



Indigenous Cultural Action for Biological and Cultural Conservation and Human Well-Being

Report of the Alliance Workshop held at the Fourth IUCN World Conservation Congress, Barcelona, October 5-9 2008

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Photographs by R. Hill

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Wet Tropics Traditional Owner Warren Canendo facilitates a group during a workshop session at the 4th IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain.

Indigenous Cultural Action for Biological and Cultural Conservation and Human Wellbeing

Main Outcomes

The workshop found that the most powerful actions to support Indigenous culture and conservation came through recognition of:

1. The role of elders in providing knowledge and direction, and ensuring Indigenous Governance continues; and the importance of linking youth to elders.
2. The centrality of rights-based approaches, which recognise both Indigenous ownership and management of the environment arising from Indigenous peoples' inherent rights over their traditional territories.
3. The need for treaties and agreements as the platform for allowing Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to work together for conservation.
4. The cultural basis of conservation and development e.g. cultural planning and mapping for conservation management; seasonal closures of pastoral areas and sustainable harvesting of resources linked to traditional ceremonies.
5. The importance of cultural unification and solidarity between Indigenous peoples, through networks and Indigenous associations; and also of educating non-Indigenous peoples.
6. Overall the key is empowerment of Indigenous people, to give back pride and confidence, and to enable Indigenous people to run their culture, laws and to run their traditional territories.

The workshop highlighted how Indigenous people from around the globe are actively working to protect the world's natural and cultural diversity. Concrete achievements reported by workshop participants included:

- Nepal model – people making conservation laws work by running conservation themselves.
- Ethiopia – Garmau people's cultural approaches include recognition of a Council of Elders, and of guardians for sacred forests, pasture lands and waters, who are appointed by the elders; cultural ceremonies for seasonal closures help pass knowledge from Elders to youth
- South Africa – Terra Pi putting people back into their land through restoration and land care projects.
- Australia – Miriuwung Gajerrong Cultural Planning Framework as a way of putting Indigenous culture back into protected area management; Wet Tropics Regional Agreement between 18 Tribal groups and the Australian and Queensland Governments recognizes rights and now has led into a cultural mapping project; Indigenous people are re-learning their language and crafts.
- Central and South America – cultural land use plans are being developed and implemented by Indigenous peoples; Indigenous people are bringing back traditional dress and traditional foods to strengthen culture.
- Canada – Indigenous peoples are playing a significant role through climate change projects and decisions.
- Argentina – Indigenous people are revitalizing traditions, for example through growing their traditional crops, including potatoes.

The workshop did not agree on one overall recommendation, but all identified that conservation and human well-being are both enhanced by empowerment of Indigenous peoples and their cultures through recognition of rights; of the role of elders; of the cultural basis of conservation and

development; and through providing opportunities for cultural unification and re-establishment of pride and confidence of the people. These recommendations target all conservation programs and should be carried forward into the work of the Commission on Economic, Environmental and Social Policy.



Warren Canendo, Ngadjon Traditional Owner from Australia addressing the Alliance Workshop Plenary session

Background to the Indigenous Cultural Action Workshop

Four Traditional Owners from Australia - three from Queensland and one from Western Australia - led this workshop at the 4th IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain on the topic of Indigenous efforts to protect biocultural diversity.

The Traditional Owners were Des Hill of Yawoorroong Miriuwung Gajerrong Yirrggeb Noong Dawang Aboriginal Corporation in Kununurra, Warren Cannendo of Terrain NRM in Innisfail; Christine George of Giringun Aboriginal Corporation in Cardwell; and Justin McCaul of Australian Conservation Foundation in Cairns. Others in the team included Leanne Cullen and Rosemary Hill of CSIRO and Terrain NRM; and Nigel Hedgecock of the Wet Tropics Management Authority all in Cairns.

