

ICCAs, the ICCA Consortium and an outline of the Consortium's current Strategy

January 28, 2016

ICCAs

A close association is often found between a specific indigenous people or local community and a specific territory, area or body of natural resources. When such an association is combined with effective local governance and conservation of nature, we speak of "ICCAs". For people and communities, that relationship is much richer than can be expressed in words. It is a bond of livelihood, energy and health. It is a source of identity and culture, autonomy and freedom. It is the connecting tie between generations, preserving memories from the past, and connecting those to a desired future. It is the ground on which communities learn, identify values and develop self-rules. For many it is also a connection between visible and invisible realities, material and spiritual wealth. With territory and nature goes life, dignity, and self-determination as peoples.

Three features appear common to ICCAs and are used by the ICCA Consortium to "identify" them:

- ***An indigenous people or local community possesses a close and profound relationship with a site (territory, area, habitat of a species)*** – a relationship embedded in local culture, sense of identity and/or dependence for livelihood and well being.
- ***The people or the community has been de facto and/or de jure governing the site.*** In other words, it has had through time the capacity to develop and enforce management decisions (regardless of the important roles possibly played by other actors).
- The people's or community's ***management decisions and efforts have been positive for the conservation*** of habitats, species, genetic diversity, ecological functions and associated cultural values (regardless of the conscious objective of management¹).

The term ICCA is considered by the Consortium as an abbreviation for "territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities", it is used for the purpose of communication and it is not meant as a label. The Consortium encourages indigenous peoples and local communities to maintain, use and highlight ***their own local names*** for all the phenomena that possess the three characteristics of ICCAs, noted above. The use of the term "ICCA" should be limited to communication purposes among diverse peoples, communities, languages and cultures.

Problem statement

"Conservation of nature" emerged in full force during the 20th Century as a moral and social concern, a discipline, a business and a duty of the state. Most often, however, it remained focused on species and habitat conservation via state established protected areas-- remarkably unaware of ICCAs and their multiple and enormous values for local and global conservation outcomes. Its emphasis has been on conservation as understood by academia and scientists, carried out by state government agencies and supported by bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Indigenous peoples and local communities have been seen, by and large, as a *problem* for conservation or, in the best of cases, as potential *participants*, to provide labour in exchange for *benefits to be* decided and delivered by the conservation main actors.

¹ In other words, conservation may be an explicit but also an implicit objective of management.

Issues of recognition and respect of local knowledge and capacities, prior rights and responsibilities (e.g., at the time of establishing protected areas) were identified nearly exclusively in countries of the global North and with respect to individuals, while the collective capacities, rights and responsibilities of communities and indigenous peoples—and especially so in the global South—were generally neglected. An immense body of local traditional knowledge and customary laws with great value for the conservation of nature was thus all but ignored. At the same time, industrial agriculture, forestry, fisheries, animal husbandry and large scale infrastructure were progressively expanding throughout the world. Dominant cultures and languages were coming to the fore through state education, extension programmes and the media. New “needs” were emerging that required monetary economies to be satisfied. In the space of just a few decades, the wealth of wild and agro-biodiversity associated with diversity in subsistence livelihoods, languages and cultures throughout the world was eroding in full view of everyone...

The ***cavalier ignorance of local knowledge and capacities and denial of collective rights and responsibilities*** that accompanied conservation policies and practices in the 20th Century has had ***enormous detrimental effects for the affected people, nature and cultures***. These effects—stemming from the widespread ***arrogance of power of the allied political, economic and academic elites*** in colonial and neo-colonial times—are still limitedly and poorly recognised. If awareness of the values of ICCAs and community conservation in general is improving, many processes at the roots of these effects are continuing unabated. Land and water grabbing, unsustainable use of natural resources, pollution, loss of languages and pervasive acculturation continue to fuel pernicious effects on both ICCAs and the environment in general. Even some of the advanced “solutions” (e.g., REDD² and PES³ initiatives) may just be harmful and false, distracting peoples and communities from their real interests and rights.

The ICCA Consortium

The ICCA Consortium is **a movement organisation** that promotes social change, in particular reforms in policy and practice towards enhanced equity in conservation.

Its ultimate goal (mission) is **to promote the appropriate recognition of, and support to, indigenous peoples’ and community conserved areas and territories (ICCAs) at local, national and international levels**.

This goal is set in the context of the broader vision of conserving biodiversity and ecological functions, nurturing the sustainable livelihoods and wellbeing of indigenous peoples and local communities, and implementing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples — including self-determination and the full respect of their cultural diversity and collective and individual rights and responsibilities.

