environment, the workshop participants came together and decided to follow a more endogenous path. In 2004, the Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples of the Highlands, Indonesia and Malaysia (FORMADAT) was established. In the face of destructive development such as the spread of oil palm plantations and highly valuing the

²⁹ Extracts from a report prepared for this Policy Brief by Cristina Eghenter, 2019.

food security that the local variety had been able to provide, the Alliance among the communities of the Krayan Highlands has opted to ensure food security by protecting the traditional cultivations and territory by preserving traditional knowledge and practices.

For instance, the communities intensified the production of black Adan rice, a local savoury and nutritious variety of rice that had almost disappeared some years ago. The Adan Rice is cultivated according to traditional organic practices by the farmers of the highlands both in Sarawak (Malaysia) and Indonesia. Each family cultivates between one and five hectares of rice fields. Water buffaloes are not used for ploughing but are let loose into the rice fields after harvest to trample the ground, eat the stems and fertilize the soil in the process, so that the rice fields are ready for the next planting season. In 2012, the Adan Rice from the Krayan Highlands was awarded a Geographic Indication certificate by the government, in acknowledgment of the unique characteristics of this rice and its production area.

Water buffaloes are let loose into the rice fields after harvest (Courtesy FORAMADAT)



With the support of the local government, the Alliance is now working with local farmers to increase the market value and keep the cultural value of the traditional crops. These products are promoted at the PARARA festival, an alternative marketing platform for indigenous products being developed by a consortium of over 100 community producers in Indonesia. They have also been widely recognized by the Slow Food movement. In 2016, the communities self-declared the Krayan Highlands an area for organic and traditional agriculture (their 'territory of life') and started advocating for formal government recognition.



Over 40 varieties of rice are planted and cultivated in this area, plus three varieties of sorghum and millet (Courtesy FORAMADAT)

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Case example 7. Shellfishers on foot along the coast of Galicia (Spain)— professional users define their rules and territory of life³⁰

This is an unusual example of territory of life. To begin with it is huge, encompassing thousands of hectares of seashore that is constantly covered and uncovered by the tide along almost one

30 personal communication by Iago Soto García, 2019.



The Galicia coast --- map and database from SIGREMMAR

thousand kilometres of the linear coastline of Galicia, in the north of Spain. The ecosystems comprise marine and tidal habitats— coastal inlets, sandbanks, seagrasses, coastal lagoons and estuaries that house productive and diverse species of bivalves, crustaceans, snails, polychaeta, seabirds, marine mammals and fish. Not one, but dozens of communities and groups act as caretakers of specific areas and segments of the coastline

making it more a system of territories of life rather than an individual territory.

Shellfishing on foot is a traditional occupation of local community women that takes place in areas of high ecological relevance, where terrestrial-aquatic transition (intertidal) or water transition (freshwater-brackish-salt water) occur. Up to the last century, the activity was supposed to be unmanaged with unregulated access. Women from the fishing communities along the coast engaged in it to provide food and a bit of income to families... In the 1980s, however, the free access degenerated into unsustainable harvesting, and the resource collapsed. Shellfishing became a marginal activity, fraught with conflicts and social contempt. Fortunately, in 1993, the administration and some researchers, together, promoted new fishing legislation that introduced strict rules for harvesting. It was the uneasy beginning of a process of self-governance.

Some 'Groups of shellfishers on foot' emerged, comprising the very women who had traditionally harvested in their local territories. The Groups were officially recognised and structured in a top-down fashion, and their 'professionalization' was somehow imposed through training programs. This caused plenty of conflicts, including social rejection from those who still defended the non-regulated traditional system. Some women did not like having to join the fishermen Guild, to pay taxes, to contribute to social security, etc. (this was somehow compensated by access to social benefits and labour rights). Slowly, however, the governance practice, the inclusion into fishing Guilds, the development of sensible management plans and some enhanced public recognition improved the image of the new Groups and professional women (see the movie [The sky is our roof](#)).

Crucially, the rules worked! Not all Groups of shellfishers on foot are equally successful but, as people started surveying and enforcing rules (e.g., establishing when and where shellfish can be collected, with which tools, and up to what amount; setting up checkpoints where minimum sizes and allowable quota is controlled; carrying out surveillance at night, etc.), the resources recovered.

Importantly, the local caretaker groups decide on the number of licenses that enables a profitable and sustainable activity. The people who get a licence must be local (resident in the municipality) and preference goes to the unemployed and those who have received at least a short course about the activity.



Image from the film 'The sky is our roof' by Carlos Cazorro and Javier Falco

The restoration of the seashore productivity has rekindled the communities' attachment to the sea and the coast. Today, the recovered resources support thousands of primary jobs (harvesting) and indirectly related jobs (canneries, shops, etc.). Sea and marine traditions are very present in Galicia (e.g. in popular sayings and gastro-

nomy) and are an important part of local identity. Local seafood is considered of high quality and used to attract tourists. Popular parties with seafood themes are habitual in summer and "Carmen day" (16th of July) is the patronymic religious event of the sea people. Shellfishing on foot is a traditional artisanal practice but the rules have found a way to enter habitual practices. For instance, checkpoints at the finish of a working day, usually on the beach where the catches are controlled for minimum sizes or allowable quota, have become good meeting occasions. They are social in nature, as well as serving to comment and discuss the harvest and needed management.

Daily observations, periodic samplings and catch data are regularly monitored and used to improve management, avoid risks and decrease negative impacts. But problems have not disappeared. There are internal and external practices that still cause overexploitation, contamination and conflict. Bureaucracy consumes time and resources. And structural issues affect the coast infrastructures via habitat fragmentation, urban and industry contamination and poaching. Shellfishing on foot is also particularly sensitive to climate change.

