

ALLIANCE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES & LOCAL COMMUNITIES FOR CONSERVATION IN AFRICA (AICA)

Windhoek, Namibia
25th -27th October, 2023

CONGRESS REPORT



We take care of our lands. This is our land by birth. We have knowledge, that was gifted to us by our forefathers, that teaches us how to sustain our land and be sustained by it. How can someone that has never lived in our land know how to care for it? How can our people and our lands be managed by laws made by people that live outside the forest and away from the great plains? Living sustainably in our forests, in our great plains, is about relationship, about interdependence.

Without the land we wouldn't be here and without us the richness of our environment would succumb to greed and power.

**Laboot declaration,
2022, Kigali, Rwanda**

Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and Local Communities (LCs) are interested in conservation practices that embrace universal principles of justice, collaboration, reconciliation, peace, and respect for all knowledge systems and models of conservation – both landscape-wide and waterscape-wide – that take into consideration human perspectives, including their livelihood systems. They call for a conservation ethos that does not criminalize their livelihood systems, and a philosophy that is anchored on land justice.

1.0 Background

In July 2022, more than 2,400 representatives from across 53 African countries and delegates from 20 countries outside Africa convened at The African Protected Areas Congress (APAC) in Kigali, Rwanda. The participants were drawn from governments, conservation actors from in and outside Africa, civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples (IP) and local communities (LCs), academic institutions, and youth. Their goal was to discuss and enhance conservation in Africa. The event's discussions were anchored on three streams: Protected areas; people; and biodiversity;; and six cross-cutting themes: 1. governance, 2.conflict, 3. climate change, 4. science, technology, and Indigenous knowledge; 5.sustainable financing; and 6.physical infrastructure. Prior to the event, IPs LCs and young Africans held two pre-congress events to coordinate actions and set their collective priorities. These two pre-congresses led to declarations on the conservation agenda in Africa (Youth Declaration and the IP and LC Declaration), which were presented during the event's closing alongside the Kigali Call to Action.

The Kigali Call to Action recognizes the need to acknowledge, respect and support the rights, identities, and governance systems of IP and LCs, and to promote fair and equitable sharing of costs and benefits associated with conservation areas. This document also calls for acknowledgment and redress of past and ongoing injustices experienced in the pursuit of conservation goals and the centering of African people in contemporary conservation practices. The IP and LC Declaration emphasizes the need to halt the violence of conservation in all dimensions, and underscores the importance of secure tenure and land justice as central pillars for the African conservation agenda. IPs and LCs are determined to articulate community-led models of conservation that result in positive outcomes for both biodiversity and people. To this end, they have set out to develop a strategy that allows them to hold governments, donor agencies, international conservation NGOs, conservationists, and other key stakeholders to account, while advocating for speedy implementation of the commitments made. As outlined in the IP and LC Declaration, they have created a Pan-African collaboration called The Alliance for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities for Conservation in Africa (AICA), as a platform for their shared concerns, actions, programs, cross-learning among states, and to follow up on the commitments made in Kigali.

One of the activities envisioned in the Alliance's strategy is convening the first IP and LC-led conservation congress on the continent: The Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' Conservation Congress, hosted by the Community Leaders Network(CLN) and supported by IMPACT and by Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI). This event was held in Windhoek, Namibia from 25-27 October 2023.

1.1 Rationale for the Congress

Highlighting the crucial importance of recognizing and safeguarding the contributions of Indigenous and local communities in conservation is paramount. These communities, deeply interconnected with the natural world, play a pivotal role in preserving the Earth's biodiversity and maintaining the intricate balance of ecosystems. Rather than being displaced from their natural habitats, there is a pressing need to support and empower these communities to harness their knowledge for global environmental benefits.

For generations, Indigenous people and local communities (IPLCs) have served as custodians of our planet's ecologically significant regions. Their harmonious coexistence with nature has allowed them to nurture these environments, understanding the intricate interconnectedness of life within them. Passed down through numerous generations, their traditional knowledge stands as a living legacy, embodying the wisdom of time-honored practices that prioritize harmony with nature. Through their stewardship, they have sustained the diverse species and habitats that define these unique ecosystems.

