

ICCA Knowledge Sharing & Capacity-building Event in Mesoamerica

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*The governance model of existing ICCAs in Mesoamerica shows that—
despite lack of recognition and imposed overlaps from modern protected
areas— the indigenous peoples continue to maintain their own structures
and forms of governance of their territories, based on local institutions
and arrangements and visible in the regulations that govern the control,
use and access to their natural resources...
(Silvel Elias, 2016)*

***Academia de Lenguas Mayas, San José (Petén, Guatemala),
3-8 April, 2016***

Background

Mesoamérica is cradle of ancient cultures, home to millions of people and one of the world's biologically mega-diverse regions. Naturally, it includes a **myriad of territories and areas customarily governed, managed and conserved by its indigenous peoples and communities**, which span forests and mountains, marine and coastal areas, lakes and rivers, coral reefs, pasture and watersheds. The international terminology "ICCA" has been used to describe such territories only in the last decades, but the relevant practices are often many centuries-old and relate to an amazing variety of names and institutions.

Since the beginning of the new millennium, **ICCAs** have been "rediscovered" by different social actors who understood they can **help them to advance many worthy goals**:

- for custodian indigenous peoples and local communities, appropriate ICCA recognition and support help to **secure collective rights and responsibility to their territories—land, water and natural resources** and foster **respect for their traditional knowledge, practices and institutions**;
- for national and local governments, appropriate ICCA recognition and support help to consolidate **conservation of biodiversity** but also **local food production and sustainable livelihoods**, as well as **cultural identity and pride**— preventing excessive urban migration and strengthening **local peace and security**;
- for civil society organisations concerned with the conservation of nature, appropriate ICCA recognition and support deliver **solid and lasting patterns of conservation** that are depending much more on internal integrity and capacities than on external fluxes of expertise and funding.

In the last decades, communication among indigenous peoples and local communities within and between countries has also considerably expanded. As part of that, peoples and communities have been sharing and evolving visions of the desired future that are openly critical of those models of development that have irreversible impacts on nature, as well as of those models of conservation that have irreversible impact on people's livelihood and culture. In place of ruthless exploitation of natural resources and top-down conservation, many in the region call for strengthening local engagement in direct governance of natural resources, drawing from **customary knowledge, wisdom and institutions** and engaging in **fair negotiations** among partners. **Governance diversity, quality and vitality**— a strong echo to the results of the [2014 World Parks Congress of Sydney](#) and the [Promise of Sydney](#) in particular— are key words in a new and promising vision for the conservation of nature where ICCAs are fully recognised and supported in Mesoamerica as in the rest of the world.

Fully in line with this vision, the [German Ministry of the Environment \(BMUB\)](#) the [UNDP GEF SGP](#), the [ICCA Consortium](#), [IUCN](#) and [UNEP WCMC](#) currently actively collaborate to implement the [ICCA Global Support Initiative](#) (in short, **GSI**). The main goal of the initiative is to foster the appropriate **recognition** of, and **support** to, **ICCAs** and the promotion of their **effectiveness** via **enhanced capacities** in at least 26 pilot countries. In Mesoamerica the pilot countries are **Belize and Guatemala**. The Regional ICCA Knowledge Sharing & Capacity-building Event that will be held in the Academia de Lenguas Maya in San José (Petén, Guatemala) from **3 to 8 April 2016** (with first meeting among the participant on the evening of 3 April) will gather teams from the two pilot countries and from Mexico (because of geographic-ecologic and cultural affinity) as well as a few selected participants from other countries in Mesoamerica. This event will be the **founding moment of GSI in Mesoamerica**.

Objectives

The regional event in Guatemala is designed to share **knowledge** and enhance **capacities among key regional actors** about how to promote and strengthen appropriate recognition of ICCAs and appropriate support to them to enhance their effectiveness in the region— within but also outside the framework of the GSI initiative.