Shellfishing cannot be considered essential for local livelihoods, but it is important and in specific places the economic dependence is very high. Shellfishing is the only professional option available for disadvantaged sectors of society. The activity is regulated by a general law, but that law was developed according to traditional sustainable practices, and context-specific variations in the law are respected. The Sea Counsel of the "Xunta de Galicia" endorses and promotes community governance (or co-governance), and EU decisions must be respected. Within these various embedding constraints, the Fishermen Guilds are the public law bodies that govern the marine and coastal resources in collaboration with the local government. The Groups of shellfishers on foot have responsibility for their seashore resources. While environmental criteria and technical assistance from professional biologists employed by the fishermen Guilds are used to develop management plans, the shellfishers' traditional knowledge from direct observations and oral transmission (mixed with superstitions) is also used in practice. The 'community governance' aspect of the seabed territories (community-decided, enforced, and surveyed rules within the framework of national legislation) is particularly noteworthy, along with the fact that many territories have historical continuity since the Middle Ages.

All marine products gathered locally must first be sold in the fish markets, but part is bought, consumed and appreciated locally. Unauthorised shellfishing still occurs, but the more a community depends on the shellfish resources, the less poaching you see in the territory they care for. In other words, reliance on natural resources seems to be an important factor compelling the communities to govern and manage their seashore territories.

Historically, most shellfish collectors were women, and this is still true today. However, the trend is towards more men becoming part of the groups and their governing bodies. This trend is also true (but inverted) at fishers Guild level, where women are starting to participate when historically they were nowhere to be seen. The local youth, on the other hand, is less willing to engage in the shellfi-

Image from the film "The sky is our roof" by Carlos Cazorro and Javier Falco



shing profession. Despite the economic and environmental benefits, the important role that organized shellfishers play in governing and managing the local seashore territories is poorly recognized. Local news about shellfishing tends to emphasize conflicts rather than benefits. Moreover, there are mixed social connotations for the mariscadoras (shellfisher women)—the term refers to honest workers, but it can also be used in a derogatory way. All this points to a serious need to better understand and appreciate the environmental and social role of the Groups of the shellfishers on foot.

Indeed, this role is very positive. The Groups are well organised and active to preserve the ecological functions of their seashore territories of life, which are essential for the provision of seafood. They engage in cleaning areas, actively breeding and nursing species, restoring and managing habitats, carrying out surveillance and alert operations (to identify use by free riders or overuse—decreasing overall negative impact) and maintaining cultural richness (a 'multifunctional coastline'). There are 63 Fishers Guilds (cofradías) in Galicia (see SIGREMAR, and click on "Entidades organizativas- Cofradías" for the list of Guilds) and they include 3800 people engaged in Groups of shellfishers on foot, officially established as sub-groups of the Guilds. Most such Groups manage their own territory of life (the SIGREMAR website shows them all: click on "Bancos- Modalidad- A pie") and all territories are clearly demarcated. The database allows a rapid assessment of how important these seashore territories of life and their caretaker Groups are for nature, culture and the local economy.

Case example 8. Xcalot Akal: governing a Mayan territory of life means overcoming the threats of modernity³¹

Xcalot Akal ("two lagoons together") is an indigenous Maya rural community more than 100 km from the Campeche state capital of San Francisco, in the Mexican Yucatan peninsula. Distinctly rural and comprising only 133 people (26 families, 80 men and 53 women), Xcalot Akal is special for the Maya linguistic proficiency of all its residents. It is also a highly marginalized community, classified by government as having very limited social opportunities and skills, and very poor access to basic goods and services. Established in 1947 by the arrival of families in search of cultivable land, in 1972 it received a basic recognition as an ejido with a total area of 3688 hectares. The totality of

the land in the ejido is held in common, and it is valued by the community as its 'territory of life'.

The climate of Xcalot Akal is warm sub-humid, with average annual rainfall of 1050 mm, a rainy season from May to October and average temperature of 26°C. Main vegetation type is tropical dry forest, with most species shedding leaves in the dry season and tall trees reaching 10 to 20 meters. The community has a strong relation of inter-dependence with



Youth and elders from Xcalot Akal visit together the territory of life to transfer and perpetuate knowledge about it. (Courtesy Xcalot Akal community)

31 Extracts from a report prepared for this Policy Brief by Álvaro Mena Fuentes, Albert Chan Dzul, Nora Tzec and Manuel May, 2019.

the territory and deep knowledge about it. As they understand it, biodiversity in the territory depends on the care and good management by the community while the health of the community depends on the care and protection by the guardian spirits of plants and animals. The ancestral form of food production in the region— the milpa after slash-and-burn— continues to produce a diversity of species and varieties. For instance, in Xcalot Akal one can find up to 11 varieties of corn. One could say that the milpa is just a stage of the normal forest cycle, which moves from first year of management through different successive stages that support a variety of plant and animal species, differently used by people. In the successive stages you can thus find material for construction, medicinal and ceremonial plants, firewood, fodder, wild foods and the corn and associated foods produced in the milpa. A particularly appreciated product is wild meat from animals found in secondary forests and agricultural spaces, such as white-tailed deer *Odocoileus virginianus*, temazate deer *Mazama* sp, turkey *Agriocharis ocellata* and pecari de monte *Pecari tajacu*. Complementing the milpa is the solar, or home garden, where families grow plenty of domestic and wild plants. In all, the community has identified 99 varieties of crops they use, and a recent study has found that 85% of the community depends exclusively on such crops for their daily food.

The community institution that serves as the highest authority and which regulates decisions and rules in the territory of life is the *ejidal* assembly, made up of 26 *ejidatarios*. Xcalot Akal is one of the few *ejidos* that are internally discussing how to strengthen internal governance. As a result of that, the number of *ejidatarios* has recently been doubled, following a common agreement for each *ejidatario* to admit one more person of their choice, commonly one of their children. Another result is the Indigenous Plan for Governance, still under discussion, which is being developed through a commission elected in the general assembly, with broad recognition and participation of women.