The workshop, which was convened by CSIRO on behalf of the partnership team, aimed to share experiences and knowledge on what Indigenous people are doing to help shape a sustainable future, attracted over 30 participants from countries as diverse as Nepal, Germany, New Zealand, Guatemala, Italy, South Africa and Australia. Specific objectives of the workshop included:

- sharing experiences from international case studies on innovations in Indigenous bio-cultural diversity and conservation—and the links to improved socio-economic well-being;
- linking the case studies and experiences to the World Conservation Congress theme of shaping solutions for a sustainable and diverse world; and
- generating ideas for actions to better support Indigenous bio-cultural diversity and conservation globally.

A small group discussion process known as a “World Café Process” was used to exchange information. The World Café approach provides an opportunity for small group discussions in an informal setting to address key questions. The workshop focused key questions according to six key themes: governance and rights; planning and management; Indigenous conservation; capacity building; social well being investment; and cultural practices and strengthening. The ideas generated are transferred through the workshop by facilitators presenting the major outcomes from each small group to the room who can then collectively discuss the major points.

Workshop structure

Warren Canendo welcomed participants to the workshop and explained the small group processes. People were asked to join one of six themes as below. The facilitator for each theme asked the group to respond to the key questions listed below. At the end of the workshop, facilitators reported back to the whole group on their findings. Unfortunately we ran out of time for collective discussion, but had some very fruitful exchanges within the small groups

1. Governance and Rights

- How do you assert your rights with government over your traditional country in areas of conservation and management?
- How are Indigenous rights recognised?
- What innovations are happening in terms of Indigenous governance?

2. Planning and Management

- What role do Indigenous people play in managing natural and cultural resources in their traditional lands?

3. Indigenous Conservation

- What innovative approaches are Indigenous people using for conservation?

4. Capacity Building

- How are Indigenous peoples building and exchanging capacity?

5. Social Wellbeing Investment

- How are you developing social or economic innovations tied to traditional knowledge and rights?

6. Cultural Practices and Strengthening

- How does Indigenous culture contribute to biological diversity in your traditional lands?
- What methods are you using to strengthen your culture?



Leanne Cullen reporting back to plenary session from the Capacity Building workshop group

Workshop Findings

Governance and Rights: Facilitator Nigel Hedgcock

Key questions addressed in this group were:

- How do you assert your rights with government over your traditional country in areas of conservation and management?
- How are Indigenous rights recognised?
- What innovations are happening in terms of Indigenous governance?

This group brought experience from international legal human rights, national policy (legal) in traditional land ownership and regional traditional rights advocacy. However, this accumulated experience was mostly in theory-based as opposed to local practical negotiation and implementation.

Summary

The Workshop found that all participants supported a rights-based approach, where peoples' rights in both ownership and management of the environment are recognised and supported. A range of different instruments for recognition are now available from international to national levels, including UN Binding Agreements, ancestral claims and regional agreements supported by laws. However, there are many barriers to achieving outcomes through these processes, including complex administration and ongoing government opposition to full recognition. Solutions lie in working both at the grass-roots level to generate solidarity and broad cross-sectoral community support, and taking up legal and political opportunities at national and international levels. Building rights into partnership agreements can be helpful where rights are not strong, but sometimes getting agreements implemented proves very challenging. Strengthening culture is really important for keeping Indigenous inherent rights strong. Constitutional and legal recognition of Indigenous governance and rights are powerful actions.

Detailed notes

How do Indigenous people assert their rights over traditional country with government in areas of conservation and management?

- UN Binding Agreements
- Regional Courts
- Native Title/Ancestral Claims
- Partnership Agreements
- Government Law.

How are Indigenous rights recognised?

Barriers:

- Complicated law and bureaucratic processes
- Compromise with other stakeholders
- Incomplete recognition of rights/responsibilities
- Poor commitment to implementation of agreements
- Low levels of broad public awareness or support.

Opportunities:

- Promote broad community support and awareness
- Regional or International legal mechanisms (Wet Tropics Regional Agreement between 18 Tribal groups and Australian and Queensland Governments)
- Empower grass roots through education and governance capacity
- Restoration/maintenance of traditional knowledge and practices
- Cross-Sector solidarity
- International political shift.

What innovations are happening in terms of Indigenous governance?