Expected results

- **Shared understanding of the main types and characteristics of ICCAs** in Mesoamerica (beginning from the participating countries), taking into consideration the **conditions** (threats and opportunities) they face and a range of **appropriate responses** to such conditions at different levels.
- **Shared understanding of ICCAs** as a form of **governance for protected areas as well as conserved areas** (cfr. “other effective area-based conservation measures”—OECM of the Convention on Biological Diversity, CBD) relevant to fulfill CBD national engagements (e.g., Aichi Targets 11, 14 and 18).
- **Shared understanding of the GSI initiative** and, as part of that, of the **support** that UNDP GEF SGP, the ICCA Consortium, IUCN and UNEP WCMC are expected to provide for ICCAs to fulfill their role— including support to **national strategic support, technical advice, and procedures for proper national validation of ICCAs and submission to the ICCA Registry at UNEP WCMC**.
- **Strengthened capacities, motivation and mutual advice** in promoting the recognition and support to ICCAs that can:
 - promote community self-awareness of the multiple values of their ICCAs;
 - promote community analysis, monitoring and evaluation of their ICCA work, with an emphasis on governance quality and vitality;
 - enhance ICCA communication via exchange visits, radio programs, social media, photostories and videos run by the ICCA communities themselves;
 - foster in-depth analyses, planning and advocacy to meet specific legal, political and other types of needs;
 - strengthen national ICCA networks (e.g., working groups, coalitions or federations, as appropriate) that could effectively take action in support of advocacy needs.
- **Motivation, ideas, mutual advice and specific plans** to further appropriate ICCA recognition and support **at national level** and—as appropriate – to support regional ICCA learning and action **in Mesoamerica** in general.

Participants

Participants will include “**country teams**” from **Belize, Guatemala and Mexico** and a few participants from other Mesoamerican countries. Each team is expected to include representatives of **indigenous peoples and local communities who govern and manage their ICCAs** (ideally representatives of networks or federations engaged to get ICCAs properly recognized and supported), representatives of **government agencies** that have influence on national policies relevant for ICCAs, representatives of **supporting civil society organizations** with experience supporting ICCAs and national GEF SGP coordinators. The total will be about 8-10 people per team, and more for Guatemala for ease of participation of local organizations.

In Guatemala, the organization **Oxlajuj Ajpop** and its partners will organize the field visit to a local ICCA in the region of Petén. Authorities and observers will be invited to attend the general presentation of work results in the morning of day five (see program). **UNOPS** will manage the budget in collaboration with **GEF SGP offices in Guatemala and Belize**. And the **ICCA Consortium** will facilitate the meeting and provide technical support as well as part of the financial support. The total expected number of participants is about 40 people.

Field visit

A visit has been planned to the territory of the Agricultural Cooperative Manos Unidas (founded in the early 60s in the municipality of Sayaxche, Petén, in the basin of the Passion river in the buffer zone of the Biosphere Reserve Maya). Until about two decades ago, Manos Unidas managed to carefully protect its natural forests in a well organized and autonomous way, based on common rules and agreements and following the principles and values of local indigenous culture. Currently, only a small group of members of the cooperative continues to protect the forest but it experiences many difficulties, mainly due to internal conflicts and external threats brought about by socio-economic changes. These changes include new roads, new agricultural practices based on “package technologies”, the internal armed conflict, the presence of NGOs that ushered in paternalism and corruption, the establishment of oil palm monocultures (African palm), etc. These facts led to the gradual erosion of the local values and principles of indigenous culture mainly among the youth; the loss of a percentage of the forested area, now dedicated to livestock; and a growing individualism and loss of love for the land. Despite these difficulties, many species of birds and mammals that are endangered in the department of Petén are still found in the territory of Manos Unidas. It is to be noted that the nearby Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR), which was established without prior consultation with the communities, today appears to allow oil exploration, tourism megaprojects in favor of transnational companies, African palm monoculture plantations and extensive ranching.