Under the active governance and management of the community, 3219 ha of the 3688 that make up the *ejido* (i.e., 87%) conserve its forest cover (in different successional stages), and in some you have good forestry use potential. In 257 ha there is no evidence of recent intervention. At present, 1587 ha (43% of the total of the conserved surface) are under a payment for environmental services (PSA) program, which compensates for hydrological protection. The remaining portion of the territory is under mechanized agriculture, in part used as commons and in part rented out to groups outside the community, including to the UAIM (Agricultural Industrial Unit of Women).

The territory of life and food security of Xcalot Akal are under several types of threats— both internal and external to the community. The PSA, although a sovereign decision of the community, can undermine the continuity of ancestral management, since the agreement forbids the *milpa* operations in the reserved territory. Another threat is the arrival of the Mennonites, who rent land to establish monocultures that include transgenic soybean and hybrid corn, use high doses of fertilisers and pesticides and, in addition to deforesting land, eliminate water bodies and archaeological remains. The government policies, and the perverse incentives that back them up, truly underpin all these threats. Internally, a major threat is the weakening of traditional governance by political parties and the erosion of traditional knowledge and intergenerational communication.

Mayan ceremony to start the mapping of sacred sites with an offering of saká (Courtesy Xcalot Akal community)



Aware of all these threats, the *ejidal* assembly has agreed to take action within the community but also outside, in alliance with other communities and organizations. Internally, it is including young people and women as *ejidatarios*, holds a seed festival where native seeds are exchanged and is engaged in mapping the sacred sites of the community (archaeological sites, bodies of water, sites of collection of medicinal plants). Externally, as a member of the Ka Kuxtal Much 'Meyaj civil association, it participates in organising a regional seed festival and the National Assembly of the Network in Defence of the Maize, is part of the Collective of Mayan Communities of the Chenes to stop permits to sow transgenic soy, and has just recently become a Member of the ICCA Consortium.

4. Discussion

The eight cases above do not allow us to reach any statistically significant conclusions. However, they tell the story of what does exist and point at what is *likely* to be more widespread and bring important benefits. Reflecting upon these eight territories of life— all possessing to a good extent the characteristics illustrated in Box 1 – we can identify some broadly shared elements in common with the principles of food sovereignty listed in Box 2. All cases include:

- ▶ a territory that produces the food customarily and culturally related to the custodian community;
- ▶ a territory where a good part of food production and processing is governed (ruled) and managed collectively by the custodian community;
- ▶ a territory where the integrity and health of nature directly contributes to the production of food and nutrition (availability, quality, quantity and sustainability);
- ▶ a territory where the integrity and health of nature is perceived as contributing to the health and wellbeing of the custodian community;
- ▶ a community that possesses customary knowledge, collective know-how, and creativity in socio-technical innovation related to the food it produces and consumes;
- ▶ a community that conserves, improves, and actively exchanges its own locally adapted seeds and livestock breeds, incorporating wild species and new varieties to enhance food system resilience and dietary diversity;
- ▶ a community that consumes food that is mostly produced and processed locally

and that prepares, eats, and shares food in ways that create place-specific gastronomies;

- ▶ a community where the production and consumption of food goes beyond mere sustenance and involves elements of cultural identity and pride;
- ▶ a community with a decent-to-good level of self-determination;
- ▶ a community that has, or is actively seeking, security of collective tenure to the land and natural resources in its territory of life;
- ▶ a community well organised for the purpose of governing and managing food production in its territory;
- ▶ a community that is demonstrating the capacity to react and respond to problems, threats and opportunities— including by enhancing and strengthening its own organisation and adapting its rules and management practices.

All cases we have examined are “**free from hunger**” thanks to the **capacity of the communities to organise themselves and govern and manage their territories of life**. The communities provide food for themselves, and often also income for their own broader livelihoods needs, by building upon **local knowledge and skills** and working with, rather than against, the local natural potential. Importantly, in addition to being **ecologically-fitting**, the relevant **food systems** (production, processing, consumption, waste recycling) are **run, valued, managed and controlled locally**. Taken together, the cases also highlight the strength of local biological and cultural diversity for community resilience, self-organisation, and autonomy. They allow us to understand

biocultural diversity as an emancipating factor against the homogenization of food by industrial agriculture and the conservation of nature relegated to protected areas established by coercion and control.

Although most case examples we have illustrated do not discuss internal equity in the custodian communities or trade within the communities and with outsiders, we see that their food systems offer practical illustrations of principles adopted by the *Via Campesina* movement (see Box 2). Most notably, we see an **active resistance to the destructive elements of modernity** (e.g. fishing by motorboats and monofilament nets, mining and oil industries, major roads, non-endogenous seeds and breeds, uncontrolled extraction of resources by outsiders, and even military penetration and occupation) while non-destructive elements are rather easily incorporated.

Are all territories of life illustrated above also examples of **food sovereignty**? We believe they broadly are, although with different levels of autonomy, security and sustainability and confronted by different threats. In fact, they may all be **examples of community organising and struggles** rather than descriptions of perfectly accomplished situations.

Does that mean that communities that enjoy a level of **self-determination** and are **well organised to govern, manage and conserve their territories of life can/are likely to achieve their own food sovereignty**? If complex and rich phenomena like those we have described can be meaningfully correlated, we are confident of answering that yes, it appears so.

Conversely, we also see that the measure of food sovereignty enjoyed by a community is likely to contribute to, and strengthen, its **political innovation** and sense of **autonomy and identity** and its desire to collectively govern and **take responsibility for its territory of life (sustainable self-determination)**.³² Indeed, the process of achieving food sovereignty is an important pathway to rekindling community governance for autonomy and self-determination. The everyday practice of food sovereignty is a catalyst for the creation of culturally appropriate, inclusive, and community-controlled governance systems. This is especially true in ICCAs— territories of life that have a history of struggles against colonization, racism, and the violence of externally imposed resource extraction or conservation and development models.³³ Figure 1 offers a schematic representation of this relation of mutual support and synergy.

