

# EMBEDDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN NATURE CONSERVATION: FROM INTENT TO ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT REPORT - 2023

# CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>7</b>
Progress on Actions: 2020-2023	8
Challenges and lessons learned	12
<b>SECTION 2: PROGRESS ON COMMITMENTS MADE IN RESPONSE TO GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>A. Operations &amp; Safeguards in Conservation Project Areas</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>B. Conservation Law Enforcement</b>	<b>24</b>
Case Study #1: Pakistan – <i>Understanding the barriers facing women rangers in Pakistan</i>	28
<b>C. Network Governance</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>D. Third-party assurance</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>SECTION 3: PROGRESS ON COUNTRY-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>A. Cameroon (Boumba Bek, Nki, Lobéké National Parks)</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>B. Central African Republic (Dzanga-Sangha Protected Areas)</b>	<b>48</b>
Case Study #2: Central African Republic – <i>Ba’Aka band gives the forest a voice</i>	52
<b>C. Democratic Republic of the Congo (Salonga National Park)</b>	<b>54</b>
Case Study #3: Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Central African Republic – <i>Promoting indigenous peoples’ rights in the Congo Basin</i>	58
<b>D. Republic of the Congo (Messok Dja)</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>E. India (Kaziranga National Park)</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>F. Nepal (Chitwan National Park)</b>	<b>68</b>
Case Study #4: Nepal – <i>Strengthening the inclusion of people with disabilities in community forestry</i>	72
<b>SECTION 4: CONCLUSION</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>SECTION 5: INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION: STORIES FROM THE FIELD</b>	<b>77</b>
Case Study #5: Madagascar – <i>Strengthening human rights capacity within the context of wildlife law enforcement in Madagascar</i>	80
Case Study #6: Bolivia – <i>A group of rural women succeed in securing the declaration of a protected area in the Bolivian Pantanal</i>	82
Case Study #7: Brazil – <i>Tackling conversion and human rights violations in the Cerrado</i>	84
Case Study #8: Colombia – <i>Conflict-sensitive conservation in Colombia</i>	86
Case Study #9: Ecuador – <i>A path toward gender equality in conservation in the Ecuadorian Amazon</i>	88
Case Study #10: Guyana – <i>Indigenous communities in Guyana collect data and information on their territories for protection purposes</i>	90
Case Study #11: Paraguay / Bolivia – <i>Women, Indigenous communities, and human rights organizations in the Chaco-Pantanal: vital voices in the fight against climate change</i>	92
Case Study #12: Peru – <i>"Love the River": The youth movement in the Peruvian Amazon that defends rivers through art, culture, and communications</i>	94
Case Study #13: Australia – <i>Embedding Indigenous engagement in Australia</i>	98
Case Study #14: Nepal – <i>Zero poaching in Nepal</i>	102
Case Study #15: Global – <i>Coastal communities initiative</i>	104
<b>ACRONYMS</b>	<b>106</b>

## Report Authors

Aarati Gurung, Alexandra Kintner, Allard Blom, Ashley Vosper, Biswash Praja, Bivishika Bhandari, Clarissa Van Heerden, Clotilde Ngomba, Donna Lusti, Elaine Geyer-Allély, Eric Parfait Essomba, Jaap Van Der Waarde, Jean Bernard Yarissem, Jean-Paul Paddack, Jo Gacheru, Franck Kamunga, Karianne Sturms, Margaret Ackerley, Matthew Perl, Moise Kono Bidzo, Paolo Revellino, Patrick Boundja, Richard Caines, Rob Parry-Jones, Rohit Singh, Sejal Worah, Stef De Bethune, Tiana Ramahaleo, Vishaish Uppal, Yaouba Kaigama.

## Case Studies Authors

**Central African Republic:** Stef De Bethune; **BENGO Project:** Franck Kamunga, Martin Kabaluapa Kapinga, Mirjam Steglich, Tiana Ramahaleo; **Nepal (Disabilities):** Aarati Gurung, Biswash Praja, Bivishika Bhandari, Matt Perl; **Colombia:** Masha Lekic, Sandra Valenzuela; **Pakistan:** Hamera Aisha, Jo Gacheru, Rohit Singh; **Australia:** Cliff Cobbo, Darren Grover, Kaz Hing, Vanessa Barnett; **Brazil:** Ana Carolina Crisostomo, Bianca Nakamoto, Daniela Jerez; **Nepal (CLE):** Jo Gacheru, Shiv Batta; **Bolivia:** Luisa Arancibia, Viviana Londoño; **Peru:** Claudia Coronado, Marcia Cruz, Viviana Londoño; **Guyana:** Aiesha Williams, Viviana Londoño; **Paraguay:** Althea Skinner, Emma Timmerman, Pia Escobar, Viviana Londoño; **Ecuador:** Althea Skinner, Andrea Bravo, Pia Escobar, Viviana Londoño; **Coastal Communities:** Maria Honig, Valerie Burgener; **Madagascar:** Cynthia Ratsimbazafy, Rob Parry-Jones, Tamara Léger.

## Core Review Team

**Action Plan Steering Group:** Amani Ngusaru, Brent Nordstrom, Felicity Glennie-Holmes, Ghana Gurung, Gustaf Lind, Kirsten Schuijt, Kurt Holle, Martin Kabaluapa Kapinga, Nik Sekhran; **Communications (WWF International):** Fiona McFadden, Winnie De’Ath, Yves Calmette; **Executive Team:** Kirsten Schuijt, Jamie Craig, Jonathan Hutton, Prasanna De Silva, Sanne Wendes; **General Counsel’s Office (WWF-US):** Margaret Ackerley, Ross Wolland; **Senior Leadership Team (WWF International):** Karianne Sturms, Ajay Barai, Carol Monoyios, Catherine Blancard, Daudi Sumba, Lan Mercado, Shivani Wadhwa. (Note: Reviewers are only listed once, however, may serve on more than one governance body).

## Editors-in-Chief

Jean-Paul Paddack, Alexandra Kintner.

## Design and Production

Stéfane Mauris, msgraphicdesign.

© 2024

WWF® and ©1986 Panda Symbol are owned by WWF. All rights reserved.

WWF, 28 rue Mauverney, 1196 Gland, Switzerland.  
Tel. +41 22 364 9111  
CH-550.0.128.920-7

For contact details and further information, please visit our international website at [wwf.panda.org](http://wwf.panda.org)

Cover photography: © Troy Enekvist / WWF-Sweden

Fisherman Saiful in Sundarbans, Bangladesh, Mangrove forest.



# FOREWORD

by Dr. Kirsten Schuijt,  
*Director General of WWF International*

Our 2023 edition of the *Human Rights and the Environment Report* documents the implementation of WWF's *Management Response* to the Independent Panel Report "Embedding Human Rights in Nature Conservation: From Intent to Action". Along with its 15 case studies, this report brings to life the important and challenging work our colleagues and partners are undertaking globally to co-create and co-implement conservation programmes. I am keen to reiterate our commitment to pursue, adapt and refine our approaches to better embed human rights in conservation, and learn from implementation, as this report documents.

As I reflect on our work over the last four years, the recommendations of the Independent Panel catalyzed changes in our ways of working, prompting us to build on existing conservation approaches and implement new ones – where rights-based conservation for biodiversity and sustainable development are integral. These approaches are the only effective way to contribute to the Global Biodiversity Framework's goals, including our common goal to protect and conserve 30% of the Earth's terrestrial and water ecosystems, and to improve the livelihoods of billions who depend on these resources.

Looking back, we have set stronger and clearer standards across the WWF Network and improved their use and enforcement. We have augmented our governance, management and capacity, with more integration, cooperation and awareness for greater consistency and continuity. We have put in place continuous learning mechanisms because we know our work is never done.

In this light, I would like to highlight a few examples of actions taken to embed rights-based approaches, in line with WWF's mission to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and nature, in particular:

» Leveraging our influence, or 'agency', in countries where we operate in an effort to prevent or mitigate harm and/or steer decisions in line with our mission and values. In this report, we report on the use of our agency and share some specific case studies.

- » Increasing the number of Indigenous Peoples trustees on WWF boards across the Network, including on the WWF International Board, and we have also initiated the establishment of an Indigenous Peoples Consultative Group – all to better bring the voices of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to our governance, and advise on conservation approaches.
- » We have established an Office of the Ombudsperson which will offer a fair, equitable, transparent process to manage grievances related to environmental and social safeguards; the process to develop the Office's Operating Framework was subject to wide-ranging stakeholder input, including public consultations.
- » We continued to engage in our partnerships with the Universal Ranger Support Alliance (URSA) – supporting the ranger profession globally, with guidance and tools for more effective monitoring of law enforcement activities that respect human rights and continued our work on gender equality within the ranger workforce, looking at challenges and opportunities and the nexus between gender and Illegal Wildlife Trade.

At the same time, we have experienced challenges in our efforts to take action to embed rights-based approaches. These have required us to reflect, and remain agile and adaptive – for example, building the right capacity internally, and with partners, to fully deliver on our ambitions. We explain these challenges further in this report together with how we have sought to address them.

Implementing the commitments of our *Management Response* is an ongoing focus across all levels of the WWF Network - at the country level where we implement our programmes, and at the governance level of WWF offices, including WWF International. We were challenged to move from "intent to action"; this required us to pivot, look inwards and reflect on how we 'do' conservation – often in fragile and conflict affected societies and geographies. We are fully cognisant that this journey has only just begun and we are committed to addressing the challenges that lie ahead.

# SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2020, an Independent Panel chaired by Judge Navi Pillay published a report that reviewed and assessed WWF's role in connection with allegations of human rights abuses by some government rangers in and around protected areas in the Congo Basin, India and Nepal. The Independent Panel published recommendations regarding country-level programmes – concluding that we must do more to ensure community voices are heard and respected, as well as advocate for governments to uphold their human rights obligations. We have made progress and also acknowledge the work we still must do to strengthen how we embed human rights in our conservation work.

