

COMMUNITY CONSERVED AREAS A Bold Frontier for Conservation

Indigenous, mobile, and local communities¹ have for millennia played a critical role in conserving a variety of natural environments and species. They have done this for a variety of purposes, economic as well as cultural, spiritual and aesthetic. There are today many thousand Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) across the world, including sacred forests, wetlands, and landscapes, village lakes, catchment forests, river and coastal stretches and marine areas. The history of conservation and sustainable use in many of these areas is much older than government-managed protected areas, yet they are often neglected or not recognised in official conservation systems. Many of them face enormous threats.

Fortunately, there is also a growing recognition of CCAs and acknowledgement of their role in the conservation of biodiversity. Some governments have integrated them into their official Protected Area Systems, and the Vth World Parks Congress and the Programme of Work on Protected Areas of the CBD accepted them as legitimate conservation sites that deserve support and, as appropriate, inclusion in national and international systems.

What are Community Conserved Areas (CCAs)?

CCAs are natural and/or modified ecosystems containing significant biodiversity values, ecological services and cultural values, voluntarily conserved by indigenous, mobile and local communities through customary laws or other effective means. CCAs can include ecosystems with minimum to substantial human influence as well as cases of continuation, revival or modification of traditional practices or new initiatives taken up by communities in the face of new threats or opportunities. Several of them are inviolate zones ranging from very small to large stretches of land and waterscapes. Three features are important:

- One or more communities closely relate to the ecosystems and species culturally and/or because of survival and dependence for livelihood;
- The community management decisions and efforts lead to the conservation of habitats, species, ecological services and associated cultural values, although the conscious objective of management may be different (e.g., livelihood, water security, safeguarding of cultural and spiritual places).



- The community(es) are the major players in decision-making and implementation regarding the management of the site, implying that community institutions have the capacity to enforce regulations; in many situa-

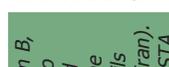
tions there may be other stakeholders in collaboration or partnership, but primary decision-making is with the community(es).

The Significance of CCAs

CCAs are an important complement to official PA systems.

- They help conserve critical ecosystems and threatened species, maintain essential ecosystem functions including water security, and provide corridors and linkages for animal and gene movement, including between two or more officially protected areas.
- They are critical to the cultural and economic survival of millions of people.
- They help synergise the links between agricultural biodiversity and wildlife, providing larger land/waterscape level integration.
- They offer crucial lessons for participatory governance of official PAs, useful to resolve conflicts between PAs and local people.
- They offer lessons in systems of conservation that integrate customary and statutory laws.
- They are often built on sophisticated ecological knowledge systems, elements of which have wider positive use.
- They are part of indigenous and local community resistance to destructive 'development', e.g. rainforests threatened by mining, dams, and logging industries, ecologically sensitive high-altitude ecosystems threatened by tourism, over-exploitation of marine resources by industrial fishing, etc.

Globally, 400-800 million hectares forest are owned/ administered by communities. In 18 developing



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¹ For reasons of convenience the term 'community' is used in this paper to include indigenous peoples, mobile peoples and other local communities.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY CONSERVED AREAS

countries with the largest forest cover, over 22% of forests are owned by or reserved for communities. In some of these countries (e.g. Mexico and Papua New Guinea) the community forests cover 80% of the total (Molnar *et al.*, 2003). More land and resources are under community control in other ecosystems. By no means all areas under community control are effectively conserved, but a substantial portion is.

The Challenge

CCAs face critical challenges to their continued existence and growth:

- Many are disappearing, due to inappropriate development and educational models, religious intrusions, and externally driven change of local value systems.
- Traditional institutions managing them have been undermined by colonial or centralised political systems, whereby governments have taken over most of the relevant functions and powers.
- As CCAs often contain valuable renewable and non-renewable resources (timber, fauna, minerals, etc.), they are often encroached or threatened by commercial users, land/resource traffickers, or community members under the increas-



Alto Fragua-Indiwasi National Park (Colombia)

The Alto Fragua-Indiwasi National Park was created in February 2002, after negotiations amongst the Colombian government, the Association of Indigenous Ingano Councils and the Amazon Conservation Team, an environmental NGO. The Park is located on the piedmont of the Colombian Amazon, part of a region that has the highest biodiversity in the country and is one of the top hotspots of the world. The site protects various ecosystems of the tropical Andes including highly endangered humid sub-Andean forests, endemic species such as the spectacled bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*), and sacred sites of unique cultural value.