Figure 1. Links between territories of life and food sovereignty



32 Corn tassel, 2012.

33 Amin, 2017; Pimbert, 2008.



Rotational agriculture is an ancient practice and a way of life among indigenous communities in Burma (Courtesy HESFA)



As regular burning is essential for local biodiversity, burning is used as a management practice within protected areas, as in the case illustrated here by a Park Manager in Finland (Courtesy Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend)

(polycultures, home gardens), integrating aquaculture with tree/crop cultivation, or gathering food from improved and restored ecosystems (fishing and gathering with appropriate rules after suitable regeneration). By merging into natural ecosystems, such food provisioning agroecosystems in human managed landscapes can be productive, pest resistant, nutrient conserving, and more resilient to shocks and stresses. Moreover, food processing based on local knowledge and indigenous technologies contribute to culturally specific gastronomies that minimise food losses and waste.³⁴ Short food chains and proximity relations between food producers and consumers also minimise the carbon and ecological footprints of resident communities. Thus, local webs of production and exchange help to sustain the territories of life and nature in general.³⁵

Remarkably, communities who derive a good part of their own food from their territories of life seem to naturally embrace **production processes that merge with stewardship of the natural environment**. This includes integrating trees with livestock and crops (agro-sylvo-pastoral farming), producing food from forests (agroforestry, forest gardens, beekeeping - including the protection and management of native bees), growing several crops together in one plot

Food production, processing and distribution can even help sustain ecological functions like pollination, purification of water, and climate regulation that are not only critical for food security and nutrition but also for the health and well-being of communities, and the health of ecosystems and the biosphere.³⁶

34 HLPE, 2014.

35 CSM, 2016.

36 The importance of these ecological functions (or so called 'ecological goods and services') is well known and documented (FAO, 1999; FAO, 2019, <https://www.ipbes.net/>).

This is so because community-based **food production, processing and distribution can generate and sustain a vast array of ecosystem, species and genetic diversity** within and around ICCAs—territories of life. For example, by building terraces, swales, tree belts, hedges, and ponds to conserve soil and water, or even by carrying-out rotational farming under suitable conditions, farmers' individual and collective action **enriches the ecological complexity and heterogeneity** at different scales. Recent research also shows that some agroecological practices have a positive impact on the restoration of diverse plant-soil microbiomes which are essential for productivity and sustainability.

Communities living in territories of life usually create a land use mosaic in which the landscape is subdivided into agricultural areas and wilder conserved biodiversity at multiple scales.³⁷ This 'natural matrix' model sustains a variety of habitats and micro-environments and a diversity of wild species (e.g. algae, flowering plants, insects, amphibians, mammals, birds, reptiles) many of which are edible.³⁸ Agriculture and food provisioning, thus, should never be assumed to be harmful to biodiversity. It is the *kind* of farming and land use that appears to matter.³⁹

As a matter of fact, different types of agricultural biodiversity (cultivated, reared and wild) are used by different people at different times and in different places, and contribute to livelihood strategies

in a complex fashion.⁴⁰ In this sense, **the very distinction between cultivated and wild ecosystems and food systems can become blurred**. In particular, wild resources are extremely important for the food, medicine and livelihood security of indigenous peoples and peasant communities— especially women and children.⁴¹ The mean use of wild foods by agricultural and forager communities in 22 countries of Asia and Africa (36 studies) is 90–100 species per location.⁴² In countries such as Ethiopia, India and Kenya aggregate country estimates can reach 300–800 wild species consumed.⁴³ And even in countries of the industrial North, as illustrated in our case example from Spain, gathering shellfish from the wild is deeply appreciated.

Modern agroecology fully recognises its roots in the collective knowledge, practices, and ecological rationale of indigenous and peasant agriculture(s) in territories of life.⁴⁴ Possibly, however, there is room to better recognise that the very existence of **territories of life play a crucial role in securing local livelihoods, ensuring the right to food⁴⁵ and promoting food sovereignty**. This is so because territories of life promote and sustain community self-determination, and the collective work toward food and livelihood security, as well as the well-being of people and nature. The collective dimension of territories of life **adds historical and cultural depth** and uniqueness to the principles identified by the *Via Campesina* movement. In fact, **a**

37 Perfecto and Vandermeer, 2017.

38 Santos-Fita, D. *et al.* 2013; Levy-Tacher *et al.*, 2019.

39 Perfecto *et al.*, 2009; Pimbert and Pretty, 1995.

40 Gujiti *et al.*, 1995.

41 Kuhnlein *et al.*, 2009; Gujiti *et al.*, 1995. (para.7). More is available regarding recognition and respect for the use, management and protection of sacred sites, including in protected areas (e.g., see Wild and McLeod, 2008).

42 Barucha and Pretty, 2010.

43 Barucha and Pretty, 2010; Gujiti *et al.*, 1995. A recent detailed mapping of agrobiodiversity in 32 indigenous villages of North East India conducted by the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (TIP) and North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society (NESFAS) showed that when wild plants, mushrooms, and cultivated crops are considered, the mean number of food plants reaches 200 per village. When looking at the intraspecific diversity of staple crops, the key pillar of food sovereignty, on average 33 varieties (mostly of rice, taro, potato, sweet potato, cassava, millets or other minor staples) were found per village. In matriarchal indigenous communities such as the Khasis of Meghalaya in North East India, women are the custodians of customary lands and territories in which the high dependence on local food system biodiversity plays a crucial role in sustaining matriarchal values of community sharing, reciprocity between men and women, and promotion of peace (TIP NESFAS, 2019 a and b).

44 Altieri, 1997; Anderson *et al.*, 2015; Gliessman, 2014; Nyéléni, 2015; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Km9Kv5UyIU&feature=youtu.be>

45 Razmkhah, Ali, 2019.

measure of autonomy and self-governance appears as **the feature from which everything else derives**, and which could not be achieved plot-by-plot and family-by-family alone. Sustainable livelihoods and food sovereignty need enhanced consciousness, an intergenerational transmission of knowledge, skills and institutions, and the strength to assert one's own values and lifestyles.⁴⁶ The collective dimension of territories of life ideally provides that strength and an enabling context to limit or reverse the social and ecological degradation that accompanies much of today's dominant development and conservation models.