A recent study, conducted by RRI and produced in collaboration with the Campaign for Nature, shows that between 1.65 and 1.87 billion of IP and LCs live in the world's important biodiversity conservation areas. These findings are affirmed in, among others, Science (Allan et al., 2022). Globally, the overlap between protected areas and the lands of IP and LCs is estimated at 50–80 percent. It has also been estimated that up to 136 million people were displaced in formally protecting half of the area currently under government protection (8.5 million km²). Currently, 56 percent of the people living in important biodiversity conservation areas are in low- and middle-income countries, while only 9 percent live in high-income countries. This means that the burden of conservation falls disproportionately on the Global South. To this extent, conservation in Africa becomes a key focal point in the land and environmental rights ecosystems.

Africa is one of the most biodiverse continents in the world as it hosts a quarter of earth's biodiversity. More than 21 countries of this continent¹ have already signed a commitment to secure 30 percent of terrestrial and marine environments under conservation by 2030². This is under the umbrella of the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People. The 30 by 30 proposal is now encapsulated in target three of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework which aims to “ensure that by 2030 at least 30 percent of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems are under effective restoration, in order to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity and connectivity.”

¹ Including Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, Gabon, Mauritania, Botswana, Kenya, Chad, Congo, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Zambia, Togo, Comoros

²<https://www.campaignfornature.org/50-countries-announce-bold-commitment-to-protect-at-least-30-of-the-worlds-land-and-ocean-by-2030>

The current network of protected areas is estimated to cover 17 percent of the continent's land mass. The bulk of this land would fall under national parks, game reserves, and forest reserves. Many of those protected areas have been established in Africa by eviction of communities from their territories and are associated with an array of human rights abuses. Broadly speaking, African people have been cast as enemies to conservation, they have been criminalized and referred to as poachers, their livelihood and knowledge systems have been undermined, and it is widely believed that they have to be taught how to conserve. This happens despite the fact that many of the national parks and reserves are not fenced and wildlife roams in and out of community territories and destroys their property, causes fear, and kills people. Its under these challenges that the voice and actions of IPs and LCs needs to be considered for defining, planning and implementing the 30x30 target by respecting the current and dynamic context of land and natural resources access by Africans. These shall be crafted considering more than five decades of research illustrating that communities effectively conserve forests, ecosystems, and biodiversity through collective ownership, governance strategies, and traditional ecological knowledge. As a result, they present a viable alternative to exclusionary conservation practices.

A study conducted by RRI demonstrates that despite their poverty and structural injustice, communities make investments of between US\$2 billion–4 billion per year and manage and protect biodiversity efficiently at a lower cost and without the support received by conservation organizations, making rights recognition a just and effective alternative to exclusionary conservation practices. Little has been done to deliver justice to communities for past human-rights violations, decriminalize customary practices in protected areas, or direct a greater share of conservation and climate financing (such as for reduced deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries—REDD+) to support the essential stewardship role of IP and LCs. Recently, IP and LCs have been strengthening their calls at the negotiations such as the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and regional convenings or forums such as the APAC congress for their inclusion in setting the world's conservation and climate-related ambitions. It is against this background that AICA organized the first community-led conservation congress to articulate its vision of rights-based, people-centered conservation as well as to demonstrate the role that IPs and LCs play in conservation and the price they pay in sharing space with wildlife. AICA is driven by the goal of advocating for the acknowledgment and respect of IPLCs' efforts in community-led conservation, seeks to ensure equal benefit sharing and responsible resource utilization within the territories inhabited by these communities. A key emphasis is placed on preventing the separation of IPs and LCs from their essential life territories. The overarching aim is to create a platform that facilitates dialogue, collaboration, and concerted action to address the pressing conservation issues faced by indigenous and local communities across Africa.

1.2 Congress Objectives



To launch the Alliance for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities for Conservation in Africa, discuss its strategy and explore opportunities for partnership to support the implementation of the IP and LC Strategy (2023–2027) with development partners and conservation organizations.



To demonstrate community conservation practices and associated knowledge systems, under a progressive format for sharing and learning



To launch and share the preliminary findings of a new RRI study on community-led and rights-based approaches to conservation in Africa.



To influence IP and LCs inclusion and recognition in the implementation of the international strategies such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Nagoya Protocol, the Free, Prior and Informed Consent tool of the United Nations, and the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity's goals and targets.



To call for the inclusion of IPs and LCs in the development of the national biodiversity strategies and actions plans for each country in the region.



To increase direct and consistent funding for IPs and LCs, including women and youth, for nature conservation that is inclusive of all landscapes.