The long-term vision of the Consortium is a world where ***ICCAs thrive and contribute to self-determination of indigenous peoples and local communities, conservation of biological and cultural diversity and wellness of all beings*** (a five page vision in three languages was developed and agreed in 2010, see here: [English](#), [Spanish](#) and [French](#)).

Why recognition of and support to ICCAs matter?

- For caretaker indigenous peoples and local communities, appropriate ICCA recognition and support help to secure **collective rights and responsibilities to their territories — land, water and natural resources** and foster **respect for their traditional knowledge, cultures, institutions and world views**.
- For national and local governments, appropriate ICCA recognition and support help to consolidate **local food production and sustainable livelihoods**, as well as **cultural identity and pride**, preventing

² Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Land Degradation

³ Payments for Ecosystem Services

excessive urban migration and strengthening **local peace and security** besides, of course, securing substantial contributions to their own **conservation and environmental goals**.

- For civil society organisations concerned with the conservation of nature, appropriate ICCA recognition and support deliver **effective and lasting patterns of conservation** that depend much more on internal integrity and capacities than on external fluxes of expertise and funding.

Why recognition of and support to ICCAs should be *appropriate*?

Recognition of ICCAs by national governments and support to ICCAs, such as support by non-governmental agencies, governmental agencies and the private sector, should be *appropriate* because inappropriate recognition and support can actually deepen, rather than solve, problems for people, nature and cultures. Lessons learned in processes of recognition and support to ICCAs have been distilled and are available. See, for instance, [this study](#), available in three languages, and [this study](#), available in English. Reviews of legal recognition options are also available [here](#).

Brief history of the emergence and work of the ICCA Consortium

The Consortium emerged from the close collaboration of like-minded individuals and organisations who started working together in the early 1990s and progressively strengthened their cooperation and engagement. One of the IUCN Commissions⁴ and its thematic groups called TGER⁵ and TSL⁶ were at the forefront in the 1990s. In 2000, an inter-commission working group called TILCEPA⁷ was created between CEESP⁸ and WCPA⁹ and became the main motor of work on ICCAs by promoting their systematic analysis, with an initial focus at the regional level and in selected countries such as India and Iran. TILCEPA, TGER and the World Alliance of Mobile Indigenous Peoples (WAMIP) spearheaded the visibility, discussion and recognition of the phenomenon in all crucial international gatherings and conventions dealing with conservation of nature at the beginning of the millennium.

In 2008, many of the individuals and organisations that had led the work decided to create the “ICCA Consortium” as an informal, voluntary network pursuing a jointly agreed work plan. No financial support was available but the people and organisations that brought it forward worked for it as volunteers, at times succeeding in fundraising to organise specific events, carry out field work and develop publications. This was possible because many of the Consortium-affiliated individuals and organisations were well known and respected in the conservation community. Relatively rapidly, however, the need became recognised for the Consortium to become a formal entity.

In 2010, the ICCA Consortium Association was established as an [international non-profit association under Swiss Law](#). The association could fundraise for specific initiatives and engage even more forcefully to promote ICCA-supportive international policies, highlight exemplary cases at local level and engage with country-specific analyses, mutual support and advocacy. A number of support partnerships were developed, notably with The Christensen Fund, UNDP GEF SGP,¹⁰ the IUCN, GIZ¹¹ and the Swift Foundation.

Starting well before its official recognition as ICCA Consortium, the ICCA movement has maintained a focus on producing [technical guidelines and publications](#) in association with the Convention on Biological

⁴ The Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP)

⁵ Theme on governance, equity and rights

⁶ Theme on sustainable livelihoods

⁷ Theme on indigenous (peoples) and local communities, equity and protected areas

⁸ The IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy

⁹ The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas

¹⁰ The Small Grants Programme of the Global Environment Facility of the UN Development Programme

¹¹ German Technical Cooperation Agency

Diversity (CBD) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). As part of that and beyond, individual ICCA cases were highlighted and eventually managed to obtain recognition via a number of international awards. With the on-going accompaniment and support of the Consortium, countries such as the Philippines, Madagascar, Iran, Senegal, Taiwan (province of China), Chile, Spain and Indonesia emerged as pioneers for ICCA work at national level. Important seeds were also planted in China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala, Kenya, Nepal, Ecuador, Argentina, Morocco, Colombia, Malaysia, Bolivia, Brazil and Vietnam. Meanwhile, mostly independently from the Consortium, other movements of indigenous peoples and local communities as well as enlightened aid agencies and NGOs were promoting processes of recognition and support to community conservation in countries as diverse as Namibia, Costa Rica, Panama, Australia, Brazil, Tanzania and Canada.