Similarly, while land rights and conservation advocates recognise the immense value of agrobiodiversity and the traditional knowledge embedded in culture-rich ways of relating to specific territories and drawing sustenance from them, there is room to better recognise that **the processes and struggles towards food sovereignty play a crucial role in sustaining ecosystems, and territories of life**. The bond that communities have with their territories and their own willingness and capacity to organise, to govern, manage and conserve

them cannot be divorced from their own capacity to produce, process, distribute and consume food locally and sustainably. Food is crucial to culture and identity and those are essential characteristics of communities that do not let themselves to be easily overcome by destructive forces of external or internal origin.

This said, we should also note that the communities we have illustrated in the case examples have **not** been **overwhelmed** by destructive forces, nor been annihilated, or totally subjugated and controlled by violent means. Neither autonomy nor agency exists in a vacuum and powerful forces affect community choices and actions.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, no amount of community organisation, self-awareness, traditional knowledge or willingness to remain independent and care for one's own environment can resist the overwhelming forces that modern states and their allies can set in motion. History testifies to innumerable crimes against nature, cultures and humanity, and the desire to be positive and forward looking should not blind us to the potential for destructiveness and greed that exist in both some individuals and some social institutions.

5. Expanding territories of life & food sovereignty— options for action and practical recommendations

What is the potential of territories of life to foster and promote food sovereignty around the world? Recent scholarship documents that more than 50% of the terrestrial surface is under some form of customary collective tenure or claim⁴⁸ and, according to FAO, smallholders still produce at least 70% of

the world's food.⁴⁹ Thus, territories of life are bound to play an important role in fostering food security and food sovereignty, even in today's dramatic environmental situation.

Paradoxically, much of the wealth embedded in local food systems in territories of life— i.e. the unique seeds and breeds,

46 Anderson *et al.*, 2019.

47 Amin, 2017.

48 Wily, 2011; Gamett *et al.*, 2018.

49 <http://www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/en/>

practices, tools, knowledge, know-how, management capacities and governing institutions of custodian communities — has been largely ignored, neglected or actively undermined by governments, corporations and conservation organisations.⁵⁰ Many of these custodian communities are made up of family farmers, but not all. Some are nomadic pastoralists, livestock herders, hunters and gatherers, agro-foresters or fishers, depending on the ecological context. All, however, need to have some form and level of **community organisation to govern their territories of life**, and this is what is **actively discouraged by the**

processes of globalisation of the economy currently at play.

Strong custodian communities governing their territories of life and achieving their own food sovereignty have the potential to fundamentally **re-invent conservation and development** for the well-being of people and nature, taking a radical departure from exclusionary⁵¹ fortress-style conservation⁵² and industrial agri-food systems. But... will this ever happen? Can the **movements in support of territories of life and the food sovereignty movement** better recognise this and **ally themselves**? Can this be fostered in any way?

We outline below a few ideas to guide and inform possible action.

5.1 Re-inventing modernity

In capitalist, socialist, and communist states alike, the dominant view of conservation and development envisions having fewer people living off the land. It encourages an exodus of people from rural areas to work in industry and urban-based trade and services.⁵³ People living in and around their customary ICCAs—territories of life are thus pushed off their lands and maritime territories by the combined expansion of both fortress conservation and industrial agriculture/aquaculture. This modernization agenda premised on globalisation is seen as inevitable by most governments, corporations, conservation organisations and a good part of society in industrialised countries, despite inherent fundamental problems or challenges for sustainability.⁵⁴ However, the idea that strong rural communities and small-scale producers as

a group are bound to disappear reflects just one vision of the future: it is a political choice that relies on specific theories of change and worldviews.

This choice is rejected by social movements working for territories of life and food sovereignty. A growing number of peoples, including youth, are affirming **another vision of modernity** that is rich in meaning and hope. This vision rejects the commodification of nature and social relations⁵⁵ and focuses on the creation and maintenance of “the good life”—including *Buen Vivir* or *Sumak Kausai* in Latin America, De-growth in Europe, feminist subsistence perspectives,⁵⁶ or *Ecological Swaraj* in India—⁵⁷ all of which focus on **reconnecting individuals with nature and rebuilding strong communities embedded in specific ecosystems**.

50 Pimbert, 2008.

51 Exclusionary conservation aims to secure critical ecosystems away from humans and replaces local and indigenous knowledge systems with exclusive scientific approaches that prioritize the criteria of external experts. Within national protected area networks, community participation is usually limited and confined to buffer zones, away from core areas of protection.

52 Farvar, *et al.*, 2018; Ghimire and Pimbert, 1997.

53 Ghimire and Pimbert, 1997; Perez-Vitoria, 2015; Pimbert, 2008.

54 Hodges *et al.*, 2014.

55 Rist, 2013.

56 Mies and Bennholdt Thomsen, 1999.

57 Kothari *et al.*, 2014.

5.2 Restructuring economies for territories of life & food sovereignty

A central challenge for the future of territories of life and food sovereignty is to claim, recover, and implement economic processes that support community control over the means of livelihoods, ecological sustainability, and direct democracy. Three interrelated issues are key in this regard:

Access to land, water, seeds, the commons & other means of production

Colonial powers, agri-business corporations, multinational companies, conservation organisations, individual entrepreneurs, industrial aquaculture companies, and national governments—all have a history of appropriating land, water and natural resources and denying the pre-existing rights of indigenous peoples and rural communities. Worldwide, this has been a most enduring source of conflict and violence.⁵⁸ In turn, inequitable access to land, water and natural resources has been reducing peoples' incentive to conserve nature, undermining livelihood security, and eroding cultural diversity.