- Constitutional and/or legal recognition that guarantees
 - Rights and/or land ownership
 - Management capacity.



Nigel Hedgcock from Wet Tropics Management Authority facilitating a group at the Workshop

Planning and Management: Facilitator Justin McCaul

Key question addressed in this group was:

- What role do Indigenous people play in managing natural and cultural resources in their traditional lands?

Participants included a diverse group from Australia, New Zealand, Africa and South America.

Summary

The workshop group identified that the question is not about Indigenous peoples' role but about their rights – a rights-based approach which recognises what rights people have. Their rights need to be recognised in formal documents like the Treaty of Waitangi, which was signed between Māori and the British in 1840. However, Indigenous peoples generally face governments that don't support rights-based approaches. In Australia, the Australian Conservation Foundation works to assist Indigenous peoples' rights in conservation to be recognised. In Madagascar, people are generally very supportive of conservation, but also face a lot of issues with poverty, and depend on being able to use natural resources. Swidden agriculture, which is the only way people can get food, isn't seen as favourable to conservation. The solution here is to make sure the threats, and the uneven distribution of resources in the environment, are properly understood and managed. Biosphere reserves, based on the concept of people and landscape together, can be a good way of bringing landscape and people together in conservation management.



Denise Boyd from the Australian Conservation Foundation taking notes in the workshop group facilitated by Justin McCaul.

Indigenous Conservation: Facilitator Des Hill

Key question addressed in this group was:

- What innovative approaches are Indigenous people using for conservation?

Participants included a diverse group from Central America, Asia and Australia.

Summary

This workshop found that the cultural approach to conservation is really important for all Indigenous people. International agreements can help with bringing cultural rights into the approaches of national-level governments – for example, the Indigenous Labour Organisation Convention (No. 169) concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries recognises Indigenous management rights over protected areas. Younger people are now becoming more concerned about the loss of cultural approaches, and pushing to bring traditional lifestyles back, including traditional dress, foods, artefacts, languages and crafts. The workshop recognised there were two different approaches to conservation – one being run by the government, and one being run by the people. The key is getting governments to recognise and support the people’s approach. In Nepal, Indigenous people are now making the laws work by running conservation themselves. In Australia, Miriuwung Gajerrong people have produced a Cultural Planning Framework as a way of getting their law and custom to be recognised in managing protected areas on their country. Barriers come when conflicting laws get put upon people that interfere with the management of country. Indigenous people are interested in learning from each other about cultural approaches, and bringing these forward to government.



Des Hill and participants in the Indigenous conservation workshop group

Capacity Building: Facilitator Leanne Cullen

Question: How are Indigenous people in your country building and exchanging capacity?

Participants from: Spain, Central America, US, Norway, Taiwan, Canada

Summary

The participants in this discussion group highlighted the need for genuine cooperation and multi-directional learning supported by the development of networks and appropriate associations. The need for intergenerational communication and information transfer was considered key for capacity building both within and across cultures. The main barriers to successful capacity building were considered to be related to ineffective or inappropriate methods of communication, lack of understanding between groups with different value systems, and issues of trust. Key recommended actions from the group included: the development of improved livelihood opportunities; targeting youth; further development of networks and alliances; improved communication strategies; and the integration and sharing of knowledge from different cultures towards shared understanding.

Detailed Notes

Introduction of participants and theme

- Discussion around definition of capacity building and clarification between *capacity building* and *cultural practices and strengthening* themes (participants did not initially see the difference between these themes).
- Goal decided for the *capacity building* theme: Indigenous community capacity building and thinking.

Current actions and opportunities for capacity building

- Co-research and research partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers.
- US Indigenous communities have created networks and associations. These networks have been developed at the political level but remain specific e.g. basket weaving association (women); spiritual and economic associations e.g. native foods. The networks help regenerate capacity by sharing with other tribes.
- Cultural land use in Central America and Cultural Land Use Plans developed and implemented by Indigenous Americans.
- Intergenerational approaches are key for capacity building. Tribes are developing ways to link youth to elders e.g. discovery camps in the US. Elders have great capacity to reenergise youth.
- Canada: Indigenous people play a significant role in climate change issues and policy/decision making. Other countries do not have this capacity/power yet.

