Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCA)

ACRONYMS | AREAS | COUNTRIES | MARINE | TERMS

DEFINITION

A globally applicable governance type for areas and territories under customary management.

DESCRIPTION

ICCAs are defined by the IUCN as *"natural and/or modified ecosystems containing significant biodiversity values, ecological services and cultural values, voluntarily conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities, both sedentary and mobile, through customary laws or other effective means"*. [1]

This is a broad definition that reflects the diverse nature of ICCAs. Although "ICCA" is used as a convenient term to facilitate understanding of these sites on a global scale, in reality they exist under a vast range of names, and may have a variety of management objectives and governance mechanisms. This diversity is because ICCAs have arisen independently in all corners of the world, with different cultural and ecological contexts, different pressures, and different motivations.

There are two main subsets:

1. indigenous conserved territories and areas established and run by indigenous peoples; and
2. community conserved areas, established and run by local communities.

The subsets, which may not be neatly separated, apply to both sedentary and mobile peoples and communities, and comprise both ancient and relatively new practices. Importantly, while ICCAs are managed under a wide range of objectives, their conservation results identify many of them as de facto protected areas according to one or more IUCN management categories [2] (see IUCN Protected area management categories for further information).

In many parts of the world, ICCAs are a far older form of conservation than protected areas created by governments. Despite this, they remain poorly recognised, leading the fifth World Parks Congress in 2003 to recommend national and international recognition of ICCAs as an urgent necessity. [3] Threats to ICCAs include external acquisition of territories (public or private), lack of political recognition, loss of

indigenous identities and internal conflicts within communities.

SUPPORTED BY

Convention on Biological Diversity e.g., Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA)[4]; Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-3) [5]; International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and associated Commissions (e.g., World Commission on Protected Areas, Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy, Environmental Law Commission, Species Survival Commission); many national governments (under evolving legislation, not necessarily conservation-related).

YEAR OF CREATION

Not applicable

COVERAGE

Although some countries have well-documented systems of ICCAs, the global distribution and coverage of ICCAs is not well understood. However, some estimates have suggested that they could have a global coverage equal to, if not greater than, that of government protected areas. [6]

CRITERIA

Recognising their substantial diversity, three features can be taken as defining characteristics of ICCAs: [3]

- A well defined people or community possess a close and profound relation with an equally well defined site (territory, area, habitat) and/or species – a relation embedded in local culture, sense of identity and/or dependence for livelihood and well being;
- The people or community is the major player in decision-making and implementation regarding the management of the site and/or species, implying that a local institution has – de facto and/or de jure – the capacity to develop and enforce management decisions. Other stakeholders may collaborate as partners, especially when the land is owned by the state, but local institutions predominantly make management decisions and efforts.
- The people's or community's management decisions and efforts lead to the conservation of habitats, species, genetic diversity, ecological functions and benefits, and associated cultural values. This is true regardless of the stated objective of management, which may not be conservation alone or *per se* (e.g. objectives may be livelihood, security, religious piety, safeguarding cultural and spiritual places, etc).

MANAGEMENT

The local institutions managing ICCAs throughout the world are varied. Large and small, ancient or relatively recently-established, powerful in means or simply in the respect they command from people. Such institutions may or may not possess a specific legal title or sanctioning power over the land, water or natural resources at stake. Most often, however, they possess customary rights, and local legitimacy and recognition. Some governments have integrated ICCAs into their official protected area systems, following recommendations from the Vth World Parks Congress in 2003 and the Programme of Work on Protected Areas of the CBD. [7] In such cases, the customary governance institutions can enjoy full

recognition and take on the responsibility of contributing to national conservation objectives.

BUSINESS RELEVANCE

Legal and compliance – Legal recognition of ICCAs depends on the context of national and local (e.g. municipal) laws. For example, some countries include ICCAs in their national systems of protected areas (e.g. Tanzania); some can seek legal titles to their ancestral lands and territories (e.g. Philippines); whilst others consider them as separate entities (e.g. Brazil). [8] Many countries where ICCAs exist do not formally recognise them. Most indigenous peoples and local communities, however, possess some legal or customary rights to land and natural resources. These must be considered on a case by case basis, with care, transparency and due respect for cultural differences.

There is increasing international attention on the protection of the areas of importance for local communities and indigenous peoples as evident from a number of environmental and social safeguard standards in which they have been incorporated. These include those of multilateral financial institutions including the World Bank [9], the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development [10] and the Inter-American Development Bank [11]. Such standards often require avoidance of adverse impacts on indigenous peoples as well as no significant conversion or degradation of areas under customary management by local communities and indigenous peoples. In cases where projects are eligible for funding by these institutions, additional requirements often apply, including the need for free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) from the community affected by the project. The projects are also required to implement additional programs to enhance the conservation aims of the protected area and to ensure that the indigenous people receive social and economic benefits that are culturally appropriate and gender and inter-generationally inclusive [10].

Indirectly, a range of international human rights, agricultural, development and other instruments are also important in providing indigenous peoples with the recognition and support needed to strengthen their ICCAs. [6] For example, the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) require the recognition of the rights of ownership of indigenous peoples over the lands that they traditionally occupy.

In addition, a number of sector specific safeguard standards refer to land under management of local communities and indigenous peoples, many of which are related to certification programs. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) requires that the projects in such areas ensure that the local communities with legal or customary tenure or use rights shall maintain control, to the extent necessary to protect their rights or resources [12]. The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil stipulates that no new plantings are to be established on local peoples' lands without FPIC [13] and the Marine Stewardship Council recommends observing the legal and customary rights and long term interests of people dependent on fishing for food and livelihood, in a manner consistent with ecological sustainability. [14]

Biodiversity importance – Although the specific biodiversity value of ICCAs is often unknown, many are likely to be of significant biodiversity value as a result of the long-term protection that this type of management has afforded them. For example, community conservancies in Kenya have been recognised for their importance in sustaining migratory species and it has been estimated that the migratory wildebeest population of the Serengeti ecosystem would decline by up to 33% if the wildebeest could not access the Group Ranches surrounding the Maasai Mara National Reserve. [15] Due to the large spatial extent and varied locations of ICCAs, a range of wildlife species and agro-pastoral landscapes are expected to be indirectly protected through ICCAs. As data is collected and compiled, information on the biodiversity components present is becoming more accessible, both internationally and locally. For example, recent reports indicate that the mammal and bird biodiversity in the northern communities of Australia is less secure than previously thought. [6] As many communities manage ICCAs to conserve culturally important or livelihood-related species or habitats, the biodiversity present at

these sites can be expected to be of high local and national value.

Socio-economic value – As ICCAs are governed and managed by indigenous peoples or local communities for the common good, these areas are often of very high importance for local livelihoods, cultural diversity and social well-being. Recognition of the value of these areas is also important for the protection of the rights of self-determination - the rights of people to determine their own economic, social and cultural development-as well as the preservation of traditional ecological knowledge held by the local communities and indigenous peoples.

REFERENCES & WEBSITE

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Van Long Nature Reserve (ICCA), Viet Nam. Piter HaSon/Shutterstock.com

Category:

Protected areas

Tools

Protected Planet is a tool for visualizing information on protected areas at the site level, country level, regional level and global level. This includes information on the IUCN category where known. Protected Planet brings together spatial data and descriptive information from the World Database on Protected Areas.

The ICCA Registry documents information about ICCAs in order to enhance understanding of their conservation and cultural values. It is a voluntary registry for Indigenous peoples and communities to raise awareness of ICCAs and provide appropriate recognition of their conservation values.

The Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) provides a visualisation and GIS download tool for protected areas, including the IUCN category where known.

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