In the last three decades, both territories of life and food sovereignty activists have defined, demanded, and defended **access to land, water, seeds, the commons, and other means of production as a human right**,⁵⁹ and important international instruments and agreements have been achieved, including:

- ▶ The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests in the context of National

Food Security (VGGT).⁶⁰ Agreed by the UN Committee on World Food Security under the impulse of agrarian activists, it promotes responsible governance under all forms of tenure for territories of life: public, private, communal, indigenous, customary and informal.

- ▶ The Voluntary Guidelines for the sustainability of small-scale fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication. These are different from VGGT and were agreed under the FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in 2014.⁶¹
- ▶ ILO Convention 169⁶² which is a critical tool for the defence of indigenous peoples' territories and, by extension, of their food security.
- ▶ The United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).⁶³ Strongly sustained by the activism of indigenous peoples, it affirms their rights to practice their cultures and strengthen their economies and socio-political institutions on the land, territories and natural resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.
- ▶ The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP).⁶⁴ Also backed by as strong international movement, it is the most recent UN Instrument that recognizes new human rights— including the right to land, seeds, natural resources, and food sovereignty⁶⁵ via agroecology, local markets, local seeds, participatory decision-making, gender justice, and the transition to resilient and sustainable food systems.

58 Barraclough, 1991; Ghimire and Pimbert, 1997; Wolfe, 1969; <https://ejatlas.org>

59 Henderson, 2008; Claeys, 2015.

60 <http://www.fao.org/3/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>

61 FAO Committee on Fisheries, 2015.

62 ILO 169.

63 United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/index.html> ; Charters and Stavenhagen, 2009.

64 The UNDROP was approved by the UN General Assembly in December 2018. It is available at http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/L.16

65 Claeys, 2018.

Ensuring that governments enforce and protect the collective and individual rights enshrined in these international instruments and declarations, depends on the agency and action of peoples and communities.⁶⁶ There clearly is an opportunity here for the movements for territories of life and food sovereignty to join forces to secure access to land, seeds, water, the commons, and other

Circular economies to re-localise production & consumption

Planetary limits are being exceeded,⁶⁹ and territories of life are threatened by extractive industries and an expanding agricultural frontier.⁷⁰ Reversing these trends partly depends on re-structuring and re-locating food and fibre production, distribution and consumption within decentralised, democratically governed, and nested circular systems.⁷¹ For this, new knowledge is needed, and agroecological R&D requires better funding⁷² to develop and promote circular systems that mimic natural ecosystems at different scales—from individual farm plots to entire cities. The building blocks for that do exist, and include enhancing functional biodiversity, ecological clustering of industries, recycling, and localised production and consumption in specific territories dedicated

Reclaiming economics for people & planet

Many ICCA custodians have their own distinct forms of economic exchange that minimize the need to participate in global commodity markets. Territories of life and the practices

means of production. In fact, these movements will need to go further than governments' pronouncements and support **equity and non-discrimination also within communities and households**.⁶⁷ They will have to focus on collective rights and promote at all levels the equitable resolution of power dynamics related to gender, wealth, age, disability, ethnic background, and other axes of difference.⁶⁸

to sustainable living. Rural and urban systems *could* be based in territories of life managed via agroecological approaches, ecological and permaculture design, widespread recycling and reuse, a focus on “doing more with less,” and the re-localisation of production processes, supply chains, and consumption.⁷³ Circular systems that combine food and energy production with water and waste management can reduce carbon and ecological footprints, while maintaining a good quality of life through *controlled processes of de-growth in consumption and production*.⁷⁴ Such processes would be designed for local control by communities and strengthen collective tenure, conviviality, autonomy and direct democracy in territories of life.

of food sovereignty often rely on economies that combine market activities with non-monetary forms of exchange based on barter, reciprocity, gift relations, care, and solidarity.⁷⁵

66 Claeys, 2015; Pimbert, 2012a.

67 Bellows *et al.*, 2016; Pimbert and Lemke, 2018.

68 While this is by no means universal, many communities do have shortcomings in relation to equity, gender, and entitlements of the very poor and marginalised. Such communities often reproduce overt or subtle forms of exclusion and inequitable power relations, with the weaker and underprivileged social groups being the least represented in decision making structures.

69 Steffen *et al.* 2015.

70 *Environmental Justice Atlas*

71 Jones *et al.*, 2012 ; Pimbert, 2012b; 2015.

72 Worldwide, there is a chronic lack of investment in research for agroecology, - both domestically and in overseas aid. In the USA for example, a recent analysis of funding by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) showed that projects with an emphasis on agroecology represented only 0.6–1.5% of the entire 2014 USDA Research, Extension, and Economics budget (Delonge *et al.*, 2016). UK development aid barely supports agroecology: overseas aid for agroecological projects in Africa, Asia, and Latin America is less than 5% of agricultural aid and less than 0.5% of total UK aid budget since 2010 (Pimbert and Moeller, 2018).

73 Jones *et al.*, 2012; Pimbert, 2012b.

74 Some talk in terms of the eight “Rs”: re-evaluate, re-conceptualise, re-structure, redistribute, re-localise, reduce, reuse, and recycle (Latouche, 2011).

75 Argumedo and Pimbert, 2010; Latouche, 1998.

These complementary forms of local economic exchange offer alternatives to economics with a single focus on money-based markets and global financial transactions.⁷⁶ For the sake of food sovereignty, sustainable livelihoods and well-being in territories of life these **plural forms of economic exchange** should be acknowledged, developed and strengthened.