In our *WWF Management Response to Recommendations from the Independent Panel Report* (2020) we made public commitments in response to recommendations made by the *Independent Panel*, outlining our plans for a three-year programme to better embed human rights in conservation. Since then, across the Congo Basin, India and Nepal – and the WWF Network, more generally – we have worked to deliver on these recommendations. We committed to reviewing the implementation by the end of 2023, publishing the following annual updates on our progress: the *Implementation Update: WWF Management Response to Recommendations from the Independent Panel Report - 2021* (hereafter referred to as the Year 1 Report), the *Human Rights and the Environment Report - 2022* and, this report, the *Human Rights and the Environment Report - 2023*. Now in 2023, as our programme comes to a close, we take the opportunity to reflect on the extent to which we have listened, learned and acted on these commitments. As previously shared and following this report, an evaluation of the implementation period following our *Management Response* will be undertaken.

Over the past four years, we have reviewed our role in the delivery of conservation, and in particular, focused on the ways we engage with Indigenous Peoples and local community stewards of sustainable development, and government partners. Adopting a rights-based approach to conservation requires more frequent and direct engagement with stakeholders and communities in our conservation project areas. This has been prompted by the development of various tools and frameworks, which are both consistent across the WWF Network and tailored to local contexts. In some places, we are

beginning to see the results of these measures, while, in others, more time is required to assess the outcomes. Many of the case studies in this report highlight our work with Indigenous Peoples and communities living closest to nature and central to conservation work – for example, in coastal seascapes, such as the *Coastal Communities Initiative* (ref. Section 5 on case studies).

The Independent Panel recognized that many of the landscapes in which we work pose challenges in terms of governance and the rule of law. We were prompted to reflect on our position, role and agency in the delivery of our conversation programmes, and our ability to influence political or systems change in line with our values. This has meant, for example, clearly affirming our human rights commitments and standards to government partners and using our agency to steer decision making to support inclusive and rights-based approaches – this includes developing stronger partnerships with civil society organizations, including Indigenous Peoples organizations. We understand that alongside the reform of our own working practices, we need to help address the complex issues facing the world and places in which we work – one where there is rising social unrest, growing nature-related risks and other challenges. Operating in project site areas often requires working with local partners whose experience and capacity varies, and when coupled with existing local complexities, this can affect the timing and speed of implementation.

Our mission remains to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature, and our commitments to stronger people-centred and human rights-based conservation, as described in the *Management Response*, have bolstered this effort, ultimately changing how we engage and partner in our conservation project areas. The implementation of our commitments has not been an effort of compliance, but rather an effort to better our conservation approach and help people and nature to thrive. Our efforts have contributed to setting the conditions for systems-level change and will continue beyond the life of the three-year implementation period of *Management Response* commitments, which concluded in December 2023.

In the following sections, we will speak to our evolution from 2020 and reflect on the internal and external challenges we have faced.



# PROGRESS ON ACTIONS: 2020-2023

## 1. USE OF WWF'S 'AGENCY'.

We take to heart the Independent Panel's recommendation to "use and apply our agency", and have strived to do so proactively, publicly and behind the scenes, where and when needed. WWF does not operate alone, and in new agreements (e.g., Memoranda of Understanding) with governments and partners, we are negotiating clauses that reflect WWF's environmental and social safeguards and a rights-based approach to conservation – to do no harm and also to do good in conservation. In addition, recent examples of advocacy efforts by WWF and our partners include:

- a. Cameroon:** advocating for the recognition and protection of Indigenous Peoples' access rights through the [historic signing of the MINFOF/ASBABUK MoU](#) (20 September 2023);
- b. Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC):** advocating for the publication of a historic new law entitled the *Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Indigenous Pygmy Peoples*, whereby the DRC provides access rights to Indigenous Peoples;
- c. Congo Basin:** advocating for the adoption of a ranger code of conduct to promote

human rights in conservation law enforcement at both the landscape and the national level;

- d. Nepal:** engaging with the Human Rights Commission of Nepal to better mitigate risks related to protected and conserved areas management and human rights;
- e. India:** supporting the recognition of tenurial rights through a range of approaches, including designing and implementing sustainable livelihood initiatives and strengthening community institutions to set up and manage conservation areas; and
- f. UN Convention on Biological Diversity Global Biodiversity Framework (UNCBD):** In the recent negotiations for the [UNCBD](#), advocating for appropriate recognition of the rights and leadership of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to restore nature and stabilise our climate.

We are committed to using our agency wherever and however we can. As a non-governmental organization, WWF facilitates access to funding and provides technical assistance to others, including governments and local communities, which have ownership and stewardship over nature. This distinguishes us

from other entities and actors that own the land and waters and are directly responsible for their management. When we use our agency – and speak up – we are also mindful of our responsibility to protect our staff, who can be operating in difficult situations where they may face violence. The stories about inclusive conservation (ref. Section 5) and the reports on our country-level progress (ref. Section 3) share more examples of the use of our agency.

## 2. INCREASED INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' PERSPECTIVES ON THE INTERNATIONAL BOARD AND THROUGHOUT WWF.

We recognize that Indigenous Peoples and local communities must be central players in conservation, including in the governance of our organization. In 2023, the WWF International Board appointed Professor Dr. Ramy Bulan as our new trustee. Dr. Bulan is a Kelabit woman, belonging to an Indigenous People and highland community residing in the Malaysian part of Borneo in Sarawak. In addition, The participation of Indigenous Peoples' as trustees on WWF national boards and advisory councils continues to increase. As at the end of 2023, 17 Indigenous and First Nations Peoples were trustees on

eight WWF national office boards or advisory councils – and 18 in total across nine offices when including WWF International.

In July 2023, WWF agreed to establish an Indigenous Peoples Consultative Group (IPCG) with guidance from an Indigenous leader. The IPCG will serve as a regionally representative group working with WWF around key challenges and opportunities at the intersection of conservation and Indigenous Peoples' rights and roles, engaging both with the executive leadership of WWF, as well as with the WWF International Board. The consultation for the recruitment of IPCG members started in late 2023, with an inaugural meeting tentatively to take place in May 2024.

## 3. ADVANCING EFFORTS IN ETHICAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AND PARTNERING IN RANGER TRAINING ON HUMAN RIGHTS.

WWF recognizes the significant role that conservation law enforcement agencies undertake in tackling wildlife crime and protecting landscapes and seascapes, often in challenging environments. Providing support to ranger training on human rights and ethical law enforcement remains at the heart of our

mission. At local, national, regional and global levels, we continue to develop and provide training opportunities, and to partner in human rights training across landscapes in the Congo Basin, India and Nepal – and beyond. In the last three years, we have engaged with partners to make the following important progress on ethical law enforcement:

- a. Continuing our engagement with Universal Ranger Support Alliance (URSA).** WWF is a founding member of URSA and through this partnership, we supported the development and release of the [International Ranger Federation Global Code of Conduct](#) in April 2021. In addition, in collaboration with URSA, the [Global Ranger Competencies](#) were finalized and released in June 2023. These contain 23 universal competencies needed by all rangers, an additional seven competencies for commonly required specialist roles, and a further eight competencies required by rangers in positions of leadership. More recently, URSA also released a mobile training module on the Code of Conduct to make it accessible to a wider ranger community.
- b. Developing and piloting the Law Enforcement Due Diligence Tool.** WWF has

developed the *Due Diligence Tool for Conservation Law Enforcement Support in Protected Areas* to screen and evaluate new or existing partnerships with government agencies in charge of law enforcement in protected areas. The due diligence tool is being progressively rolled out across the Network from June 2022 through to June 2024, and will be regularly updated based on lessons learned from implementation.

- c. Conservation law enforcement guidance documents for WWF.** We are developing a suite of guidance documents for conservation law enforcement engagement within the WWF Network. The guidelines will cover a number of risk areas to help the WWF Network uphold human rights when engaging with conservation law enforcement agencies: prohibited activities, financial support, community patrols and handling of sensitive information. We are also developing an overarching framework document that includes these guidance documents and represents the definitive manual for conservation law enforcement engagement in the WWF Network.



#### 4. SAFEGUARDING FROM ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL RISKS.

##### a. Adopting and implementing improved Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework and Statement of Principles.

In July 2023, we published our revised *ESSF and Statement of Principles*, which clarified our commitments so that they could be implemented and adaptively managed more easily in all place-based activities – integrating public consultation feedback and lessons learned from implementation.

The revised package consists of three overarching Statements of Principles that encapsulate our commitments to respect and promote human rights, promote gender equality and uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples. These are applicable across the WWF Network, in all instances and all places. We put in place a framework for WWF on safeguarding all of our place-based work. The extensive roll-out of safeguards globally has been a process from which we continue to learn.

WWF committed to “progressively applying ESSF to all field-based activities” that we implement or fund.<sup>1</sup> By the end of March 2024, 251 of 261 (96%) landscapes and seascapes in which WWF

carries out its place-based activities are progressively implementing the safeguards framework. This includes 107 (41%) in the risk and issue screening stage, 91 (32%) in the mitigation design stage, 53 (20%) in the application stage, and 10 (4%) not started.

In addition, WWF has developed, approved and is applying risk mitigation frameworks in five of seven landscapes reviewed by the Independent Panel. Safeguards have provided us with a standardised model to mitigate risk and deliver people-centred conservation, as evidenced by our safeguard on stakeholder engagement.

##### b. Building capacity in people-centred and rights-based conservation.

We have reviewed our capacity in people-centred and rights-based conservation across the WWF Network to ensure that we have the necessary skills and expertise.