1.3 IMPACT's Roles and Responsibilities

IMPACT leveraged on its convening and fundraising power to mobilize the IPs and LCs in East Africa and across the continent and raised up to USD 300,000 which made the congress possible. As one of the organizing partners, IMPACT played a crucial role in ensuring the seamless execution of the congress, particularly in the realm of logistics.. Within the logistics domain, IMPACT delegates took on various tasks and responsibilities to contribute to the overall success of the event. This included conducting a thorough venue assessment, determining the layout to accommodate the expected number of attendees, and organizing the logistics for the donors and partners dinner. The latter served as a means to bring stakeholders together, fostering a sense of appreciation for their collective efforts. Additionally, IMPACT delegates provided on-site support by managing registration and information desks, and helping attendees navigate the venue effectively. In an effort to showcase the work of IMPACT and provide a platform for learning and exchange, delegates displayed various project briefs and studies undertaken by IMPACT. This dissemination of information aimed to enable other organizations to replicate successful initiatives in different areas. As part of its broader engagement, IMPACT hosted a side event focused on 'Maximizing Rights to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in Community-Led Conservation.' Recognizing FPIC as a fundamental principle in international law, the discussion highlighted the importance of obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of indigenous and local communities before implementing projects that may impact their lands, resources, or livelihoods.

The event emphasized the need to ensure that conservation initiatives are sustainable, equitable, and respectful of the rights and well-being of indigenous and local communities. This involves working within existing legal frameworks and international standards, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The discussions further delved into the imperative of involving investors and ensuring their understanding of FPIC guidelines. Respect for the timeframe required by communities to comprehend and provide consent to projects was underscored, emphasizing the cultural sensitivity needed throughout the process. The event highlighted the necessity for organizations to fully understand and adopt the principles of FPIC in their work, advocating for its implementation not just at global forums but also at grassroots levels. Community-led conservation was emphasized as a long-term commitment requiring continual efforts to safeguard the well-being of communities in those areas.

1.4. Congress Proceedings

The congress commenced with introductory remarks from Dr. Rodgers Lubilo, the chairperson of the Community Leaders Network of South Africa (CLN), the host of the Congress. Dr Lubilo extended a warm welcome to representatives from over 40 countries and seized the moment to acknowledge the foundational elements that led to the event—namely, the Kigali Call to Action and Declaration that were delivered in 2022 during the IUCN Africa Protected Areas Congress (APAC) held in Kigali, Rwanda. Consistent with the African tradition, the event commenced with a blessing offered by Chief Frederick Langman a community elder, representing the Kao traditional authority of Namibia. Dr. Speaking at the opening ceremony,



As Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, we have every reason to celebrate community-based conservation because from time immemorial, we have effectively conserved forests, ecosystems, and biodiversity through collective ownership, traditional governance, and ecological knowledge systems which continue to this day.

Dr. Malidadi Langa, the interim chairperson of AICA

The congress was officially opened by His Excellency Mr. Hailemariam Desalegn, the APAC Patron and Former Prime Minister of Ethiopia. He commended the Interim Leadership of AICA for the strategic work undertaken to mobilize IPs and LCs from all over the continent around common areas of interest.

The Congress was designed around six interlocking themes:

- **COMMUNITY-LED CONSERVATION APPROACHES AND KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS**
- **HUMAN-WILDLIFE INTERACTIONS**
- **IPLCS AND GLOBAL CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE PROCESSES**
- **LAND TENURE, CONSERVATION, AND COMMUNITY LIVELIHOODS**
- **GRIEVANCE REDRESS MECHANISMS INCLUDING PAST AND ONGOING RIGHTS VIOLATIONS**
- **LIVING IN PEACE WITH PROTECTED AREAS, LEGISLATIVE REFORMS AND THE ACHIEVING OF THE 30X30 CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY GOALS**

1.5 Major Congress Outcomes

01

The Leadership of AICA will mobilize and partner with its supporters to conduct regional and national consultative meetings that raise awareness about the need for the Alliance as the only and collective voice of Africa's IPLCs, a suitable governance structure and institutional form, and the Post-APAC IPLC Strategy as a road map to the implementation of the IPs & LCs-Declaration and Kigali Call to Action.

02

AICA will strive to unify IPs & LCs conservation voices on key issues from all the five regions of Africa and support sub-regional platforms and networks to make connections that advance the IPs & LCs conservation agenda including advocating for a dedicated & sustainable IPs & LCs funding mechanism that will channel funding directly to grassroots IPLC Organizations.