Since 2010 the [membership](#) of the Consortium, spanning more than 75 countries, has grown to include:

- 94 Member organisations (CBOs¹², IPOs¹³, coalitions and federations of CBOs and IPOs, NGOs¹⁴) that work at local, national and regional level
- more than 200 individual Honorary Members (individual experts and activists)

Interestingly, despite no specific membership campaign, the membership of the Consortium has grown steadily at a pace of about 20% per year.

In 2013, the Consortium succeeded in joining forces with UNDP GEF SGP¹⁵, the IUCN¹⁶ and UNEP WCMC¹⁷ to establish an ICCA Global Support Initiative financed by the German government to the level of 12 million Euro (then more than 16 million US dollars). The near totality of the funds will be disbursed in small grants to ICCA caretaker communities. The Consortium was active for the initiative on an entirely voluntary basis from January 2014 to June 2015, when financial resources arrived to support its technical assistance.

Since 2015, the Consortium has been recognised in Switzerland as an organisation that pursues aims of pure public utility, and is thus tax-exempt. Procedures for the recognition of the Consortium as part of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) have been accomplished and acceptance is expected early in 2016.

The following sub-periods can be identified in the emergence and life of the ICCA Consortium so far:¹⁸

1995-2005

- **local:** identification of “exemplary cases” of ICCAs and first country inventories (e.g. India).
- **national:** identification of specific issues and barriers to ICCA recognition and support.
- **regional:** reviews of the extent of the ICCA phenomenon and identification of regional peculiarities (e.g., South-East Asia, West China, Maghreb, West Asia, South America).
- **global:** distilling the general “ICCA” phenomenon from a variety of single cases and focusing on recognition in international conservation policy (initial enormous problems of acceptance and credibility in the conservation community, very slowly opening only after WPC Durban 2003); focus on ICCAs as a type of governance for protected areas, linkages between ICCAs and sustainable livelihoods and cultural diversity; critical analysis of the connection between poverty and environmental degradation.

2006-2010

- **local:** grassroots discussions, people drawing their own lessons and identifying how they need and want to be recognized and supported (*DOs and DONTs*).

¹² Community-based organisations

¹³ Indigenous peoples’ organisations

¹⁴ Non-governmental organisations

¹⁵ The Small Grants Programme of the Global Environment Facility of the United Nations Development Programme

¹⁶ The International Union for the Conservation of Nature

¹⁷ The World Conservation Monitoring Center of the United Nations Environment Programme

¹⁸ For the relevant references please see www.iccaconsortium.org

- **national:** early studies of legal contexts and country-specific recognition of and support to ICCAs; working groups, coalitions and federations promoted and supported to take action at national level for ICCAs and against identified problems and barriers.
- **regional:** enhanced awareness of specific regional and country perspectives on ICCAs: learning from country to country and region to region.
- **global:** upscaling international conservation policy recognition (process easier as time goes by -- outcome of Consortium's efforts); developing publications that provide in depth advice for appropriate recognition and support; recognising the need to *institutionalise* the Consortium.

2010-2015

- **local:** transitioning from "ICCA case examples" to IPs and LCs as Members of the Consortium directly engaged in developing their own "photostories" and "videostories".
- **national:** further studies of legal contexts and country-specific possibilities for recognition and support; renewed emphasis on IPs' and LCs' **working groups, coalitions and federations** to create a critical mass for policy advocacy and change (e.g., Philippines, Iran, Nepal, Madagascar, Indonesia, China, Taiwan (province of China), Chile, Spain, DRC, Senegal...).
- **regional:** development of plans for regional learning events and regional learning networks; regional studies of the roots of ICCAs in history and culture (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the Amazon basin, the Mayan area of Mesoamerica) and on regional policies and ICCAs (European Union); thematic areas of regional relevance (e.g. *extractivism* in Latin America) identified, analysed and tools developed for their self-monitoring; first **regional events for ICCA knowledge sharing and capacity building** (Indonesia, Madagascar, Ecuador, Namibia, Guatemala...).
- **global:** up-scaling international policy recognition towards widespread acknowledgement of voluntary conservation of the commons as key opportunity within and outside protected areas (ICCAs as *conserved areas / other effective area-based conservation measures*); in parallel, "governance for the conservation of nature" consolidates visibility and importance in international conservation policy; ICCAs advanced as a non market-based mechanism to mitigate and adapt to climate change; ICCAs as spaces of food sovereignty; more explicit link made between ICCAs and collective land rights and responsibilities; the Consortium becomes a Member of the International Land Coalition (ILC); the Consortium promotes and develops a Solidarity Alliance and Fund (SAFE) for the Defenders of the Commons and ICCAs.