In the last four years, in addition to regular training and upskilling across the Network, WWF has hired over 40 positions globally, linked to environmental and social safeguarding, human rights, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities issues. Capacity building in human rights remains an ongoing challenge, and this is explained in Section 2 on Network Governance.

#### 5. SUPPORTING AND IMPROVING COMPLAINTS CHANNELS AND GRIEVANCE MECHANISMS.

Complaints channels and grievance mechanisms provide an avenue for communities to express their concerns and for WWF to hear these and adaptively manage the implementation of our projects to more effectively prevent and mitigate risks to local stakeholders.

**a. Implementation of the Safeguard on Grievance Mechanisms.** The principal avenue for communities to voice their concerns is through national mechanisms. Landscape grievance mechanisms are deployed in those places where there is a history of human rights abuses, in ‘fragile and conflict affected states’, and in remote locations. This is a critical element through which WWF implements human rights-based conservation measures.

Bringing that clarity into organisational structures and processes is an ongoing focus, and in 2023 specifically through:

- » Designing and implementing systems that communities and individuals impacted by WWF’s place-based activities can use to raise grievances and seek resolution.
- » Ensuring that any mechanism that is established is fit for purpose. The revised 2023 *Safeguard on Grievance Mechanisms* specifies eight effectiveness criteria that need to be met, including legitimacy, accessibility, predictability, equitability and transparency.

**b. Implementation of Speak Up! core standard.** Additionally, effective complaint channels serve different stakeholder groups (communities, WWF staff, etc.) and address different

types of complaints. A focus in 2023 has been ensuring that our staff understand the role of mechanisms established through the Speak Up! core standard. Every office in the WWF Network must comply with the requirements of Speak Up! and structure the mechanisms in such a way that they are appropriate to their specific operational context. As of December 2023, all of WWF office sites have published a country-level complaints channel in line with our Speak Up! core standard.

For further information on the implementation of complaints channels and grievance mechanisms, refer to the Section 2 on Network Governance.

#### 6. ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON.

WWF is committed to strengthening its accountability and to ensuring that trustworthy

mechanisms are established at relevant levels. This will enable affected stakeholders, including local communities and Indigenous Peoples, to raise concerns about ESSF compliance and have them addressed in a timely and consistent manner.

After extensive public and stakeholder consultations, the Office of the Ombudsman was established in 2021. An “Operating Framework” for the office was adopted in May 2023, following an extensive internal and external consultation process. A new WWF Ombudsman will take office in 2024 succeeding Gina Barbieri, the inaugural Ombudsman for the WWF Network, and will carry forward the operationalisation of the Office of the Ombudsman, which will engage in collaborative problem-solving in response to ESSF-related grievances about WWF activities and mediation, among other services. For further information on the role of the Office of the Ombudsman, refer to Section 2.

<sup>1</sup> WWF *Management Response*, pg. 18.

# CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The Independent Panel report provided valuable foundational advice on how to strengthen human rights in conservation in fragile and conflict-affected places. This advice is pertinent to the entire conservation community and beyond, and reflects the interlinkages between conservation, sustainable development and governance. We remain committed to the actions and the spirit of our *Management Response*. While progress has been made, we have been confronted with challenges, some unique to WWF given our complex federated structure and others common to the broader conservation sector – and there remains more to do. We have outlined below some overarching internal and external challenges – with additional challenges, specific to particular landscapes, covered in individual country chapters (Section 3). The challenges outlined below cover the period since the publication of the *Management Response* in late 2020.



Aerial view of Salonga National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo.  
© Thomas Nicolon / WWF DR Congo

## INTERNAL CHALLENGES

### 1. SCALE OF EFFORT OF ESSF IMPLEMENTATION.

Five of seven landscapes in scope for the *Management Response* have implemented the Environmental and Social Mitigation Framework (ESMF) – they are being applied, monitored and reviewed – and the remaining two will reach application stage by May 2024.

The scale of the task of ESSF implementation, across all 261 landscapes and seascapes in which we operate, remains an ongoing challenge for the WWF Network. We underestimated the work, time and resource allocation required to build the ESSF foundation at various levels of the Network: from teams on the ground working with communities, up through regional and broader staff support levels, to senior management and WWF Boards. This challenge is further discussed in the section on *Operations & Safeguards in conservation project areas*.

### 2. HUMAN RIGHTS CAPACITY.

Part of our work has been to identify required human rights capacity and organize ourselves to allocate that capacity to support staff carrying out place-based activities more proactively and to create communities of practice to strengthen this capacity, facilitate cross learning, and better embed it within offices. We also continue to build our human rights capacity, and since 2019, we have added several human rights positions across our Network – e.g., in the Congo Basin, Latin America and within the WWF Secretariat.

At the senior-most level, a member of the WWF International Board and Chairperson of WWF-

Netherlands is the Founder of the Hague Institute for Innovation of Law (HiiL), a civil society organisation committed to people-centred justice.

### 3. PROPORTIONALITY IN APPLYING SAFEGUARDS.

While WWF has made progress in addressing safeguards, it has been asymmetric across countries and in the land- and seascapes where we operate. This is by design: as we signalled in our *Management Response*, the measures we have taken follow the principle of proportionality; that is, we seek to prioritize the development of mitigation frameworks where risks are highest. This assessment can be due to individual risks, the compound effect of several risks, risk complexity or risks arising from the operating context (e.g., in fragile or conflict areas). In addition, we have made trade-offs in available staff time and resources to optimize outcomes.

### 4. COMMUNITY ACCESS TO GRIEVANCE MECHANISMS.

We continue to learn how to better meet the needs of local communities as we operationalize grievance mechanisms across the places where we work. Our initial focus was to provide dedicated grievance mechanisms for communities in landscapes considered the most challenging and complex for safeguards implementation, but we saw that understanding and assessing the effectiveness of what is already available – including those operated by third parties – was the critical first step. Consequently, the Safeguard on Grievance Mechanisms was

revised to emphasise this. We have also started a review of existing grievance mechanisms across landscapes managed by WWF International offices to better understand effectiveness at a portfolio level, including any differences at the regional, country or type-of-mechanism level. Specific challenges and lessons learned to date include:

- a. Third-party managed grievance mechanisms.** Where appropriate, WWF has outsourced grievance management to third parties and in some cases, we have faced considerable challenges in obtaining reliable, complete and consistent information. In these instances, an agreed roles and responsibilities matrix across the grievance management process is helpful.
- b. Funding.** Grievance management is a mandate that requires long-term, secure financial resources to effectively operate them, including investigating grievances that have been received.
- c. Alignment with government or third-party grievance mechanisms.** The WWF grievance mechanisms are intended to complement what is already in place to serve communities or to improve the overall effectiveness of the options available. Grievance mechanisms should not compete with the government justice system.
- d. Expertise.** Active, day-to-day management of grievance mechanisms is a relatively new area for WWF. We routinely look for ways to promote cross-learning within the network and other training

and support options for WWF staff and partners.

Successful grievance mechanisms are actively used by communities and they routinely deliver resolutions and build trust. Receipt of grievances should therefore not be perceived as a negative, but part of a shift in the perception of these mechanisms as pillars of stakeholder engagement. They are transparent and trusted ways for potentially affected people and communities to voice and seek resolution to their concerns.

### 5. OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON.

A challenge remains in clarifying and communicating how these mechanisms interact with each other. The Ombudsperson will operate independently of conservation field level activities and will report directly to the Director General of WWF International, with direct access to escalate case files to the WWF International Board as needed. The function of the Ombudsperson is in addition to other methods for communities to raise concerns, including landscape and national level mechanisms, and Speak Up! – all part of a system designed to increase the communities' ability to voice their concerns.

### 6. COMMITMENTS TO TRANSPARENCY.

The Independent Panel recommended that WWF be more transparent.<sup>2</sup> We made commitments to disclose more ESSF-related information and also, to bring a proposal to the WWF International Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee (ARCC) to disclose aggregated data on complaints annually. The

<sup>2</sup> See WWF's *Protected and Conserved Areas* case study on the Republic of the Congo, where we highlight the challenges we are facing in Ntokou-Pikounda National Park.

## EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

WWF Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee approved (October 2023) the principles of a disclosure pathway which will be finalised in 2024, that lays out what and how WWF will publicly share regarding complaints and landscape level information. In this vein, in January 2024, WWF International launched an online page dedicated to [Protected and Conserved Areas \(PCAs\): Preserving Biodiversity and Ensuring Sustainable Futures](#) which features an analysis of the critical role that PCAs play in conservation, the inherent and specific challenges encountered across the range of models deployed in supporting PCAs and the approaches taken by WWF to deliver on its commitment to taking a rights based approach. The discussion and analysis on PCAs have been supplemented with a series of landscape focused case studies which aim to transparently disclose barriers and progress with respect to operating in the landscape, including those related to safeguards. This case study approach will be further expanded in the coming year by including additional case studies and updating the existing disclosures with key developments, as was done in February 2024 with respect to the case study on [Ntokou-Pikounda National Park](#).

The environments that we work in and the systems we work with are increasingly complex. Risks – economic, environmental, geopolitical, societal and technological – shape our daily lives and our work.<sup>3</sup> The polycrisis we face can be unexpected, and WWF must remain adaptable and learn to fully embrace them.

### 1. COVID-19 IMPACTED OUR FIELD CONSULTATIONS.

The pandemic, from 2020 through 2022, impacted our training, field-level consultations, and other in-person measures identified in the *Management Response*. In some countries, it delayed our ability to engage and have in-person conversations with communities in local languages, as they did not have early access to vaccines. Our public consultations on draft social policies and safeguards, as well as the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsperson, were also delayed as a result.

### 2. FREE PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT (FPIC) AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS.