Under the terms of the decree that created the Park, the Ingano are the principal actors in the design and management of the park. The area, whose name means 'House of the Sun' in the Ingano language, is a sacred place for the indigenous peoples.

The creation of Indiwasi National Park is a part of the Ingano Life Plan (Plan de Vida), or long-term vision for the entirety of their territory and the region. In addition, the creation of the Park represents an historic precedent for the indigenous people of Colombia, as for the first time an indigenous



community is the principal actor in the design and management of a PA fully recognised by the state.

ing influence of market forces.

- They remain unrecognised in most countries, and the lack of political and legal support often hampers community efforts at maintaining them through traditional means.
- Communities' internal conflicts, inequities and weak institutions can make sustained management difficult.

These and other challenges can be effectively faced *jointly* by communities and formal conservation agencies, with help from NGOs and others. This is beginning to happen in countries where CCAs are formally recognised (see some of the examples presented in the boxes).

Outcomes of the Fifth World Parks Congress

The participants at the Fifth

World Parks Congress (WPC, Sept. 2003) recommended that national and international recognition of CCAs areas is an urgent necessity. In its Message to the CBD, this largest ever gathering of conservationists suggested to "recognize the diversity of protected area governance approaches, such as community conserved areas, indigenous conservation areas and private protected areas, and encourage Parties to support this diversity". The Durban Accord further "urged commitment to recognize, strengthen, protect and support community conserved areas". The WPC also developed specific Recommendations on CCAs and on governance of PAs as means to strengthen the management and expand the coverage of the world's protected areas, to address gaps in national protected area systems, to promote connectivity at landscape and seascape level, to enhance public support for protected areas, and to strengthen the relationship between

Coron island (The Philippines)

The Tagbanwa people in the Philippines inhabit a stunningly beautiful limestone island for which they have established strict use regulations. The forest resources are to be used for domestic purposes only. All the freshwater lakes but one are sacred and entry there is strictly restricted, except for religious and cultural purposes. The only lake accessible for tourism is Lake Kayangan, albeit with strict regulations concerning garbage disposal, resource use, etc.

Until recently, the Tagbanwas' territorial rights were not legally recognised, leading to encroachment by migrant fishers, tourism operators, politicians seeking land deals and government agencies. This caused a number of problems, in particular the impoverishment of the marine resources, essential for the local livelihood. In the mid-1980s, the islanders organized themselves into the Tagbanwas Foundation of Coron Island (TFCI) and applied for a Community Forest Stewardship Agreement (CFSA). In 1990, the stewardship agreement was granted over the 7748 hectares of Coron island and a neighboring island called Delian, but not over the marine areas. In 1998 the islanders man-

aged to get a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Claim (CADC) for 22,284 hectares of land and marine waters, and in 2001, with the help of a



high quality map and an Ancestral Land Management Plan (ALMP), obtained a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT), which grants collective right to land.

Despite successful community management, in 2001 the Tagnabwa CATD was put under review, as the national policies and systems were being restructured. A governmental proposal was also advanced to add Coron Island into the National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAS). The Tagbanwas resent these moves, as they fear that they would engender losing control of their natural resources. From being owners and protectors of their territories, they would become only *one* of the management actors.

The island of Eigg (United Kingdom)

Eigg is a small island 10 miles offshore south of the Isle of Skye, in the United Kingdom, with a unique environment that supports many rare and threatened species of wildlife, and a community of 60 people. For a long time the island was owned by absentee landlords, seduced by the image of the place but with no real interest in its future. The island changed hands for ever more inflated sums, often in secret, leaving residents to guess what the next unknown owner will do. Under the circumstances, the island became progressively run down, with estate

properties decaying, and both the community and wildlife under threat. In response, the island's inhabitants formed a partnership with the Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Highland Council, and developed a vision: an island community securing a viable future livelihood whilst sustaining its unique environmental and cultural heritage. The Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust, founded in 1991, runs today the island as a partnership body with the objective of maintaining and developing the island as an area of outstanding natural heritage quality, and great quality of life.