Barriers to successful capacity building

- How do you reach/communicate effectively?
- Women/men may require different approaches for effective communication.

- If Indigenous values are similar to mainstream values it will be easier to build capacity. However, if values and language is different it will be harder to build capacity from external sources.
- Internalised oppression.
- Conservationists are not changing themselves.
- Outsiders are often not accepted into Indigenous communities.

Future needs/recommended actions

- People need food security and incomes (livelihoods).
- Collectivist approach (moving away from individualist).
- We need to identify why people are losing skills/losing their way of producing. This point was tied in to a point made about the government of France supporting local farmers to maintain farming lifestyles and the question was asked as to why this couldn't happen for Indigenous people elsewhere?
- Capacity building may need to be gender specific: e.g. female elders teach girls.
- Develop capacity building from youth.
- Combine wisdom from various cultures.
- Non-Indigenous people should learn Indigenous language/culture. 2-way capacity building. Ask Indigenous people to teach non-Indigenous people Indigenous ways. We want to learn from you too. We need to work together to build every ones capacity (for engagement and management).
- Need monetary investment to incorporate Indigenous knowledge/ways into conservation initiatives.
- We need to change mainstream thinking. Indigenous knowledge can be equal to non-Indigenous knowledge: this is a challenge.
- Tell us your perceptions and knowledge – how do you know that things are changing? Non-Indigenous people must listen.
- Non-Indigenous researchers should not extract knowledge.
- Indicators of cultural wellbeing (like the happiness index).
- Indigenous people should be employed in research positions.
- Non-Indigenous people should write/speak in plain language that anyone can understand.
- Outsiders should spend time in communities to build trust, knowledge and respect and to learn enough to love the culture.
- Feedback should be provided to Indigenous communities.
- We need resources allocated directly to Indigenous communities e.g. funding for communities to build their capacity in a way that they decide is appropriate.
- We need to facilitate engagement at every level e.g. mapping/research stage to interaction with government and policy makers. Indigenous people must be involved in the development of management tools for example.
- Indigenous people need the capacity to fight external extractive companies – this goes back to the ability/capacity to engage at different levels.
- Power: how do people get their power back? Links with other groups/networks. Need help making these links. If links/networks developed Indigenous people may have enough power to apply pressure to extractive companies for example, as a supportive collective.
- Transfer resources e.g. as in Indigenous people and climate change initiatives.



Participants in workshop group facilitated by Leanne Cullen

Social Well-Being Investment – Facilitator Christine George

Key question addressed in this group was:

- How are Indigenous people developing social or economic innovations tied to Traditional Knowledge and rights?

Indigenous people from Australia, Argentina and South Africa were part of this group.

Summary

The workshop found that Indigenous innovations are about strengthening cultural knowledge and connections to country/land as the basis of human well-being. However, many barriers still impede people being able to move forward with these innovations, particularly the education system which excludes traditional culture. The past legacy of victimisation and oppression also leads to barriers through social exclusion. Many initiatives are under way to overcome these barriers, through Indigenous people revitalising traditional food crops, traditional practices like weaving, through bringing their approaches into Indigenous Protected Areas, and through spending time on country in restoration projects. The key is empowering people so their pride is returned, and they can gain skills and at the same time help the land recover from stress. The most powerful actions to achieve innovations are cultural unification between people, working together on land restoration, strengthening cultural knowledge and applying it to looking after the land, showcasing the connections between western and Indigenous ways to highlight the importance of maintaining people in the landscape.

Detailed notes

Innovations are about strengthening cultural knowledge and re-connecting with country

- Getting people on restoration and land care projects as a way of addressing social problems is the approach of Terra Pi in South Africa.
- Indigenous people are seeing traditional knowledge as the basis of development in Argentina, maintaining people in landscapes is the best way forward for human well-being.