One of the ongoing issues arising from our ongoing consultations with human rights and development groups – as well as others in the conservation sector – was the challenges associated with Indigenous Peoples' right to a FPIC process for conservation measures that may affect them, including access restrictions. FPIC can pose a challenge in part because Indigenous communities are often decentralised, opinions may be broad, and there may not be a single entity that can speak for the entire community. Who is responsible for securing FPIC also needs to be established: government, WWF or

another party. This is an area in which the conservation community must partner with human rights groups and development organizations to operationalize rights-based approaches.

### 3. RISK OF SPEAKING OUT.

Environmental defenders around the world are at risk, and there are growing restrictions on civic space. Five countries accounted for more than 80% of murders of human rights defenders, including four in Latin America and one in the Congo Basin.<sup>4</sup> In the past three years, we experienced instances where WWF staff were threatened as a result of speaking out.

### 4. PERSEVERING THROUGH CONFLICTS.

Conflicts continue to put nature at risk and lead to environmental degradation and there are unique challenges to operating in countries with weak governance and in remote areas. This is particularly the case in fragile and conflict-affected states, characterised by security concerns ranging from organized crime to political instability. Armed conflicts are particularly common in biodiversity-rich areas, where they not only pose major threats to conservation programmes but also undermine efforts to protect human rights and support communities whose livelihoods depend on nature. In these places, there is a greater need for funding to implement rights-based approaches, safeguards, and measures to strengthen the protection of human rights by governments, which requires collaboration with donor countries and institutions.

### 5. OPERATING IN PLACES WITH WEAK ACCESS TO JUSTICE.

Conservation work often takes place in remote areas within fragile states where the rule of law and access to justice is weak. While states are responsible for the justice system, WWF and other non-state actors can play an important supporting role.

“RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INDEPENDENT PANEL CATALYZED CHANGES IN OUR WAYS OF WORKING, PROMPTING US TO BUILD ON EXISTING CONSERVATION APPROACHES AND IMPLEMENT NEW ONES - WHERE RIGHTS-BASED CONSERVATION FOR BIODIVERSITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ARE INTEGRAL.”

Dr. Kirsten Schuijt,  
Director General of WWF International and  
Chairperson of the Action Plan Steering Group

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2024/digest/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/global-analysis-2022;> pages 5 and 7.



Aerial view of farmers transplanting rice,  
Madagascar.

© naturepl.com / Lorraine Bennery / WWF

# SECTION 2: PROGRESS ON COMMITMENTS MADE IN RESPONSE TO GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section we will report on the progress made on commitments made by WWF in response to the Independent Panel’s general recommendations. These recommendations are with respect to WWF Network-level change and fall across four categories: operations and safeguards, conservation law enforcement, network governance and third party assurance.

## A. OPERATIONS & SAFEGUARDS IN CONSERVATION PROJECT AREAS

As stated in the Year 1 report, to help more uniformly deliver on the recommendations of the Independent Panel and the findings from our own consultations, WWF recognized the need for a consistent framework to facilitate action. These include ensuring local community engagement in the design, implementation, and monitoring of field projects, fostering inclusive approaches and respecting human rights. We developed the Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework (ESSF) to provide a clear means for implementing our commitments towards inclusive conservation and human rights.

WWF recognises that respect for rights is at the heart of sustainable development. Guided by our organizational values of courage, integrity, respect and collaboration, the Statements of Principles encapsulate our commitments to respect and promote human rights, foster gender equality and uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework, which includes nine Safeguards, supports the Principles by helping us to live up to our social and human rights commitments in relation to our place-based work.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> [https://wwf.panda.org/principles\\_and\\_safeguards/](https://wwf.panda.org/principles_and_safeguards/)

The Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework (ESSF) is based on three objectives:

- » To improve planning and design of conservation actions by identifying and selecting alternatives that avoid adverse environmental and social impacts and where possible enhance benefits.
- » To minimise adverse environmental and social impacts that cannot be avoided, and respond to residual impacts by identifying and designing appropriate and proportionate mitigation measures.
- » To effectively monitor, review and adaptively manage environmental and social opportunities and risks at all stages of a conservation action, from conceptualization to closure.

WWF’s conservation project areas span across diverse ecosystems. Through strategic initiatives and partnerships, WWF engages with local communities, governments, and businesses to address pressing environmental challenges. WWF applies ESSF to its place-based activities – those where we engage in place-based conservation, including activities implemented through partners. We have chosen to apply safeguards principally at the level of our operational landscapes and seascapes – geographic areas in which we have a clear strategic vision and multiple projects or one large programme. However, recognizing that situations and the way our work is organized vary across the WWF Network, we have also developed tools to incorporate safeguards at the level of individual projects whenever appropriate.

### 1. REVISED (2023) ESSF AND STATEMENTS OF PRINCIPLES.<sup>6</sup>

In March 2023 the WWF International Board approved the revised (2023) *ESSF and Statements of Principles*, which came into effect on 1 July 2023.

The process to collate and review feedback (including from the public consultation, as described in the *Human Rights and the Environment Report - 2022*) and finalize revised documents took around two years. The work was guided by a set of revision principles that brought discipline to the process but also some trade-offs, as

satisfying one principle could impact another. Through a Network-wide effort that mobilised practitioners from different regions and technical, legal, policy and systems development expertise, the revised documents were finalized and approved in March 2023 by the WWF Network Executive Team (NET) and the International Board. The revised documents were changed in four key areas:

- » **Consistency of document structure:** the former social policies (now Statements of Principles) are clearly identifiable as a set of related documents with a two-part structure (introduction and principles). The safeguards documents follow a

<sup>6</sup> The Framework comprises three foundational safeguards whose requirements are applied in all cases: the Safeguard Process, the Safeguard on Stakeholder Engagement and the Safeguard on Grievance Mechanisms. As a result, anywhere that place-based activities occur will have been subject to a systematic screening and mitigation design process; those identified as stakeholders will be meaningfully engaged; and effective mechanisms are in place for stakeholders to raise concerns and seek resolution. The application of the six substantive safeguards is determined by the screening and review process. These are the safeguards on (1) Biodiversity and Natural Resources; (2) Pest Management; (3) Indigenous Peoples; (4) Restriction of Access; (5) Community Health, Safety and Security and (6) Cultural Heritage.



WWF staff speaks to a Baka village about the future prospects of Messok-Dja National Park.

© Daniel Nelson

four-part structure (scope of application, objectives, requirements and relationship to other safeguards).

- » **Consistency and clarity of requirements:** requirements related to the same issue across different documents (e.g., expectations of partners, mitigation hierarchy, proportionality principle) are expressed consistently. Greater clarity is provided on systems boundaries, establishing red lines and setting the “minimum bar”.
- » **Clarity on the scope of application:** the Statements of Principles apply to all WWF’s work. Safeguards apply to place-based activities – defined as “situations where WWF engages in place-based conservation, including activities implemented through partners”.
- » **Integration of lessons from implementation:** aspects of implementation are considered from different scenarios and contexts Network-wide. The public consultation reinforced many of the issues identified around clarity and consistency.

A fundamental objective of the transition from the 2019 Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework to the revised 2023 Framework was to ensure no duplication of effort for implementing teams – to avoid requests to redo work, or resubmit documents in a different format. The underlying systems and processes that support safeguard implementation have not changed so ongoing implementation efforts continue, with easy pivot points to the 2023 Framework identified at appropriate times in the management cycle (i.e., preparation, screening, mitigation design, application). Similarly, the tools that support safeguards implementation remain compatible with the 2023 Framework. Review and adaptation of tools to reflect lessons of experience remains an ongoing process that will be pursued in the future.

In the development of the updated 2023 Framework, WWF carried out a **six-week public consultation** in May 2021. The approach, analysis, conclusions and recommendations of the consultation are captured in the **interim report**. The consultation gathered helpful reflection and commentary, with over 1,000 specific comments received, from various key stakeholders. We recognize that in some places, because of constraints due to COVID-19, we could not engage Indigenous Peoples and local communities as directly and systematically as

desired. The 2021 consultation should be viewed as an initial step in a process of continuous learning, and we continue to engage Indigenous Peoples and local communities for feedback on our policies and commitments as part of our **Standard on Stakeholder Engagement** through landscape-level safeguards consultations.<sup>7</sup>

Have a look at Environmental & Social Safeguards Framework (ESSF) principles and visit the dedicated website.

## 2. BUILDING CAPACITY IN SAFEGUARDS.

The revision of the ESSF and creation of the Statements of Principles raised the question of the level of understanding and capacity within the WWF Network for their effective implementation. As a decentralized, federated Network, implementation occurs at a country office level, with WWF International providing support and oversight functions. The capacity needs therefore differ from country to country, depending on the numbers of landscapes or other place-based activities and the complexity of safeguard implementation.

- » **Safeguard focal points.** Most country offices have chosen to appoint a safeguards focal point who works with landscape or project teams to move through the safeguarding process. For country offices that report into WWF International or WWF-US, safeguards focal points are in turn supported by safeguard regional heads. As of end 2023, the ESSF Practitioner community in the WWF Network comprised 82 members.
- » **Accredited safeguard experts (ASE).** WWF’s safeguards framework mobilizes safeguard experts to provide quality assurance and approvals across the WWF landscapes globally. This allows for environmental and social issues to be addressed across all landscapes throughout all stages of WWF engagement with them, from concept to exit. The WWF International safeguards team has a global oversight role and four staff in regional head roles across Europe, Asia, and Africa. They work in close coordination with the safeguards team at WWF-US who have been supporting the Latin America region and a handful of other offices. The safeguard system was designed to be complemented by technical experts drawn from across the network

who are able to provide independent support and quality assurance. The ASE programme was launched in 2021 to build internal capacity and to date, 18 staff and consultants have been accredited, providing them with the delegated authority to review and approve screenings and mitigation plans for landscapes or activities where two or less substantive safeguards have been triggered. Safeguard Regional Heads and their WWF-US equivalent have been accredited to a higher level, providing them with delegated authority to review and approve all activities and landscapes other than those categorised as special consideration.