Indigenous Protected Areas (Australia)

In Australia, a very strong CCA model has come to be officially recognised in 1998 as Indigenous Protected Area (IPA; <http://www.ea.gov.au/indigenous/ipa/index.html>). This is built on the understanding that some Aboriginal landholders are



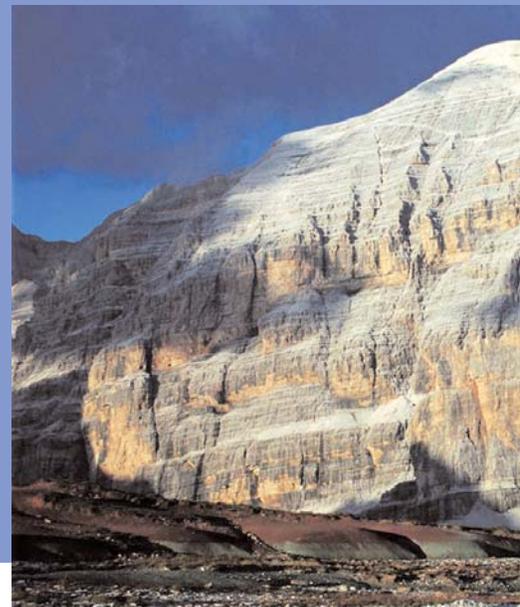
prepared to protect their land and part of the Australia National Reserve System in return for government funds and other types of technical assistance. The first IPA was formally proclaimed in 1998, over an Aboriginal-owned property called Nantawarrina in the northern Flinders Ranges of South Australia. Several more IPAs were proclaimed in other states during 1999. IPAs can be established as formal conservation agreements under state or territory legislation, or under Indigenous Law. Aboriginal landowners have a variety of legal mechanisms to control activities on their land, including local government by-laws and privacy laws. The process is entirely voluntary, and Aboriginal people can choose the level of government involvement, the level of visitor access (if any), and the extent of development to meet their needs. In return for government assistance, the Aboriginal owners of IPAs are required to develop a management plan and to make a commitment to manage their land (and/or waters and resources) with the goal of conserving its biodiversity values. IPAs provide public recognition of the natural and cultural

values of Aboriginal land, and of the capacity of Aboriginal peoples to protect and nurture those values. They are also attractive to government agencies because they effectively add to the nation's conservation estate without the need to acquire the land, and without the cost of establishing all the infrastructure, staffing, housing, etc. of a government-run PA.

The Regole of the Ampezzo Valley (Italy)

The Regole have a recorded history of approximately 1,000 years managing the common property resources initially made available by the extensive work of the early Regolieri (extensive pasture creation and maintenance out of the original woods). To date, the Regolieri comprise only the descendants of the early founders of the community and their sons who remain *residents* in the valley. Their general assembly takes management decisions after extensive discussion and by a "qualified majority", a procedure more akin to consensus than voting. The decisions and rules (which, incidentally, is the meaning of the word "regole") are carefully crafted to use the natural resources sustainably and in non-destructive ways. No dividends are shared among the Regolieri and all the income from the natural resources (e.g., from tourism, timber sale) is re-invested in their management. Through time, the early inhabitants of the Ampezzo Valley maintained their rights of occupation and modes of local production thanks to their skills as diplomats (they managed to ensure agreements with the Venetian Republic in 1420 and, later on, with the Austrian Emperors). In 1918, the end of the First World War saw the Ampezzo Valley incorporated within the Italian state. From then to the present, the Regole often had to strive to maintain their rare autonomous status under special exceptions in the national legislation

and regional laws, a feat that depended on a combination of personal skills of the Regolieri and importance and visibility of the landscape they managed to conserve. About 15 years ago, the Regole finally received major recognition as the sole and full legal managers of the *Parco Naturale delle Dolomiti d'Ampezzo*— a regional protected area established on the land and the resources the local community has conserved through the centuries. From the economic point of view, the Regole are today less directly reliant on the natural resources that they manage, although the unique tourism and real estate value of their valley depends on the magnificent landscape they have maintained. It is notable that they have



Mendha-Lekha forests (India)



In the 1970s, successful mobilisation by indigenous (*adivasi*) people against a dam, in the thickly forested central highlands of India, united the communities into a campaign towards tribal self-rule. Villages began to be declared as small republics within the Constitution of India. Mendha-Lekha was one of such villages, with about 400 *adivasis* called Gonds. The move led to their re-establishing *de facto* control over about 1800 ha. of forests that had been taken over by the government in the 1960s (for revenue through logging, charcoal making, and bamboo extraction). The crucial act was the establishment of the *Gram Sabha* (Village Assembly) including all adult residents, and other institutions including a Forest Protection Committee. Villagers declared that henceforth all major local initiatives required the permission of the Gram Sabha (GS). Decisions in the GS are taken unanimously and implemented through unwritten yet strong social rules. Informal *abhyas gats* (study circles), where villagers gather and discuss information with or without outsiders, help make informed decisions in the GS.