Most of the population of Manos Unidas still retains and practices the traditions, customs and ancestral knowledge that are part of its own cultural identity as Quiche and Mam peoples. These ancestral solidarity practices have helped to preserve the strong ties of friendship and cooperation that exist among local individuals and families and to maintain their relationship with the forest and the territory. The Quiche and Mam languages still continue to be practiced (mainly by adults); people still create and use their traditional costumes (garments and blouses); ancestral knowledge and technologies are still used in agriculture and natural medicine; planting and harvesting is still based on the lunar phase for agriculture and for timber forest products; food according to the indigenous culture is still prepared, exchanged and consumed in the occasion of community activities; women and men still get together for communal work; there still are ancestral forms of organization and decision making by local institutions (assistant mayor, community council, community assemblies) as well as traditional patterns of conflict resolution, marriage ceremonies, communal tasks, raising of local breeds, preparation of typical fabrics and, in general, communal life.

During the visit we will learn about the relationship between the community and the territory and the strong threats surrounding it, as well as about the forms of resistance to stop such threats, and some opportunities that can be brought into play for the ICCA to flourish. The Manos Unidas Cooperative has asked for the participants in our event to visit them to have an occasion to strengthen itself in its efforts to collectively protect its territory and the natural resources it still includes.

Agenda Regional ICCA knowledge sharing & capacity-building event – San José (Petén, Guatemala) 3-8 April 2016

Heures	Sunday 3 April-- DAY 0: Arrival	Monday 4 April--DAY 1 ICCA situation in Mesoamerica	Tuesday 5 April--DAY 2 Concepts & analysis	Wed 6 April-- DAY 3 Field visit	Thursday 7 April-- DAY 4 Plans & mutual support	Friday 8 April---- DAY 5 Future of ICCA learning
08.30-10.00	<p>Arrivals in San José (Petén, Guatemala)</p> <p>All national teams finalise their presentations</p>	Presentation/ discussion of the ICCA situation (policy, practice, conditions, prospects...) in Mexico	History, culture and conservation —developing a collective understanding of the ICCA concept and practice —interactive presentation	<p>Field visit by country teams/ small groups with specific learning objectives</p> <p>Each group focuses on different ICCA topics and/or actors, making use of a variety of participatory methods and tools</p>	Learning from the field visit —group reports, discussion and advice to the visited ICCA community and other relevant local & national actors	Arrival of partners and sponsors – Welcome and introductions. ICCA country action plans
Coffee						
10.30-12.30		Presentation and discussion of the ICCA situation in Guatemala	Threats to ICCAs & opportunities for ICCA in Mesoamerica —interactive presentation Presentation and discussion: ICCA as governance type for conserved areas recognized by UICN & CBD and listed by UNEP WCMC		Presentations and discussion: Recognition and support to ICCAs by the ICCA Consortium and by UNDP GEF SGP in the context of the GSI initiative— Presentations and discussions	Panel of partners and sponsors offer perspective and responses to the plans Possible outline of initiatives to further ICCA learning and action in Mesoamerica
			Group work for country teams – ICCA “speaking maps” and country strategies		Group work for country teams – Action plan to promote appropriate recognition and support to ICCAs at national level	Brief evaluation of the event Distribution of certificates and closing
Lunch						
14.00-15.30		Presentation and discussion of the ICCA situation in Belize	Group work for country teams – ICCA “speaking maps” and country strategies		Group work for country teams on ICCA action plans at national level (continues)	Departures
Coffee						
16.00-18.30		Presentation and discussion of the ICCA situation in El Salvador, Panama and eventually other contexts (as appropriate)	Group work reports and discussion. Introduction to the ICCAs to be visited & methods/ tools relevant for the visit. Country teams/small groups plan what they wish to learn about & how		All teams report on their plans, provide advice on the plans of other country teams Participants discuss and, as appropriate, agree upon an initiative for future ICCA learning & action in Mesoamerica	
Dinner						
Evening	Introductions & agenda	Free time Video showing	“Clinic” on ICCA Registry and WDPA	Group work	Cultural evening	