Levels of work

The Consortium works at four different levels.

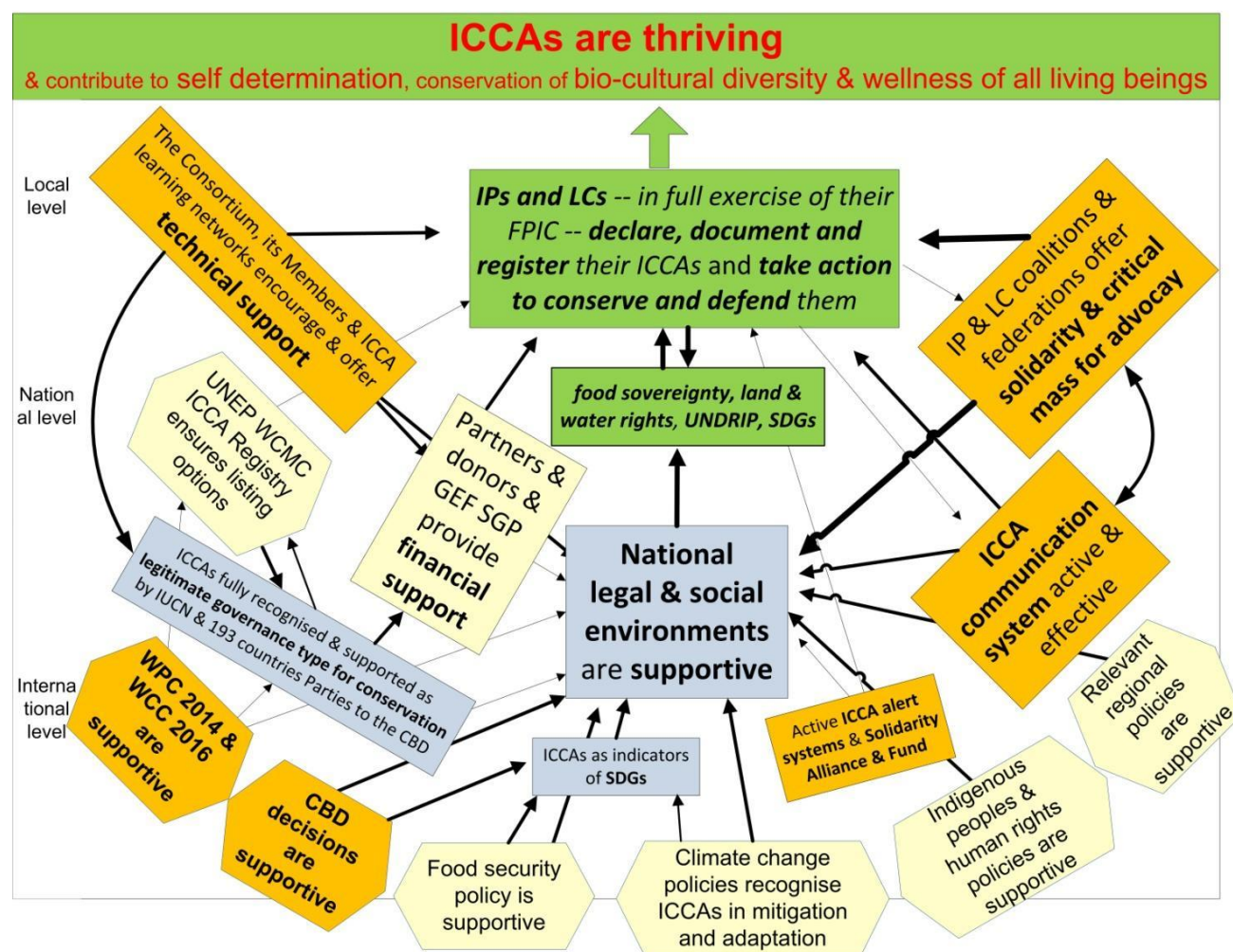
- At **local level**, the Consortium has promoted self-awareness of existing and potential ICCAs, and engaged communities in communicating their values and the threats weighing upon them. The Consortium has assisted communities in resisting threats, carrying out assessments and plans, and obtaining the means to implement their plans.
- At **national level**, the Members of the Consortium have taken the lead in processes of networking, mutual learning, organisation and mobilisation for collective advocacy to improve relevant policies and practices. The Consortium has encouraged and supported such processes in diverse ways, promoting awareness and capacities and assisting technically for specific issues and tasks.
- At **regional level**, the Consortium has highlighted regional peculiarities and predicaments in terms of ICCA recognition and support. It has promoted exchanges of knowledge and mutual learning among diverse "country teams" including representatives of organised indigenous peoples and local communities, relevant governmental agencies and supporting civil society organisations. Regional Learning Networks are promoted as crucial mechanisms.