By adopting transparent and open decision-making processes and assuming social and ecological responsibility, Mendha-Lekha's residents have developed the capacity to deal with a range of natural resource issues. They are documenting the local biodiversity, and handling tedious financial dealings and official procedures. All logging and other commercial exploitation of forests by outside agencies have been stopped. Non timber forest produce

and bamboo are currently extracted in a strictly regulated manner (after a decade long moratorium),

jointly by the forest department and villagers. Most encroachment of forests by the villagers and forest fires have been stopped. Women, youth and economically weaker sections have equal status in the decision-making process.

Through non-violence, strong relationships have been established with government officials, who in

turn have helped the villagers at many crucial points. Livelihood security is assured through access to forest resources or employment opportunities.

obtained a tax-free status from the Italian government, and secured major project funds and subsidies from the European Union, the Italian state and the Veneto regional government.



The Potato Park (Peru)

In the highlands of Peru, six communities of the Quechua peoples have established a Potato Park (el Parque de la Papa) in a unique initiative to conserve domesticated and wild biodiversity. Over 8,500 hectares of titled communal land are being jointly managed to conserve about 1200 potato varieties (cultivated and wild) as well as the natural ecosystems of the Andes. Since this region is the one of origin of the potato, the effort is of global significance.

The Potato Park was initiated by an indigenous-run organisation, the Quechua-Aymara Association for Sustainable Livelihoods-ANDES. The villages entered into an agreement with the International Potato Institute to repatriate 206 additional varieties, and have a long-term goal to re-establish in the valley, all of the world's 4000 known potato varieties. Traditional techniques are being augmented by new ones, including greenhouses, education on potato varieties through video filming in the local language, production of medicines for local sale, and establishment of a database. Native species are being used to regenerate forests, and a form of "agro-ecotourism" is being developed. The initiative has brought together communities that had land conflicts, partly through the revival of the village boundary festival in which the boundaries are "walked".

The Park is a powerful example of an integrated protected landscape, suitable for IUCN's Category V designation. Despite this, it has not yet received a formal status in Peru's PA system.

people and the land, freshwater and the sea.

Outcomes of Convention on Biological Diversity 7th Conference of Parties (CBD COP 7)

Following recommendations from the World Parks Congress, the CBD has included in its Programme of Work (POW) on Protected Areas a specific section (element 2) on "Governance, Equity, Participation and Benefit Sharing", and embedded its key concepts also in all other elements. The PoW includes several specific activities (in particular nos. 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.2.2, and 2.2.7) that request the signatory countries to:

- Developing better practices and stronger patterns of accountability in PA governance.
- Recognising and promoting various PA governance types in national and regional systems to support people's participation and community conserved areas through specific policies and legal, financial and community means.
- Establishing policies and institutional mechanism to facilitate the above with full participation of indigenous and local communities.
- Seeking prior informed consent before any indigenous community is relocated for the establishment

of a protected area.

- Better appreciating and understanding local knowledge, the priorities, practices and values of indigenous and local communities.
- Identifying and removing barriers preventing adequate participation of local and indigenous communities in all stages of protected area planning, establishment, governance and management.

The PoW also calls for studies, constructive dialogue, exchange of information and experiences and joint research among local and non-local experts. It asks for a more equitable division of the costs and benefits of conservation for indigenous and local communities and to make use of conservation benefits to reduce poverty.

Specifically, among the targets to be reached and reported upon by the parties to the Convention in the next years are the following (emphasis added):

Target 1.4: All protected areas to have effective management in existence by 2012, using *participatory* and science-based site planning processes that incorporate clear biodiversity objectives, targets, management strategies and monitoring programmes, drawing upon existing methodologies and a long-term management plan *with active stakeholder involvement*.

Target 2.1: Establish by 2008 mechanisms for the *equitable sharing of both costs and benefits* arising from the establishment and management of protected areas.