References

- [A primer on governance for protected and conserved areas](#), 2014
- [ICCAs and Aichi Targets](#), ICCA Consortium Briefing Note no. 1, 2014
- [Governance of Protected Areas: From understanding to action](#), IUCN Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 20, 2013
- [A toolkit to support conservation by indigenous peoples and local communities](#), 2013.
- [The ICCA Consortium Leaflet in English](#), 2013
- [Recognising and supporting territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities: Global overview and national case studies](#), CBD Technical Series no. 64, 2012
- [Bio-cultural diversity conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities – Examples and analysis](#), 2010
- [Synthesis of “Recognition and support to Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas \(ICCAs\) in northern Mesoamerica”](#)
- [Community Conserved Areas in Northern Mesoamerica-- A review of status & needs](#)

Web sites and videos

- www.iccaconsortium.org
- www.iccaregistry.org
- [Governance for the Conservation of Nature](#)

Sponsors

The Guatemala event is being sponsored by the ICCA Global Support Initiative (GSI) financed by the German Ministry of the Environment and implemented by UNDP GEF SGP and the ICCA Consortium.

Funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as a flagship programme, the [GEF Small Grants Programme](#) (SGP) is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on behalf of the GEF, and is executed by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). Launched in 1992, the SGP supports activities of non-governmental and community-based organizations in developing countries towards, among others, biodiversity conservation while generating sustainable livelihoods.

The [ICCA Consortium](#) is an international association dedicated to promoting the appropriate recognition of, and support to, the territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities (ICCAs). Its members (currently 94 organizations) are indigenous peoples' organizations and federations, community organizations and civil society organizations working closely with them. Its 207 honorary members are individuals with relevant expertise and commitment. Its staff of 24 work on a volunteer or semi-volunteer basis out of 22 countries. Together, members and honorary members span more than 75 countries. Members and staff join forces to support local ICCA-based initiatives, international and national policies and capacity building, and to carry out research and develop publications.

The Guatemalan organization [Oxlajuj Ajpop](#) (National Conference of Ministers of Spirituality Maya) brings together seven organizations of Ajq'ijab's (Maya ministers) from different linguistic areas of Guatemala, and hundreds of elders from different communities. In addition to its spiritual work, it has a cultural approach, which is considered essential to address positively the current historical changes related to economic globalization and climate change, and a focus on defending the collective rights, territories, worldviews and sacred sites of indigenous peoples.

The **Interdisciplinary Center for Research and Alternative Development, U Yich Lu'um, AC** (Campeche, Yucatan, Mexico) is an interdisciplinary group composed of young men and women from indigenous and local communities who, after completing their academic training, returned to their home community to work for the Maya people concerned that the Maya practices, knowledge, language, traditions, customs, ways of life and worldview were being lost and devalued. This main objective is pursued through four major axes, which are: Agroecology, Education, Management and Conservation of Natural Resources and Gender and Human Rights. Given that ecological restoration needs biocultural restoration, U Yich Lu'um coincides with the objectives and goals of the ICCA Consortium and decided to co-sponsor the Regional ICCA Knowledge Sharing and Capacity-building event in Mesoamerica.

The [Maya Leaders Alliance](#) (MLA) was organized to represent and advance the rights of the Maya villages in the Toledo District of Belize. It is an umbrella organization comprising other Maya sectoral organizations and representatives, among which the Toledo Alcaldes Association, which includes the leaders traditionally elected in all Maya villages of southern Belize. The mission of the organization is to safeguard, promote, and enhance the rights of the indigenous Maya of southern Belize, to protect and use sustainably their natural resources, and to advocate for the well-being of the Mayan communities through social, economic and cultural development.

The [National Garifuna Council](#) of Belize is a non-governmental organization representing its indigenous Garifuna people. The mission of the organization is to preserve, strengthen and develop the culture, as well as to promote the economic development, of the Garifuna people. On May 18th 2001, the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, proclaimed the "Garifuna language, music and dance" a masterpiece of the oral and intangible Heritage of Humanity.