Two years from the launch of the ASE scheme, we realise that it remains under capacity, in part because the incentives for individuals and their home offices to participate have not been adequately integrated. For instance, for most staff being selected as an ASE is seen as an additional, voluntary activity rather than a formal part of their role and performance evaluation. We will therefore be reviewing the ASE programme in 2024 to address these shortfalls; recruit more staff and gain better representation from Africa and Asia country offices.

## 3. ONGOING IMPLEMENTATION OF SAFEGUARDS.

At the end of March 2024, 251 of 261 (96%) of landscapes and seascapes where WWF carries out its place-based work are in the process of implementing the ESSF. There are 10 landscapes that have yet to start ESSF implementation for a variety of reasons, including eligibility and work being put on hold (e.g., due to conflict or natural disaster).

As described in the **safeguard process**, the ESSF applies the principle of proportionality to risk management for its place-based activities. This means that priority is given to landscapes or other places where activities:

- » Lead to environmental and social risks associated with multiple substantive safeguards, where these risks intersect and significantly compound each other.
- » Are ongoing or proposed in fragile or conflict-affected situations.
- » Take place in regions or states that have a history of incidents of human rights abuses intersecting with conservation efforts; or

where there is weak governance or inadequate access to justice and rule of law.

Landscapes and seascapes or other place-based activities that meet these criteria are classified as “special consideration”. These require escalation within the WWF Network and the use of independent external expertise to support the safeguards process. Approved mitigation frameworks are operationalized through their integration into work plans, monitoring plans and budgets. In the *Human Rights and the Environment Report - 2022*, we stated that within the initial 374 landscape and seascape baseline, 50 were provisionally identified as potentially having “special consideration” status, primarily based on their location in a fragile or conflict-affected country. During the last year, as the results of screening were submitted and reviewed against all of the “special consideration” criteria described above, this number dropped to 19. The landscapes are located in Cameroon, CAR, DRC, Gabon, Indonesia, Kenya, Myanmar, the Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia. Two additional landscapes in India and Nepal did not meet the criteria, but were considered in scope by the Independent Panel report, thereby bringing the total to 21.

As of January 2024, all 21 landscapes have started ESSF implementation, with six in the screening phase; 10 in the mitigation design phase and five in the application phase (i.e., mitigation frameworks were approved and are being implemented and monitored).

The “special consideration” portfolio – and the entire safeguarded portfolio itself – are dynamic. Changes occur to activities, start and stop dates, partner organizations, incidents and contextual factors (e.g., changes in government or government structures, to law, to areas of conflict or civil unrest). As a result, WWF activities may cease or be radically altered by such changes, including adaptation of the safeguarding approach.

Therefore, ongoing monitoring is core to ESSF. As information becomes available through monitoring, stakeholder feedback or other circumstances, adaptation to mitigation plans may be required to ensure plans remain proportionate, timely, effective, locally appropriate and specifically benefit those who are potentially affected. Myanmar is an example of where this has occurred.

<sup>7</sup> [wwf.panda.org/principles\\_and\\_safeguards](https://www.panda.org/principles_and_safeguards)

#### 4. ESSF IMPLEMENTATION IN CONGO BASIN, INDIA AND NEPAL LANDSCAPES.

All landscapes involving allegations examined in the Independent Panel report were prioritized for safeguarding, and risk mitigation plans were developed in line with our [ESSF process](#). Throughout the mitigation planning process, detailed stakeholder consultations were held to gather the opinions and recommendations from stakeholders about environmental and social risks related to WWF interventions and to jointly identify appropriate actions that reduce and mitigate risks. The Conservation Quality Committee (CQC) reviews, advises on, and signs off on special consideration and allegation landscapes.

Further information on the development of the mitigation frameworks for each of the key landscapes in the Congo Basin, Nepal and India is detailed below. Additional content on ongoing activities, projects and initiatives across these key landscapes are further detailed in individual country chapters.

» **Cameroon.** WWF conducted detailed stakeholder consultations to develop safeguard mitigation frameworks for its activities in two transnational landscapes covering 18.5 million hectares of critical biodiversity areas: Lobéké which is part of the TNS (*Tri-national de la Sangha*) and Cameroon portion of TRIDOM (*Tri-national Dja-Odzala-Minkébé*). Both mitigation frameworks were presented to and endorsed by local stakeholders in 2022. Due to the importance of concerns related to stakeholder engagement, Baka Indigenous Peoples' rights and restrictions of access,

these mitigation frameworks are also accompanied by three relevant thematic frameworks (Stakeholder Engagement Framework, Indigenous Peoples Framework and Process Framework). The mitigation framework for Lobéké was leveraged to revise the Lobéké National Park's management plan with *Fondation Tri-National de la Sangha* (FTNS) and the Cameroonian Government. Additionally, the mitigation framework for TRIDOM Cameroon segment informed the revision of the TRIDOM transboundary landscape conservation strategy and ongoing UNDP's GEF-8 programming. Workplans are being developed for the mitigation frameworks to ensure that new proposals in the landscape are aligned and consistent with identified safeguard mitigation measures.

» **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).** In the DRC, WWF, with support from an independent consulting firm, has carried out stakeholder consultations across key areas that are influenced by WWF's activities in the Salonga National Park landscape. Consultations were conducted with several villages, which has resulted in the development of a safeguard mitigation framework to avoid and, where possible, minimize and manage the identified environmental and social risks that may result from WWF project activities. The mitigation framework as well as its subsequent frameworks (Stakeholder Engagement Framework, Indigenous Peoples Framework and Process Framework) are currently under internal review processes before it is presented to local stakeholders including local communities and Indigenous Peoples, ICCN and local NGOs and partners. It is expected that the final mitigation framework will be ready for implementation during the second quarter of 2024.

» **Central Africa Republic (CAR).** The mitigation framework for the Dzanga Sangha landscape was developed along with Lobéké's mitigation framework to ensure consistency of the safeguard approach across the entire TNS. The framework is expected to be presented for approval by CQC during the second quarter of 2024. The current funding pipeline from Dzanga Sangha confirms a strong focus on identified mitigation measures in the framework and those activities are already being implemented by the landscape team as part of the ongoing delivery.

» **Republic of the Congo (ROC).** Espace TRIDOM Interzone Congo's (ETIC) mitigation framework was presented to and endorsed by the multi-stakeholder platform in Sembe in August 2021 and was approved by WWF's CQC in February 2022. The team has since prioritized the implementation of (i) the revised grievance mechanism procedures, (ii) the stakeholder engagement framework and (iii) delivery of training to ETIC rangers on human rights and implementation of code of conduct. Additional mitigation measures are currently being mainstreamed into new project proposals with the prospect of engaging their implementation as soon as these proposals are secured.

» **India.** WWF-India has submitted safeguard screening tools for eight landscapes and has received the final categorisation memos for four landscapes to date. In addition, the screening of the rivers and agriculture programmes was completed.<sup>8</sup> The adoption of the ESSF has helped WWF-India to improve and systemize working with all partners, especially tribal and local communities. It has enabled staff to learn about participatory and inclusive project design, risk assessment, and integration of gender and human rights concerns and has improved documentation of WWF-India's work at the community level. In addition, WWF-India is monitoring the implementation of the mitigation framework in the Kaziranga Karbi Anglong landscape. In addition, a grievance redressal process has been established in line with the core Safeguard on Grievance Mechanisms and translated into 12 languages.

» **Nepal.** In addition to implementing our ESSF and integrating ESSF in our project lifecycle, WWF-Nepal has disseminated information on safeguards, including the Terai Arc Landscap (TAL) mitigation plan, widely and transparently across the landscape. This has included posting on [WWF-Nepal's website](#), and translating key documents into Nepali (safeguards risk categorization memo, TAL mitigation plan, grievance mechanism).

<sup>8</sup> Several training and actions have taken place: (a) Training sessions have been and are being conducted on human rights related provisions in Indian constitution and community entitlements in Indian laws (such as the Forest Rights Act and the Wildlife Protection Act) for the Forest Department staff across landscapes. (b) Financial support as interim relief were also provided to families living in forest fringe and corridor villages for around 130 incidents of livestock depredation and human injury by wildlife since July 2022 in KKL. (c) Nearly 60 community institutions such as Anti-Depredation Squads (ADSs) and Village Defence Parties (VDPs) in corridors and forest fringe villages strengthened for addressing human wildlife conflict by providing them support in the form of torch lights and rain jackets to aid them in keeping a watch on wildlife movement in their areas since mid-2022. Trainings are also conducted for ADSs and VDPs on wildlife behaviour and do's and don'ts for addressing human wildlife conflict situations. A small three minute video clip has also been made in Assamese and is shown in villages too. (d) In addition we have prepared a training manual on gender and biodiversity Conservation and also Human rights and biodiversity conservation so that we can streamline our training content and embed this in forest staff training schools.

## B. CONSERVATION LAW ENFORCEMENT

WWF recognizes the significant role that conservation law enforcement agencies undertake to tackle wildlife crime and protect landscapes and seascapes, which enables WWF to pursue its mission of people and nature living in harmony, often in challenging environments. Conservation law enforcement staff such as park rangers are government employees, and the relevant government authority is responsible for ensuring that their teams are well trained and equipped to undertake their roles. The government remains accountable for investigating any incidents that arise and putting in place any disciplinary procedures. However, we understand that in some parts of the world we may need to support governments and law enforcement personnel to help stop wildlife species and population extinctions, reduce the loss of natural habitats, and protect nature's contributions to the health and well-being of people, while respecting human rights. To help ensure that we safeguard local communities and that our activities uphold the respect of human rights we have processes to assess, understand and mitigate the risks identified in line with international human rights laws and standards.