Target 2.2: *Full and effective participation* by 2008, of indigenous and local communities, in full respect of their

rights and recognition of their responsibilities, consistent with national law and applicable international obligations, and the *participation of relevant stakeholders* in the management of existing, and the establishment and management of new, protected areas

The sacred mountain of Forole (Kenya-Ethiopia)

Forole is a sacred mountain just north of the border between Kenya and Ethiopia where the Galbo peoples (a sub-group of the Gabbra people) hold the *jila galana* ceremonies. Most of the Galbo live in Kenya, but they move in pilgrimage to the Forole on occasion of the ceremony. The trees of Forole

Mountain are totally protected by the Gabbra and access to the upper part is only allowed to a few officiants in occasion of the Sacrifice to the Sacred Python. The lower part of the mountain provides permanent water and it is used as reserve grazing area by both the

Gabbra and Borana pastoralists. Although there is sometimes tension over pastoral resources among the two groups, the Borana fully respect the sacredness of Forole mountain and the inherent restrictions, indirectly assuring its conservation. This is an example of a Community Conserved Area (CCA) not univocally associated to a single ethnic group and engaging local actors in complex economic and symbolic relationships. These relations may easily shift from constructive complementarity to conflict, but at the moment seem to be working quite effectively.



Target 4.1: By 2008, *standards, criteria, and best practices* for planning, selecting establishing, managing

and *governance* of national and regional systems of protected areas are developed and adopted.

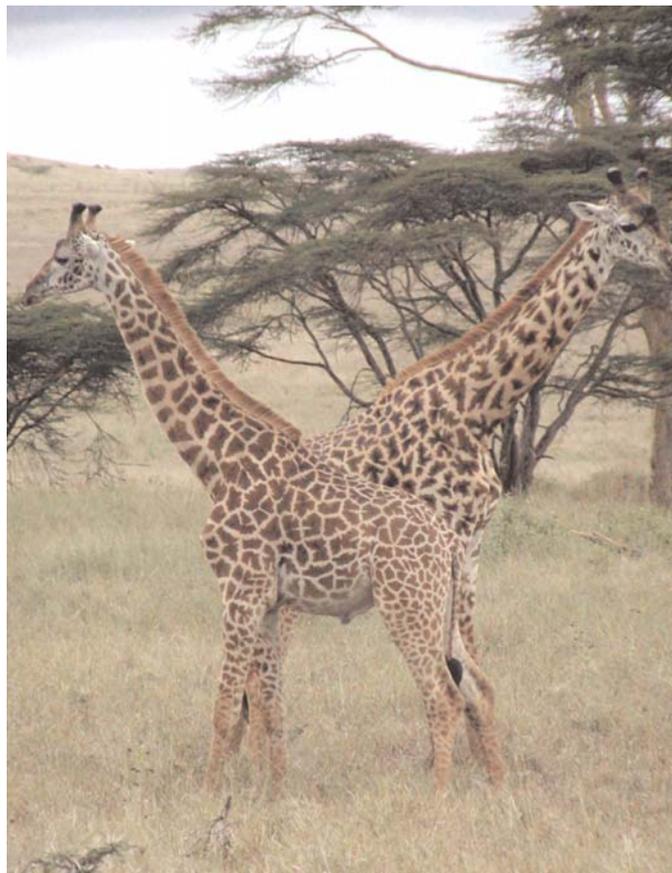
The need for Guidelines on Community Conserved Areas under the CBD

Guidance is needed on specific steps that conservation agencies and other relevant actors could take to recognise CCAs and, as appropriate, take advantage of their conservation benefits in national protected areas systems. IUCN, through its WCPA-CEESP Theme on Indigenous and Local Communities, Equity, and Protected Areas (TILCEPA), has prepared a volume of Guidelines (no. 11 in the IUCN/WCPA series, entitled *Indigenous and Local Communities and Protected Areas—Towards Equity and Enhanced Conservation*), which will contribute to that objective. The CBD Parties may wish to consider it an input for the implementation of the relevant element of the Programme of Work.

The section of the Guidelines explicitly dedicated to Community Conserved Areas includes descriptions, insights, examples and tools relevant to:

- Gaining a broad initial understanding of the Community Conserved Areas
- Supporting community-led studies and demarcation of the Community Conserved Areas
- Supporting communities' efforts to have Community Conserved Areas legally recognised and, if appropriate and communities so desire, incorporated into official protected area systems.
- Providing various forms of support to Community Conserved Areas in an empowering and capacity building mode
- Helping communities to tackle equity issues

Governments are encouraged to recognise CCAs as legitimate and important conservation tools, and to, as appropriate, assign them to national and to the IUCN international protected area categories, as illustrated by examples in Table 1.