But piecemeal approaches will not be enough in a global context of climate change,⁷⁷ rapid biodiversity loss,⁷⁸ and growing inequality.⁷⁹ A fundamental re-thinking of economics is required for the defence and strengthening of territories of life and food sovereignty,⁸⁰ and here are some further ideas that could promote

them: i) local spaces and opportunities to highlight and produce use values instead of market values; ii) multiple forms of exchange within and between communities; iii) a significant drop in time spent in wage-work and a fairer share of jobs and free time between men and women; iv) a guaranteed and unconditional minimum income for all men and women; v) alternative local currencies that help retain wealth and livelihoods in specific territories; vi) economic indicators that reflect new definitions of well-being such as conviviality and frugal abundance;⁸¹ and vii) a progressive shift to the principle of “from each according to his/her means, to each according to his/her needs”.⁸²

5.3 Deepening democratic governance

Expanding and strengthening ICCAs—territories of life and food sovereignty fundamentally challenges governments and the wider society to enable decentralisation, adaptation, diversity, inclusion, and active direct deliberations in place of centralised top-down decisions, rigid policies, uniformity, blueprint planning, exclusion, control, and coercion.⁸³

In a ‘well defined’ ICCA—territory of life, the community is the major actor in making decisions about the local adaptive management of the territory’s biocultural diversity. This implies that a local institution has—*de facto* and/or *de jure*—the capacity to develop policies and enforce decisions.⁸⁴ Other actors may collaborate as partners, especially when the land is owned by the state,⁸⁵ but local decisions and self-determination are paramount. This defining element of governance of land, water, and natural resources in an ICCA—territory of life is in line with a fundamental

claim of food sovereignty, i.e. that people define their own policies for food, agriculture, environment and development.⁸⁶

Not surprisingly, communities and movements committed to expanding territories of life and food sovereignty generally seek to reverse the democratic deficit and politics of exclusion that favour the interests of powerful corporations, financial investors, big farmers, large conservation organisations, technocratic research institutes, and government elites. In practice, this often requires an expansion of direct democracy in decision-making in order to complement, or replace, the prevalent models of representative democracy. Democracy is thus understood in its original sense of **self-governance— people deciding their individual and collective futures.**

76 Rist, 2011.

77 IPPC, 2018.

78 IPBES, 2019.

79 World Inequality Lab, 2018.

80 Pimbert, 2018a.

81 D’Alisa *et al.*, 2014.

82 Kropotkin, 1906.

83 Pimbert and Pretty, 1998.

84 Borrini-Feyerabend *et al.*, 2007.

85 Borrini-Feyerabend *et al.*, 2013.

86 Nyéléni, 2007.



Deepening democratic governance assumes that every person is competent and reasonable enough to participate in democratic politics, assuming a different attitude than passive taxpaying and voting. It also assumes that meaningful forums, processes and methods for inclusive deliberation and decision-making⁸⁷ can be organised—including peoples' assemblies, citizens' juries, referendums, and sortition⁸⁸ as alternatives to elections. To different degrees, many of the consensus decision-making approaches of indigenous peoples deliver democratic and egalitarian governance. There may be problems with expressing opinions that go against other members of the community and, in particular, other kin members, but even in these cases, people are known to boycott assemblies, which is a very strong form of disagreement when it impedes reaching the quorum.

Deepening democratic governance also means creating safe spaces to integrate different types of knowledge, beyond western science. For instance, in several of the case studies highlighted here and elsewhere,⁸⁹ the governance of territories of life is based on the general assembly of the community and its local institutions, where diverse forms of knowledge can surface and be discussed. Furthermore, only with some material security and free time can people—both women and men—be 'empowered' to think about what type of policies and institutions they would like to see and how they can develop them. Free time is needed for men and women to fully engage in, and regularly practice, the art of participatory direct democracy.

The movements for territories of life and food sovereignty may wish to **coordinate adaptive governance and management**

across a range of landscapes (forests, wetlands, grasslands, islands) – from the local to the global. One option is democratic confederations, which involve a network of people-based (as opposed to government) bodies or councils, with members or delegates chosen by sortition or elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies in villages, towns, and neighbourhoods of large cities.⁹⁰ This web of people-based bodies becomes the means of interlinking territories of life into a confederation based on shared responsibilities, full accountability, firmly mandated representatives and the right to recall them, as necessary.⁹¹ Some of the consensus-based organisations of indigenous peoples conform to these ideas.

Federating and building alliances between spaces of self-governance and bottom up decision-making has an important potential for the governance of ICCAs – territories of life at different scales. However, urgent issues like the global ecological crisis and climate change⁹² also requires engaging with national governments today. This suggests two directions of work:⁹³

1. **Strengthening community self-governance** and management, developing grassroots horizontal networks and insisting on participatory planning, deliberative and inclusive processes for policy making, participatory budgeting, power-equalising action-research and the co-creation of new knowledge, while organising people for widespread coordination and democratic oversight at multiple scales; and
2. **Acting to transform** the organisational structures, professional culture, and practices that are necessary to exercise **State governance**, and focus on

87 Pimbert, 2009 ; Pimbert, 2012a.

88 Sortition consists in choosing public officials as a random sample from the population (by a sort of lottery). Sortition is an alternative to elections. It is usually part of a participatory process in which a representative random sample of everyday people make decisions in an informed, deliberative and fair environment (<https://www.sortitionfoundation.org>)

89 Kothari *et al.*, 2012; Forest Peoples Program *et al.*, 2016.

90 Bookchin, 1990.

91 Bookchin, 2015.

92 IPCC, 2018.

93 Anderson *et al.*, 2019; Pimbert, 2018b.



The heart of territories of life in pastoral environments are areas of abundant pasture and water in the migration routes (courtesy Christian Chateletain)

Depending on context and history, one direction of work may be favoured over another. Both could also be used in complementary and mutually reinforcing ways. The latest reports on fast accelerating global warming,⁹⁴ loss of world biodiversity,⁹⁵ growing malnutrition and food poverty,⁹⁶ and rising inequalities⁹⁷ starkly highlight the

need for urgent radical action by as many as possible in society.

enabling national, provincial, and municipal governments to support bottom-up, decentralised, and diverse participatory processes of decision making.

6. Recommendations

In line with the examples, analysis and arguments presented here, the ICCA Consortium offers the following recommendations for communities and civil society organisations and networks as well as

legislators, policymakers and conservation practitioners, who wish to support the expansion of food sovereignty and ICCAs—territories of life.