03

AICA will work towards identification and documentation of unrecognized community conserved areas and ensure that African voices and strengthen the call for recognition of these areas as part of Africa's contribution to the 30x30 Global Biodiversity Framework. It will forestall the need for creating new protected areas that would risk yet another round of displacement and dispossession. There is need for additional data to ensure a comprehensive and accurate representation of conservation efforts across the continent. This underscores the ongoing commitment to gather a robust dataset that reflects the diverse approaches and challenges faced by communities involved in conservation initiatives in Africa

04

In acknowledging that conservation models that exclude people have failed worldwide, the Alliance will put ordinary communities at the center of the conservation agenda at all levels and advocate for the discontinuation of failed models. Communities live all over Africa, including its remotest areas, and most community domains contain natural resources. IPs and LCs will not accept additional State Protected Areas created from their customary lands. We need to nurture learning-by-doing and use practical cases to guide changes to better meet community and conservation needs.

05

The Alliance will collaborate with established International conservation institutions like the International Union for Conservation (IUCN), CITES and many others to collaboratively design and create new IPLC natural governance models that could be considered as a category of IPLC community conservation that fully integrates the IPLCs into these international conservation bodies.

06

Conduct robust advocacy with wildlife agencies of African governments on the need for compensation for Human Wildlife Conflict (HWC) and, putting in place functional grievance redress and conflict resolution mechanisms founded on the reputed guidance on FPIC (Free Prior and Informed Consent) and Cancun safeguards for inclusive conservation.

07

Recognize that communities living in proximity with wildlife pay disproportionately high costs in HWC and therefore call on adequate compensation and ensuring conservation is beneficial to communities that coexist with wildlife through proper and appropriate benefits sharing mechanisms. It's essential to consider the multifaceted nature of human-wildlife conflict, involving ecological, social, and economic dimensions. Addressing this issue effectively requires collaborative efforts, innovative solutions, and a comprehensive understanding of the complex interactions between communities and wildlife in specific regions.

08

Protect corridors, grazing lands and settlement areas through inclusive and participatory land use planning. Promote the use of local & indigenous knowledge, strategies and methods that can be adapted to conflict resolution approaches that mitigate human wildlife conflict and address compensation within the challenging framework of poor governance.

09

In line with the strategic directions of the APAC-IPLCs Implementation Strategy and the IPLC Kigali Declaration — and based on the recommendations of the CCC's participants, the Congress resolved to engage actively in biodiversity conservation, and to do more to protect the remaining biodiversity hotspots on the continent while being inclusive.

10

Provide key interventions to various international and global conventions (such as COP28) to disseminate the outcomes of CCC, and contribute Africa's IPLCs experiential approaches and knowledge systems in conservation.

11

Advocate for legislations that recognize community land rights, implementation of legislation, consolidating community governance and full implementation of existing pro-people land policies and legislation.

12

Promote the training of more advocacy officers of indigenous organizations, community leaders in the field, lawyers and professionals, who will work with IPLC networks to create awareness among IPLCs on land rights, strengthen networks at the regional level to have a voice and advocate for reforms in land laws that will include respecting the rights of IPLCs.

13

Promote the creation and building of networks to support the unlocking of potential opportunities for resources and development especially in central Africa while strengthening existing networks in West Africa to better understand the concept of IPLCs and ensuring their effective participation in AICA.

14

Conduct sincere, honest and constructive dialogues with governments in addressing historical injustices and dedicating critical resources to support and fund community-led conservation interventions.

15

Strengthen partnerships and coordination and promote co-management of protected areas between government agencies & IPs & LCs and any new conservation endeavors be based on respectful partnerships and not in conflict with local communities.

16

Examine & use where appropriate existing mechanisms that ensure International Conservation Non-Governmental Organizations work towards supporting and growing national and regional IPLC organizations in respectful and transparent partnerships other than seeking to replace them or maintain the status quo.

17

Emphasize Indigenous knowledge among women and youth through sharing knowledge with future generations for continuity and encourage both groups to participate in development of policies at the local, regional and international levels including discussions on Climate Change.

18

Work very closely with African governments and conservation actors in ensuring capacity-building programs for conservation are provided especially for pastoral women including investing in indigenous leadership.

19

Promote inclusive participation of Indigenous women & youth in conservation efforts to advance their active participation in natural resource management that contributes to ecosystems management and realization for intergenerational champions that create value to the youths and women through advocacy programs at all levels.

20

Promote organizational development by establishing, strengthening and operationalizing regional networks to create awareness about AICA and grow membership base and ensure regional and country-level engagement in all of Africa's sub-regions.