People still face multiple barriers

- Education systems
 - Not based on traditional culture so people go to school and lose their traditional knowledge.
 - Education leads to loss of culture, loss of connection to country.
 - People need literacy to re-learn their traditional culture.
- Social exclusion
 - Indigenous people are very victimised and oppressed.
 - Therefore don't want to accept help, help often has led to further oppression in the past.

Opportunities and solutions to overcome these barriers

- Knowledge can be returned to Indigenous people – for example Warrgamay Aboriginal people in Australia have a non-Indigenous linguist helping them re-learn and strengthen their language.
- Indigenous organisations can support cultural education – Giringun Aboriginal Corporation supports re-learning of traditions like weaving, traditional foods.

- Traditional food crops – in Argentina, Indigenous people are growing their traditional crops like potatoes again.
- Reconnecting with land – Terra Pi helps people to get access back to their lands for restoration projects, looking at drought resistance species to enable co-existence between people and nature, and to help people re-learn their conservation ethics.
- Indigenous Protected Areas – are a good way of bringing Indigenous approaches more into the contemporary management approach.

Empowerment of the people is the key

- Give people back their pride.
- Support people to be proud of what they have.
- Support skills transfer.
- Assist the land to recover from stress, through re-establishing Indigenous care and protection.

Most powerful actions

- Promote cultural unification through reconnecting people together, for example through workshops.
- Work together on restoring land through native species of that area.
- Strengthen and pass on knowledge of cultural beliefs.
- Showcase the connection between western and Indigenous cultural ways of looking after the land.
- Mainstream people in landscapes as critical to both culture and nature.



Christine George from Girringun Aboriginal Corporation facilitating a workshop group

Cultural Practices and Strengthening: Facilitator Warren Canendo

Key questions addressed in this group were:

- How does Indigenous culture contribute to biological diversity in your traditional lands?
- What methods are you using to strengthen your culture?

The workshop found that Indigenous culture contributes to biological diversity through its holistic approach, where every element of the landscape has a link into the cultural system. Key common approaches include respect for the role of the Elders, for learning by observation and doing, and for adherence to complex systems that link the people to the land, for example through sacred forest guardians. Practical strategies like seasonal closures of grazing areas are also used and enforced through customary law and the Elders. Recognition of cultural practices and heritage, and of the links between natural and cultural heritage, allows culture to be strengthened.

Traditional landscape

- Based on custom and law, traditional belief system.
- Whole country is a cultural practice: water, rocks and everything is a mother in this belief system.
- Cultural rites are still practiced: for example, bringing the younger generation out to be part of ceremonies to celebrate the start/end of seasonal closures on grazing areas for five months.

Council of Elders

- Garmau people from Ethiopia
 - Elders have key role in determining punishment if people break law for example by using grazing areas in the time of seasonal closures
 - Elders are also responsible for teaching youth – younger generation must have strong respect in following the elders so that traditions can stay alive for the future.
- Common for all Indigenous societies to be linked to a Council of Elders.
- Role to distribute power and assign roles.
- For example, Council of Elders appoints a guardian to sacred pasture lands and sacred forests in Ethiopia.

Connection to country

- Link between the land and the Council of Elders through the guardians of sacred places.
- For Garmau people in Ethiopia, there are guardians for all sacred water and forests.
- Connection to country is key to Traditional Owners in Australia.

Contribution of Indigenous people to biodiversity

- Indigenous people guard the forests, water and pastures.
- Indigenous people protect and keep the whole cultural landscape.

Education of youth

- Young people are initiated to take responsibility through learning by doing, through participating in ceremonies.
- Key learning is through the observation of the older people.
- Knowledge comes down from the ancestors.
- Learning to make a spear in Aboriginal traditions of Australia comes firstly through being shown by an elder, but the younger person has to be with the elder to make another spear, until he earns the right to make a spear.

Cultural heritage in Europe

- World heritage convention provides good ways to bring natural and cultural heritage together .
- The Mediterranean is regarded as the “cradle of civilisation” which is cultural heritage.

How to strengthen culture

- Recognise culture.
- Recognise the links between natural and cultural heritage.



Warren Canendo and participants in workshop group