- At **global level**, the Consortium has developed strong active partnerships with UNDP GEF SGP, the IUCN Global Protected Areas Programme, the CBD Secretariat and UNEP WCMC, with the main aim of getting the ICCA phenomenon recognised in international policy and databases. It has also actively participated in events that discuss the rights of indigenous peoples (e.g., UNFPPII, EMRIP), highlight common rights and responsibilities to land, water and natural resources (e.g., ILC and RRI gatherings) and examine the conditions for food sovereignty (e.g., FAO¹⁹ events).

The current Strategy

Within the overall framework of the Consortium's mission, and taking into account the fact that it emerged as an informal movement and became institutionalised only in recent years (thus, it largely took advantage of opportunities as they arose), **the Strategy of the Consortium from 1995 to 2015 can be summarised in the diagram below (Figure 1).**

Figure 1: A graphic description of the Strategy of the ICCA Consortium



Colour legend:

Green – most important

Golden yellow – areas of focused work by the Consortium

Lighter yellow – areas where the work of the Consortium has contributed so far to a lesser extent

Blue – Result areas that the Consortium has been striving to obtain (variable results so far)

¹⁹ The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the UN

From the diagram and the historical outline noted above, it should be clear that:

- The **key actors** for strengthening and conserving ICCAs are the **indigenous peoples and local communities** with relevant collective rights and responsibilities and governance capacities. The Consortium cannot and does not wish to substitute for them, nor to “speak for them”.
- The Consortium can and does help indigenous peoples and local communities to secure their desired **social, technical, legal, policy and financial support** at local, national and international level and **solidarity from diverse actors in society** so that they reach the **collective land and water rights, food sovereignty and respect to UNDRIP²⁰ and SDGs** that secure their ICCAs.
- In close collaboration with its Members, the Consortium encourages and assists in the establishment and strengthening of **dedicated ICCA working groups, coalitions and federations** at local, national, thematic and regional levels towards **critical mass for advocacy and change** in governance policy and practice.
- At international level the Consortium has been concerned with **policy advocacy, an alert system focusing on threats to ICCAs** and the development of alliances and initiatives of **solidarity with the defenders of the commons and ICCAs**. After focusing communication in the technical field, the Consortium is gearing up to embrace a larger audience and broaden its advocacy work.

Five main distinct objectives

Specifically, five main objectives can be identified as having provided direction to the work of the Consortium **from 1995 to 2015**:

1. Promoting **appropriate recognition of ICCAs in international conservation policy** via the development and diffusion of crucial publications and active participation and advocacy in policy events (some efforts also at land rights, IP, food security and climate change policies).
2. Promoting and strengthening appropriate **visibility** and **direct technical and financial support to ICCAs** that may be **exemplary and/or under particular threat**.
3. Promoting **knowledge sharing and mutual learning** on ICCAs in various countries and regions, e.g. by organising local, national, regional and international events, exchange visits and communication initiatives (e.g. radio programmes in local language).
4. Promoting the creation of **local, national, regional and thematic ICCA working groups, federations and coalitions** and strengthening them towards **enhanced awareness, analysis, strategic planning and legal and policy advocacy** for ICCAs.
5. Highlighting the variety and pervasiveness of **threats** to ICCAs and the plight of their **defenders** and promoting appropriate remedial and compensation initiatives.