21

Establish a Secretariat for the Alliance to support regional networks with chapters and coordinators to champion implementation of the Kigali APAC IPLC strategy and the congress recommendations including voicing Human Rights abuses and violations in the name of conservation.

22

Include the AICA'S vision in regional initiatives through existing regional networks so as to amplify visibility at the regional level and within the regional economic blocs and influence decisions that impact IPLCs at the African Union level.

23

Establish mechanisms to engage with donors and partners of IPLCs to support the implementation of the congress outcomes and AICA implementation strategy for Kigali IPLC declaration and Kigali Call to Action.

24

Ensure donors and partners prioritize human rights and the differentiated rights of indigenous peoples, local communities and women.

25

Develop AICA strategic plan from the grassroots including trans-boundary conservation issues to enable members of AICA all work towards the same goals.

1.6 Conclusion

The congress was a resounding success and an illustration of what can be done when IPs and LCs are effectively mobilized around a common agenda on the continent. In a nutshell, the congress underscored the paramount importance of leveraging on the power of local communities, honoring traditional knowledge, and forging partnerships to bolster community-led conservation efforts. It emphasized the critical role of integrating traditional wisdom into conservation strategies, recognizing that these time-tested practices offer valuable insights into sustainable resource management. Functioning as a catalyst, the congress propelled the advancement of community-led conservation initiatives. It instilled a renewed commitment to ongoing collaboration and support for the indispensable practices undertaken by indigenous and local communities. The event made it clear that community-led conservation is not only a viable approach but an essential one for the enduring preservation of our planet's biodiversity and natural resources. Building on the momentum generated by the Kigali Declaration, the congress followed up on actions taken and outlined the way forward in the realm of community-led conservation. This collective effort is a testament to the acknowledgment of the intrinsic value IPs & LCs bring to the stewardship of the Earth's ecosystems and the commitment to ensuring their continued involvement in shaping the future of conservation practices.

Discussions on how to maximize FPIC in the context of community-led conservation are vital to ensure that it is effectively implemented and respected. These discussions create a space for continuous improvement and adaptation of conservation strategies in regard to indigenous traditional knowledge, where the communities have a voice in matters concerning their lands. The closing of the program with an acknowledgment of the ancestral wisdom of Indigenous elders and an address from Hon. Royal Johan Kxao IUiloloo, Deputy Minister of Marginalized Communities of Namibia, signifies a moment of respect, recognition, and closure. It is a meaningful conclusion that emphasized on the importance of cultural heritage, elders' wisdom, and the ongoing dialogue between communities and government representatives. In his remarks Hon. Hon. Royal Johan Kxao IUiloloo stated that:

Indigenous Peoples and local communities close to conservation areas are among the poorest people. I say that it depends on our respective countries to change this reality. We, as the government, are listening to you, and we need your support and expertise in this path. I think that well-documented socioeconomic challenges faced by communities and the role that national governments can play in addressing and ameliorating these challenges is needed.

Moving forward, the AICA steering committee plans to create an the Alliance's roadmap compiling the recommendations and visions of participants from each region. This roadmap will also guide the next Congress, which will be held in Central Africa in 2026. The Congress sought to give African peoples, their languages, cultures, and philosophies the respect it deserves.



Juliette Naipanoi Lekiale, of the Samburu community of Kenya

Image: During the Community Conservation Congress Juliette Naipanoi took the floor and articulated the cost communities pay for sharing space with wildlife. She said - I want to talk! Who can translate for me? She spoke in Maa. Have you ever seen how an elephant kills a person? We went to fetch firewood with some women and out of nowhere an elephant appeared. We all ran in different directions, but the elephant caught up with one of us. The elephant flung her into the air and dropped her down. Then the elephant uprooted a tree and placed it on the woman's body. Finally, the elephant sat on her. Let us stop talking about human-wildlife conflict! Some of us live with this reality and we pay a heavy price for sharing space with wildlife. Enough talking! We need action - and urgently!



Image: African song, dance, and music have largely been reduced to tools for entertainment. They have been stripped of their intellectual and philosophical power. The Community Conservation Congress sought to showcase these art forms from a more sophisticated perspective by highlighting the value they carry in transmission of indigenous knowledge systems, documenting people-nature relationships, histories, struggles over land and natural resource, social interactions, and livelihood systems. There was extensive use of African music instruments majority of which are derived from nature. This was another way of the congress emphasizing that - we are nature and nature is us.

“ We are Nature and Nature is us.”

**- ALLIANCE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES & LOCAL COMMUNITIES
FOR CONSERVATION IN AFRICA (AICA)**



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