WWF's support to conservation law enforcement agencies includes engaging with them to uphold human rights and adhere to the international code of conduct for conservation law enforcement or a similar standard. We may provide funding and equipment (e.g., communications equipment) to support conservation law enforcement officials in their work.

Our engagement with law enforcement is guided by our standards and values, and we follow an [exclusions list](#) detailing activities ineligible for WWF support.

In 2023, we have made progress in developing a suite of guidance documents for conservation law enforcement engagement within the WWF Network. Though at various stages of completion, the guidelines cover several risk areas to help the Network uphold human rights when engaging with conservation law enforcement. These risk areas cover: prohibited activities, financial support, community patrols, engagement with the military and handling of sensitive information. We are also developing an overarching framework document that includes these guidance documents and represents the definitive manual for conservation law enforcement engagement in the WWF Network.

In 2023, we have also made progress on the thematic areas recommended by the [Independent Panel](#). Where

WWF provides support for government law enforcement activities, we committed in the *Management Response* to take additional steps to advance human rights protections. Below is a reflection on our work in 2023.

### 1. STRENGTHENING OUR RISK ASSESSMENT MEASURES THROUGH A LAW ENFORCEMENT DUE DILIGENCE TOOL.

WWF has developed the *Due Diligence Tool for Conservation Law Enforcement Support in Protected Areas* (hereafter due diligence tool) to screen and evaluate new or existing partnerships with government agencies in charge of law enforcement in protected areas. We use the due diligence tool to assess the risks in countries where WWF directly or indirectly (via third parties) supports conservation law enforcement agencies in protected areas. This support includes training, buying field equipment, law enforcement monitoring, financial support, and travel for rangers. In addition, risks related to conservation law enforcement are

surfaced in landscapes or seascapes through the ESSF screening process.

A due diligence tool assessment was completed in 14 countries and is in progress in seven others. Work is also under way on taking the lessons that countries have learnt in using the tools and sharing these with the WWF Network to help simplify, standardize and strengthen approaches. The action plans derived from the due diligence tool will be tracked annually.

### 2. RAISING AWARENESS OF AND ADVOCATING FOR THE ADOPTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL RANGER FEDERATION (IRF) CODE OF CONDUCT.

The [Universal Ranger Support Alliance \(URSA\)](#) is a coalition of nine conservation organizations supporting and promoting the International Ranger Federation (IRF) to build a network of well-supported, professional and capable rangers. WWF is a founding member of

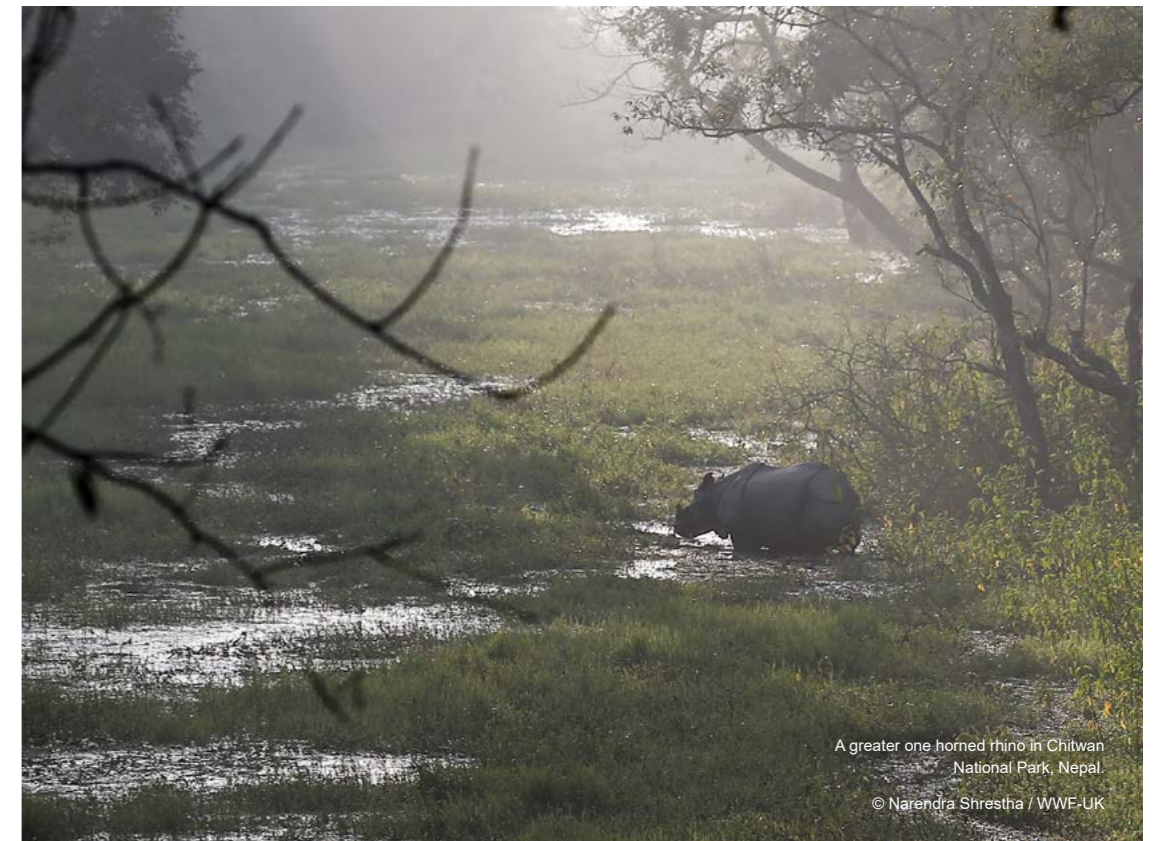
URSA and through this partnership we supported the development and release of the IRF Global Code of Conduct in April 2021. The Code of Conduct aims to inspire rangers and provide good practice guidelines that enable an effective and professional ranger workforce. Refer to the [Human Rights & the Environment Report - 2022](#) for more information on our work with URSA.

This first-ever Global Code of Conduct for rangers needs to be adapted to and adopted in local contexts. For example, in 2023 we worked with fellow URSA members Zoological Society of London (ZSL), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Fauna and Flora International (FFI) to adapt the Code for the Kenya Wildlife Service.

In 2023, URSA released a mobile version of the training module on the Code of Conduct to make it accessible to a wider ranger community. As part of the process, a simple summarized version of the Code of Conduct was developed, including a one-page summary that rangers can display at their outposts.



Confiscated animal traps, at HQ of Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve, Central African Republic.  
© Andy Isaacson / WWF-US



A greater one-horned rhino in Chitwan National Park, Nepal.  
© Narendra Shrestha / WWF-UK

Also this year, URSA members organized a high-level meeting to discuss how to progress on the priorities outlined in the global action plan. The meeting brought together strategic partners, global experts and donor organizations to explore policies, funding strategies, innovative projects and partnerships. A particular focus is on Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which aims to effectively conserve at least 30% of all land and waters by 2030. The meeting provided an opportunity to integrate the role of an equitable and responsible ranger workforce within this global effort, and included a session run by the UN Human Rights Office on the IRF Code of Conduct and how donor communities can integrate it into their requirements. Other events in 2023 included:

- » The First Asian Ranger Forum, hosted in Guwahati, India in December, bringing together around 150 rangers from Asia. The forum focused on inclusion and conduct, and included workshops on the Code of Conduct and human rights.
- » A webinar in July to showcase good practices for supporting rangers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The webinar looked at how governments, academic institutions, NGOs and others are helping professionalize the ranger workforce.
- » A webinar on the role of rangers and the Code of Conduct in implementing the Global Biodiversity Framework, hosted by the IRF in collaboration with IUCN-WCPA, GEF and human rights experts.

We will continue to support risk mitigation in our engagement with conservation law enforcement agencies, as part of an integrated approach to promote human rights in our work in protected and conserved areas:

### 3. ENGAGING IN PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE RANGER TRAINING PROGRAMMES AND WORKING CONDITIONS.

WWF used its agency to work with partners in encouraging duty bearers to adopt the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in relation to the ranger agenda, including human rights-based approaches, respecting gender equality and protecting environmental human rights defenders.

The [Global Ranger Competences](#) were finalized and released in June 2023. This contains 23 universal competencies needed by all rangers, an additional seven competencies for commonly required specialist roles, and a further eight competencies required by rangers in positions of leadership. They are designed to be applicable to those working as rangers (or in equivalent roles) around the world, and to any entity responsible for rangers in protected and conserved areas of all types. The competencies were identified through a global consultation process, with the contribution of 536 people from 88 countries. Most contributors were rangers, but they also included employers and representatives of ranger associations, as well as social, community and human rights experts. The Global Ranger Competences framework makes training modules on Indigenous Peoples, local communities and human rights a fundamental part of training for all rangers.

In March 2023, URSA published [principles and guidance](#) on safeguarding the rights and well-being of rangers. These provide a framework for and connect existing efforts to improve working conditions for rangers, while also filling identified gaps to ensure that rangers are (and feel) safe and supported. The principles contribute to the aim of establishing a motivated ranger workforce that applies a human rights-based approach and maintains trusted relationships with vulnerable individuals and groups they meet. The framework has 10 principles, one of which is acting within and respecting the IRF Code of Conduct.

Many rangers operate in poor and dangerous working conditions with no access to insurance and mental health support. We supported URSA's development of [Global Standards for Employment and Working Conditions](#) for rangers. These first-ever global standards seek to set a benchmark of ensuring the physical and mental well-being of rangers. Safety is also one of the key elements of the Code of Conduct, which states that in all actions, rangers will do their best to ensure the safety of themselves, their colleagues, their environment, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and visitors. It also states that rangers will strive to be physically and mentally fit to carry out their duties and will never use illegal or intoxicating substances.

In addition to our work with URSA at a multilateral scale, we also work closely with conservation law enforcement at the landscape level to ensure that the code of conduct

is integrated and adhered to as a part of regular ways of working. Refer to the following country-level sections and to our case studies on inclusive conservation.