Achievements

ICCAs are today known in the conservation community and embedded in [international policies](#) as one of the four main recognised governance types for protected areas as well as for “other effective area-based

²⁰ The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)

conservation measures” (conserved areas). They are taken into consideration in the context of CBD’s Programme of Work on Protected Areas, articles 8j and 10c, and in mitigating and adapting to climate change. The CBD Secretariat is a partner of the Consortium and has co-organised with us special sessions on ICCAs (more are planned for CBD COP13 in 2016). ICCAs possess a dedicated [International Registry](#) at UNEP WCMC and are included in WDPA. As countries work to reach the objectives of the CBD Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, the Consortium provides guidance to understand how ICCAs [can enhance governance](#) for both protected and conserved areas and [contribute to all Aichi Targets](#). Countries such as the Philippines, Madagascar, Iran, Taiwan (province of China), Colombia and Ecuador are currently discussing such guidance while developing new legislation, policies and practices to properly deal with ICCAs.

Several ICCAs have won international awards and many are described in publications available in multiple languages (including syntheses of [site-specific grassroots analyses](#), [region-specific analyses](#) of ICCAs, [reviews of legal options](#) to support ICCAs). Many case examples and analyses are available from a rich and regularly maintained web-site dedicated to ICCAs (www.iccaconsortium.org) and via other means of social communication such as [photo and video-stories](#), [social media groups](#), [blogs](#), etc. Local, national and global [events](#) have taken place focusing on ICCAs in various world regions, and notably in Australia, South East Asia and Latin America. And the [historical and cultural roots of ICCAs](#) are being explored.

As regularly described in the [Consortium Newsletter](#), national **ICCA-dedicated working groups, federations and coalitions** have been promoted and nourished in countries as diverse as the Philippines, Iran, Senegal, DRC, Chile, China, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Italy, Nepal, Spain, Taiwan (province of China) and Vietnam. They explore diverse options for ICCA recognition and support and are active to promote those options that appear most appropriate to them (e.g. in Chile, Democratic Republic of Congo, the Philippines, Iran, Madagascar).

An [ICCA alert system](#) is active and has contributed to some positive resolutions of conflicts, and a [Solidarity Alliance and Fund \(SAFE\) for the Defenders of the Commons and ICCAs](#) is currently under final discussions among the Consortium and other prestigious partners.

The Consortium has grown steadily as an institution, gaining respect and visibility in the international arena and among its Members and partners. Its financial situation is very sound but is – by choice – noticeably limited for the scope and range of initiatives. All the Consortium personnel is engaged on a semi-volunteer basis. On the other hand, the Consortium has managed to mobilise a substantial amount of funds to be disbursed directly to communities in support to ICCAs in many countries. This is perceived as the beginning of a worldwide recognition of ICCAs expected to broaden in the coming decades.

Summing up the achievements to which the ICCA Consortium has contributed in no small part:

- international policies have begun to openly recognise the multiple values of ICCAs;
- country governments all over the world face decisions about how to approach ICCAs in legislation, policy and practice;
- national constituencies are getting organised, more aware of the diverse options available for ICCA recognition and support, and more active in promoting the options that appear appropriate to them;
- a number of ICCAs in the field are safer and stronger.

The Consortium continues to assist in these processes at all levels.

Looking ahead

Despite important achievements, the Consortium is still far from its vision of a world where *ICCAs thrive and contribute to self-determination, conservation of biocultural diversity and wellness for all beings*. In addition, the rapid changes in the world today compel it to review and strengthen its Strategy and approach.

[Type text]

Internally, the Consortium has begun to broaden its perspective, for instance by establishing a Working Group on ICCAs and Law and Policy with seven Teams dedicated to different themes (e.g. ICCAs and climate change, ICCAs and food sovereignty, ICCAs and land and water rights, etc.). The Teams have formidable tasks in front of them, but are moving ahead, albeit at different speeds. Another innovative step is the development of the [Solidarity Alliance and Fund \(SAFE\) for the Defenders of the Commons and ICCAs](#) (name to be confirmed) —an initiative that engages the Consortium with new partner organisations such as Friends of the Earth International, the International Land Coalition and Global Witness. Last but not least, the Consortium is entirely revamping its communication strategy, developing a new website and descriptive videos. One of the objectives of the new communication strategy is to strengthen the trust and engagement of indigenous peoples and local communities. We also want to do justice to the diversity of knowledge systems, worldviews and epistemologies embedded in ICCAs, or providing the context to ICCAs. And we wish to embrace a larger audience in our advocacy work.

The summary of the current Strategy of the ICCA Consortium provided in this document offers the first of a series of steps expected to take place in 2016 and lead to a strengthened Strategy, as shown in the diagram below (Fig. 2). The new Strategy is expected to be finalised and approved at the General Assembly of the Consortium to take place in Cancun (Mexico) in December 2016, on the margins of CBD COP13.



Figure 2: **Steps towards strengthening the Strategy of the ICCA Consortium**