6.1 Recommendations for civil society organisations & networks

Given the converging goals and concerns of civil society organisations and networks engaged in the current separate movement for territories of life and **movement for food sovereignty**, we encourage their **alliance and collaboration** in areas such as:

► **Ecological action**— e.g., support nature-friendly, climate friendly, decentralised food systems that sustain high levels of biological diversity in ICCAs-territories

of life (e.g., systems that link in circular patterns food and energy production with water and waste management).

► **Political action**— e.g., expand the democratic governance of territories of life and their embedded food systems by strengthening local knowledge and deliberative, inclusive and innovative processes for policy making and institutional choices (e.g. citizens'

94 IPCC, 2018; The Guardian, 2018.

95 IPBES, 2019.

96 Eat-LANCET Commission, 2018.

97 World Inequality Lab, 2018.

juries, sortition to select members of legislative and executive bodies, local implementation of international policies, such as ILO 169, UNDRIP, the UN declaration of peasant rights).

- ▶ **Economic action**- e.g., re-territorialize food systems, wealth production, and economic exchange whilst creating free time and livelihood security for farmers and other citizens, both men and women, who live in and around ICCAs-territories of life.
- ▶ **Action for social inclusion and gender justice**– e.g., encourage embedding in policies and practices values that challenge patriarchy and violence, and

violence against women and minority genders in particular.

- ▶ **Popular education** – e.g., encourage the use of critical adult education and knowledge sharing methodologies such as *Campesino a Campesino* to scale out agroecology and biodiversity conservation and develop the confidence, skills, and knowledge needed by local communities to negotiate with outsiders.
- ▶ **Active search for a new modernity**– e.g., demonstrate, document and disseminate alternative definitions of modernity and well-being, such as *Buen Vivir* and *Ecological Swaraj*.

6.2 Recommendations for legislators, policymakers & government officials

Conscious human beings facing the disastrous prospect of a planet progressively hotter, less diverse, less sustainable and more unjust, and where more and more people are hungry and desperate need to think clearly and act systemically. We

recommend two main strategic directions of work: 1. halting the drivers of disaster and 2. enhancing the positive forces that provide powerful and viable alternatives for a sane society.⁹⁸

Halting the drivers of disaster

- ▶ **Eliminate the perverse incentives and investments that sustain the industrial drivers of climate change, biodiversity loss, social injustice and hunger, and undermine** collective social interests and the interests of indigenous peoples and local communities in particular.
- ▶ **Avoid and disinvest** from development and conservation programmes that pose any risk of abuse to individual and collective human rights (due diligence).
- ▶ **Halt subsidies to industrial food production and re-direct those** to family farmers, indigenous forest dwellers, pastoralists, artisanal fishers and communities

engaged in small-scale and climate friendly production (agroecology, artisanal fishing, use of local seeds and breeds, processing of food and fibres) **in and around territories of life.**

- ▶ **Protect local economies** against the dumping of cheap food and fibre by using quotas and tariffs to guarantee fair and stable prices to small-scale producers, food processors, and small enterprises. Phase out food security programs that import foods unfamiliar to local communities and displace nutritious native crops, knowledge and livelihoods.

98 Fromm, 2001.

▶ **Transform government agencies** to become able to support community decision-making and local adaptive management in territories of life (e.g., via

re-oriented staff training, organisational cultures, policies, procedures, reward systems, and accountability mechanisms).

Enhancing the positive forces that provide powerful & sane alternatives

- ▶ Recognise indigenous peoples and local communities as **key actors to conserve biodiversity, mitigate and adapt to climate change and achieve food sovereignty in territories of life** and resolve to actively support them in political, social and economic terms.
- ▶ **Secure and support the collective governance of customary territories and natural resources** (e.g., forests, grasslands, farmlands, wetlands, coastal resources and fisheries, seeds and breeds and all local commons) **by their custodian indigenous peoples and local communities.**⁹⁹
- ▶ **Redirect subsidies to sound environmental management initiatives**— and restoration initiatives in particular— **that produce food and clean water for consumption in territories of life** (and secondarily for consumption elsewhere).
- ▶ Foster the custodians' collective capacity to cultivate, sustainably hunt and gather, prepare, serve and eat traditional foods in territories of life, including by enabling custodians with **security of tenure and equitable access to, and use of, land, water and other gifts of nature.**
- ▶ **Secure a decent income** for small-scale food producers and artisans, encouraging them to invest in livelihoods assets within and around their territories of life.
- ▶ **Support innovations in agroecology** that build on peoples' knowledge and priorities and strengthen farmer-led research; emphasize peer to peer co-creation of knowledge tailored to context; systems of circular and organic production and consumption; combined agroforestry and forest management; and all systems that foster diversity and prioritize native species.
- ▶ **Significantly increase public R&D funding** for agroecology and circular systems designed to reduce carbon and ecological footprints, re-localise production and consumption, enhance sustainability and resilience, and increase local democratic control over the means of production and livelihood within and around territories of life. Crucially: include agroecology and food sovereignty issues in formal education and training of researchers.
- ▶ **Deepen democratic governance** and secure direct participation of people in legislative and executive bodies, including by ensuring direct democracy at all levels.
- ▶ **Support collective actions** to create the social, economic, and cultural conditions that allow people to engage in sustainable production, healthy consumption and wellbeing in and around ICCAs—territories of life.
- ▶ **Support global policies and laws** that are friendly and positive for local economies, individual and collective human rights, and the climate.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ By so doing, government will take crucial steps to implement their obligations following the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the UN Declaration of the Rights of Peasants and Other Persons Working in Rural Areas, ILO Resolution 169, and the VGGT.

¹⁰⁰ For more details on enabling international policies and laws for ICCAs and food sovereignty see Pimbert, 2018c.



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A ceremony to thank for food and plentiful nature in the Andean region of Ecuador.
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