### 4. STRENGTHENING OUR WORK TO BUILD TRUST BETWEEN RANGERS AND COMMUNITIES.

The roll-out of the Code of Conduct is underpinned by our work in building trust between rangers and communities. A strong and trusting relationship is crucial for effective protection and management of conservation areas, yet establishing and maintaining trust is challenging.

The [scoping report](#) – titled *Building Trust with Rangers and Communities* – published in 2019 was shared with ranger associations and community groups through two webinars. The report covers good practice examples to help build ranger and community trust and includes a series of mini-case studies. Additionally, the IUCN-WCPA chair has approved the proposal to convert this scoping document into IUCN-WCPA best practice guidelines that will make the document accessible to thousands of park managers across the globe. To further strengthen this work, we worked with other URSA members on an exploratory assessment of the role of Indigenous rangers within the ranger workforce and the challenges they face. For further information on our work with URSA in this space, refer to the [Human Rights & the Environment Report - 2023](#) (pg. 58).

### 5. ROLE OF RANGERS IN “30X30”.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted in December 2022, represents a landmark moment for nature that lays out an action agenda for the coming decade and beyond, including a target to effectively conserve 30% of all land and sea by 2030 (Target 3 of the GBF, colloquially known as “30x30”). Achieving this will require a significant scale-up of support for the frontline workforce critical to its success: rangers. The report, [Rangers for 30 by 30 framework - a framework for support from governments, agencies, donors and NGOs to implement Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework](#), was drafted by IRF and URSA and defines the essential requirements in terms of conditions, conduct and competence.

A high-level meeting in Brussels, Belgium in September 2023 brought together representatives from governments, donor organisations, NGOs and other experts to agree a path forward. It explored how to strengthen, support and enable a professional, accountable and equitable ranger workforce to help achieve the targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework while ensuring the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities are protected. The meeting included a session run by the UN Human Rights Office on the IRF Code of Conduct and how donor communities can integrate it into their requirements. A similar meeting was hosted in the United States in the first quarter of 2024 to ensure that similar considerations are adopted by the donor community there.

### 6. CONTINUING OUR WORK TO MONITOR LAW ENFORCEMENT WITH SMART.

[SMART](#) has become the world's most widely adopted conservation area adaptive management tool, currently used by tens of thousands of conservationists across the globe in over 1,200 sites in 80 countries. The tool is used by various practitioners, from local governments, NGOs and academic institutes to Indigenous Peoples and local communities, in terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments. WWF provides technical support to conservation law enforcement agencies in approximately 250 sites on effective SMART implementation.

We have completed the [evaluation](#) of these sites and identified the gaps that need addressing for effective monitoring of conservation law enforcement support activities. In the coming months, the WWF team will focus on addressing these gaps and ensuring that all support we provide to conservation law enforcement agencies is monitored effectively. In partnership with other partners, we hosted regional SMART trainings in Africa (Rwanda and Kenya) and Asia (Cambodia) to strengthen the capacity of users on effective use of SMART and SMART Collect.

For further information on our work with SMART, refer to the [Human Rights & the Environment Report - 2023](#) (pg. 61).

## CASE STUDY #1: PAKISTAN – UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS FACING WOMEN RANGERS IN PAKISTAN

Dr. Fehmida Firdous, the first known female ranger in Pakistan, was known as “the Turtle Lady” for her immense contribution to protecting green sea turtles and their nesting habitat. But Dr. Firdous, who worked for the Sindh Wildlife Department in the 1980s, was a **rare exception**. Today, the global ranger workforce remains overwhelmingly male, with evidence suggesting only 3-11% of rangers are women. In Pakistan, women rangers face even greater barriers. Despite laws and policies promoting gender equality, Pakistan ranked 145 out of 146 countries in the World Economic Forum’s **Global Gender Gap Index 2022**.

From our engagement with wildlife rangers in the country, we know there are significant gender imbalances in the sector. In response, WWF-Pakistan launched a study to identify key issues and underlying factors contributing to the limited opportunities for women in the ranger profession. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with female and male rangers, senior officials and experts were conducted in partnership with the University

of Karachi. Experts delved into the challenges hindering greater representation of women, as well as the motivations of women rangers and their contributions to conservation. We also orchestrated a national-level consultation, providing a platform for women rangers to connect, share common experiences and values, and address challenges collectively.

The research found that women make up less than 1% of the total ranger workforce in Pakistan. In some provinces and territories, such as Balochistan, Sindh and Gilgit-Baltistan, there are no women working in the wildlife departments at all, while others have just a handful. Where women are working as rangers, their inclusion is usually a recent development. The exclusion of women rangers from pivotal conservation decisions reverberates across the entire ranger workforce, leading to missed opportunities.

Confronting this gender gap raises complex challenges. Entrenched gender stereotypes, cultural barriers and male-centric norms dissuade women from pursuing roles within

the profession. Unconscious biases, intentional exclusion and limited prospects for advancement further discourage women rangers from embracing long-term careers.

Within the wildlife sector, many positions are assumed to be exclusively suitable for men. The prevailing ranger and conservation culture reflects male dominance, with rangers often bonding over shared experiences and “male” rituals, including male-exclusive gatherings and segregated workplace discussions. Women are frequently reminded that the demanding nature of fieldwork poses difficulties for their participation in ranger-related duties, and societal norms often discourage women with children from taking part in field operations.

Transforming the ranger profession into an inclusive workforce demands a holistic strategy. More research is needed into the factors constraining women’s representation, along with enabling policies and frameworks that actively promote the inclusion of women in the ranger workforce.

WWF-Pakistan is furthering this work through follow-up research focused on assessing the representation of women in government sectors dedicated to biodiversity conservation (wildlife, forest, and fisheries) to evaluate any underlying challenges that might hinder the nature conservation field from being an inclusive profession for individuals of all genders, and identify opportunities for the sector to become more gender-inclusive. The work also includes a thorough review of existing policies and frameworks to identify current gaps in policy and support mechanisms for the development of a Gender Action Plan. This will offer learning and awareness-raising opportunities for wildlife departments and national ministries working on wildlife conservation and gender empowerment and inclusion, while the evidence generated and policy recommendations will serve as the basis for lobbying to improve diversity, equity, equality and women’s empowerment within the wildlife ranger workforce in Pakistan.

“The benefits of incorporating gender equality and equity in workforces dedicated to the conservation of nature are essential for achieving long-term conservation objectives. There is ample evidence to support this idea. Our current eye-opening research, which reveals that women constitute less than one per cent of the wildlife ranger workforce in Pakistan, marks the beginning of a positive transformation towards achieving gender equality and equity in wildlife, forest, and fisheries workforces in the country. Given Pakistan’s unique position, where these sectors fall under the purview of provincial and territorial governments, implementing harmonized gender-supportive policies will require a unified will and vision. The larger challenge however remains in systematically and simultaneously addressing the specific barriers that hinder the development of a more gender-inclusive workforce. This will require a combination of policy reforms, capacity-building, and a shift in mindset. While this may be difficult, it is certainly possible.”

Hammad Naqi Khan  
Director General of WWF-Pakistan



Up: Ume Habiba, Director Wildlife, Islamabad Wildlife Management Board (IWMB) and Ayesha Shahzad, Assistant Director Wildlife, IWMB.

Right: Rizwana Imtiaz, Assistant Director, Punjab Wildlife and Parks Department.

© WWF-Pakistan

# C. NETWORK GOVERNANCE

The Independent Panel report presented WWF's key challenge with respect to its governance structure as "how to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of social policies and human rights standards at country and field levels." WWF recognizes the value and importance of the use of WWF's agency with partners, the collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and work with conservation law enforcement on adhering to human rights principles. We seek to do this by operating through our complex federated structure. Although every office is tied together by a common mission, brand and programme strategy, instituting change must be collaborative, rather than instituted. We have reviewed our own internal architecture and governance mechanisms, and have made a series of governance enhancements, summarized in this chapter.

## 1. GRIEVANCE AND COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT AT WWF: AN OVERVIEW.<sup>9</sup>

We recognize the need for effective grievance and complaints channels to serve different stakeholder groups and address different types of complaints. Bringing that clarity into organizational structures and processes has been a focus of the last three years, specifically through:

- » Designing and implementing systems that communities and individuals impacted by WWF's place-based activities can use to raise grievances and seek resolution. Grievances are therefore a component of wider national-level complaints management and also, relate to WWF's compliance to its environmental and social safeguard requirements.
- » Ensuring that our staff understand the role of mechanisms established through the *Speak Up! core standard* – published in September 2020. Every office in the WWF Network must comply with the requirements of *Speak Up!*, structuring mechanisms that are appropriate to their specific operational context. Most mechanisms established via *Speak Up!* handle complaints from staff and external complaints that are not safeguard related. The revised 2023 *Safeguard on Grievance Mechanisms* specifies eight effectiveness criteria that need to be met: legitimacy, accessibility, predictability, equitability, transparent, rights-compatible, continuous learning, and dialogue and meaningful consultation. Databases and other tools to capture, track and escalate complaints are also subject to review.

## Implementation of the Safeguard on Grievance Mechanisms.<sup>10</sup>

The *Safeguard on Grievance Mechanisms* is applied in all cases, alongside the safeguards for *Process* and *Stakeholder Engagement*. In many cases, the existing mechanism established through *Speak Up!* may be sufficient to reach all parties that may be affected by WWF's place-based activities but where this is not the case, the *Safeguard on Grievance Mechanisms* requires assessment of other (third-party) grievance mechanisms accessible to potentially affected individuals and communities, and whether WWF or its partners should collaborate on their implementation. Where no systems are available or fit for purpose, a localised grievance mechanism must be designed to allow access for those who may be affected. Any grievance mechanism that WWF supports must meet the specified effectiveness criteria detailed in the *Safeguard on Grievance Mechanisms*.