A motion drafted with the inputs and support from several IUCN members, and supported by TILCEPA, is being submitted by IUCN Member CENESTA (Iran) and others to the Third World Conservation Congress in Bangkok, Thailand (November 2004). The motion urges IUCN to provide leadership and supportive roles in local, national and global recognition of CCAs. It also requests the World Commission of PAs (WCPA) to include cultural values in the criteria to define various PA categories; to include a substantive workplan on CCAs within its programme of action and to revise and update the Global Database on Protected Areas to include CCAs. For the full text of the motion see CGR3.RES037 on: www.iucn.org/congress/members/submitted-motions.htm

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Table 1: Community Conserved Areas and the IUCN Protected Area Categories

Category and Description	Community Conserved Area (CCA) type	Site examples
Strict Nature Reserve and Wilderness Areas : PA managed mainly for science or wilderness protection.	Sacred/forbidden or otherwise 'no-use' groves, lakes, springs, mountains, islands, etc. with prohibition on uses except in very particular occasions, such as a once-a-year ceremony, once-a-year collective hunting or fishing strictly regulated by the community. A special case here may be the territories of un-contacted peoples (e.g. in the Amazons). Noticeably, the main reasons for the communities to protect the area may be cultural or religious rather than wilderness or science per se.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coron Island, Palawan, Philippines (sacred beaches, marine areas, lakes) • Life Reserve of Awa People, Ecuador • Forole sacred mountain of Northern Kenya • Hundreds of sacred forests and wetlands, India • Mandailing Province, Sumatra, Indonesia (forbidden river stretches) • Intangible Zones of Cuyabeno-Imuya and Tagaeri-Taromenane, Ecuador
National Park : PA managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation.	Watershed forests above villages, community declared wildlife sanctuaries (at times also for eco-tourism use)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tinangol, Sabah, Malaysia (forest catchment) • Isidoro-Secure National Park, Bolivia • Safety forests, Mizoram, India • Alto Fragua Indiwasi National Park, Colombia
Natural Monument : PA managed mainly for conservation of specific natural features.	Natural monuments (caves, waterfalls, cliffs, rocks) that are protected by communities for religious, cultural, or other reasons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapu Lahual Network of Indigenous Protected Areas (Coastal Range Temperate Rainforests), Chile • Limestone Caves, Kanger Ghati National Park and elsewhere, India • Sites of ancestor graves, Madagascar
Habitat/Species Management Area : PA managed mainly for conservation through management intervention.	Heronries and other village tanks, turtle nesting sites, community managed wildlife corridors and riparian vegetation areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pulmar, Protected Indigenous Territory, Argentina (proposed) • Kokkare Bellur, India (heronry)
Protected Landscape/Seascape : PA managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation and recreation.	Traditional grounds of pastoral communities/ mobile peoples, including rangelands, water points and forest patches; sacred and cultural landscapes and seascapes, collectively managed river basins. (Such natural & cultural ecosystems have multiple land/water uses integrated into each other, and given a context by the overall sacred/ cultural/ productive nature of the ecosystem; they include areas with high agricultural biodiversity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration territory of the Kuhi nomadic tribe (Iran), including the Chartang-Kushkizar community protected wetland • Palian river basin, Trang Province, Thailand (rainforest, coast, mangroves) • Thateng District, Sekong Province, Laos (agriculture and forestry mosaic) • Potato Park, Peru • Island of Eigg (United Kingdom) • Coron island, the Philippines • Borana territory, Oromo Region, Ethiopia (pastoral territory, with protected savannah, forest, and volcanic areas of Category Ib and III)
Managed Resource Protected Area : PA managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems.	Resource reserves (forests, grasslands, waterways, coastal and marine stretches, including wildlife habitats) under restricted use and communal rules that assure sustainable harvesting through time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community forests in the Val di Fiemme, Italy. • Takietà forest, Niger • Pathoumphone District, Champassak Province, Laos (NTFP-based) • Pred Nai, Thailand (mangrove regeneration) • Amarakaeri Communal Reserve, Peru • Kinna, Kenya (bordering Meru National Park; use of medicinal plants) • Jardhargaon, Mendha-Lekha, Arvari, and 100s of others, India (fodder, fuel, water, NTFP, medicinal plants)