These requirements reflect our learning from the first years of implementation under the 2019 version of the grievance mechanism safeguard, which specified that a landscape-level mechanism should be established for all landscapes considered high risk ("special consideration"). The revised (2023) safeguard recognizes that, while such a system may need to be established, there first needs to be a systematic review of existing mechanisms and the opportunities for affected individuals and stakeholder – and in turn WWF – to benefit from these before introducing further options.

Grievance mechanisms provide an avenue for WWF to hear the concerns of those who think they may have been impacted by our work and to appropriately respond to those concerns. Among others, these are critical elements of WWF's approach to implementing human rights-based conservation measures. As described in *Human Rights and the Environment Report - 2022*, where needed, the establishment of effective grievance mechanisms that can serve populations across a large geographic area is complex and expensive. The revised safeguard recognizes that a more effective and sustainable option may be to support existing mechanisms, including options to modify them (e.g., by funding their expansion to a wider area).

The *Safeguard on Grievance Mechanisms* is informed by the *UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights* (UNGP). The UNGP stipulates that institutions "are expected to establish or participate in effective grievance mechanisms for any individuals or communities adversely impacted by their operations". As such, WWF continues its efforts to ensure that communities have a method to raise concerns and for these to be systematically addressed.

WWF aims to regularly improve the delivery of its grievance mechanisms to make them more effective. This is in line with our effectiveness criteria, e.g., accessible to local communities, available in multiple languages, sustainable, etc. The definition of what constitutes 'effective' will vary based on the needs of the specific landscapes that WWF operates in.

<sup>9</sup> For WWF, "complaints" are suggestions and concerns raised by anyone about WWF and its work and "grievances" are concerns that come directly from people who feel they are being impacted by WWF's work, particularly related to the social and environmental risks covered by ESSF.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to distinguish between "complaints" and "grievances": For WWF, "complaints" are suggestions and concerns raised by anyone about WWF and its work. "Grievances" are concerns that come directly from people who feel they are being impacted by WWF's work, particularly related to the social and environmental risks covered by ESSF.



### Implementation of Speak Up! core standard.

In line with our [Speak Up! core standard](#), all WWF offices must provide access to channels for WWF staff and any associated third parties (including local communities) to report complaints. These channels should be trusted, effective, easy to access and in appropriate languages.

As of December 2023, all offices in the WWF Network have published a country-level complaints channel in line with the Speak Up! Core standard.

## 2. OPERATIONALIZING THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON.

**Developing the operating framework.** The Ombudsman spoke with, and listened to, a range of experts and partners, including grassroots communities, WWF staff and senior leadership, and civil society organisations. These conversations helped to inform the development of the Office of the Ombudsman's Operating Framework, which built on the initial vision while offering more specificity on how the new office would operate. It was also an opportunity to ensure that the model of accountability was fit for purpose and reflective of WWF's governance structure.

**Consultation process.** In September 2022, the Office of the Ombudsman commenced a consultation process on the proposed operating framework. This consultation process took place in two phases. The first phase focused on internal engagements with select WWF national organizations to discuss key implementation issues. This helped prepare for the broader internal engagement with the remaining WWF offices, external partners and local communities in phase two. The second phase opened the consultation to a wider targeted audience, including broader engagement with the WWF Network; external civil society organisations focusing on human rights, conservation and/or accountability, donors, and local communities. Feedback was collected via virtual discussions, email, a [publicly accessible online survey](#) and targeted community outreach activities. A total of 215 participants took part and their feedback was taken into account in revising the operating framework.

A final [operating framework](#) was approved by the International Board in March 2023, which:

- » Details the objectives and processes for effective problem-solving and outlines the ways in which the Office of the Ombudsman can support WWF through advisory services, including providing support to staff and management in strengthening the social and environmental impact of WWF activities, and assisting WWF to strengthen its local grievance systems.
- » Confirms WWF's commitment to firmly and proactively anchor and integrate human rights into conservation practices.
- » Provides a broad overview of the operational grievance mechanism infrastructure being established by WWF in terms of the ESSF, and positions the role of the Office of the Ombudsman in complementing those grievance mechanisms. It also confirms that the Office is a critical component of WWF's efforts to:
  - Strengthen its programmatic work through compliance with ESSF commitments;
  - Further strengthen its relationships with communities through stakeholder engagement;
  - Strengthen its institutional accountability in terms of the ESSF;
  - Improve the environmental and social outcomes of its work.
- » Clearly articulates the Office's mandate to:
  - Meaningfully and fairly address ESSF-related concerns brought to the Office of the Ombudsman relating to WWF activities;
  - Enhance the human rights, social and environmental performance of WWF activities by contributing toward institutional accountability for ESSF compliance;
  - Support the culture of continuous learning and strengthen WWF's collaborative problem-solving capabilities.
- » Identifies the principles that will govern the work of the Office of the Ombudsman, and specifies the governance obligations that will ensure it is able to function independently.



#### **Operationalizing the Office of the Ombudsperson.**

The Office of the Ombudsperson will be publicly launched in mid-2024. In October 2023, WWF initiated an open recruitment process for the next leader of the Office of the Ombudsperson as it moves into its new operational phase, with a strong focus on mediation and problem solving.

**Looking ahead.** The Office of the Ombudsperson will use an adaptive approach in implementing its mandate over two distinct phases. The first phase of operations will span up to two years with an evaluation at the end of this period, during which the Office of the Ombudsperson will:

- A.** Provide collaborative problem-solving in response to ESSF-related grievances about WWF activities, and develop related procedures where necessary.
- B.** Provide advisory services to WWF national organization boards and their offices.
- C.** Develop and propose to WWF national organization boards draft provisions to add to the operating framework that describe the support the Office of the Ombudsperson may offer WWF boards in conducting ESSF compliance assessments.

Furthermore, WWF is exploring with partner NGOs the possibility of sharing this function and collaborating on safeguarding.

As noted in the *Human Rights and the Environment Report - 2022*, a review that will assess the progress on the implementation of our *Management Response* will take place in 2024. This will be carried out by an external party.

#### **4. CONSERVATION QUALITY COMMITTEE.**

The Panel recommended that WWF “establish and implement human rights due diligence processes”.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, we created the Network Conservation Quality Committee (CQC) in February 2020 to holistically review risk in special consideration landscapes and review, advise, and sign off that adequate measures to mitigate all risks had been taken in these landscapes.

The CQC provides advice to the WWF Network on specific projects, and works to assure the NET that key project-related risks are being appropriately managed. It is the responsibility of the CQC to review, advise on, and assume risks of “special consideration” projects and landscapes based on adequate safeguard mitigation plans and/or broader risk mitigation measures to support successful implementation.

Following review, between 2020 - 2023 the CQC reviewed and endorsed risk mitigation frameworks for five “special consideration” landscapes in the Congo Basin, India and Nepal where allegations were raised.

#### **5. INCREASING INFLUENCE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ PERSPECTIVES IN WWF’S GOVERNANCE.**

**WWF International Board.** The Independent Panel recommended that the International Board “review its membership and ensure that at least one member is a representative of Indigenous peoples, and at least one member has expertise in human rights”.

In 2023, the WWF International Board appointed Professor Dr. Ramy Bulan as our new trustee. She is an eminent legal scholar on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and her work over the past 30 years has focused on access to justice for Indigenous Peoples, touching on customary land rights, native courts, alternative dispute resolution and restorative justice, Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous legal traditions, as well as forestry laws. Dr. Bulan is the first Indigenous Person and second human rights lawyer on the WWF International Board. Dr. Bulan is a Kelabit woman, belonging to an Indigenous People and highland community residing in the Malaysian part of Borneo in Sarawak.

**WWF national boards.** The participation of Indigenous Peoples as trustees on WWF national boards and advisory councils continues to increase. As at the end of 2023, 17 Indigenous and First Nations Peoples were trustees on eight WWF national office boards or advisory councils – and 18 in total across nine offices when including WWF International.

**Indigenous Peoples Consultative Group.** In July 2023, WWF agreed to establish an Indigenous Peoples Consultative Group (IPCG) with guidance from an Indigenous leader. The Terms of Reference (ToR) lay out the mandate of the group, which will serve as a regionally representative group working with WWF on key challenges and opportunities at the intersection of conservation and Indigenous Peoples’ rights and roles. The ToR will be discussed and finalized by participants at the group’s inaugural meeting, tentatively planned for May 2024. The IPCG will be composed of seven to

nine members, including representatives – individuals and or representatives of regional Indigenous Peoples’ groups – from Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Pacific, Arctic/Europe and North America. The process is expected to be finalized by April-May 2024.

#### **6. ENHANCING INCLUSIVENESS IN OUR PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS.**

##### **Developing guidance on inclusive conservation.**

WWF’s Governance Practice has been leading consultations within the WWF Network to develop a set of guiding principles on inclusive conservation, looking at WWF’s conservation narrative and practice through people-centred, equity and social justice lenses. Two online exchanges in late 2022 and in 2023 brought together almost 1,000 staff from more than 70 offices to reflect on the multiple ways WWF can employ and encourage inclusive approaches to conservation. Senior leaders met in Colombia in **January 2024** to confirm elements of consensus in our understanding of inclusive conservation and develop a Network support plan to be submitted to the Global Conservation Committee in early 2024.

##### **Advocacy for human rights-based approaches in global conventions.**

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework was historic for Indigenous Peoples’ rights, and gender and inter-generational equity. WWF actively engaged for this outcome, developing its first position on a rights-based approach in the Global Biodiversity Framework and advocating with multiple organisations through the human rights and biodiversity working group.

<sup>11</sup> Independent Panel Report, recommendation No. 5, pg. 18.



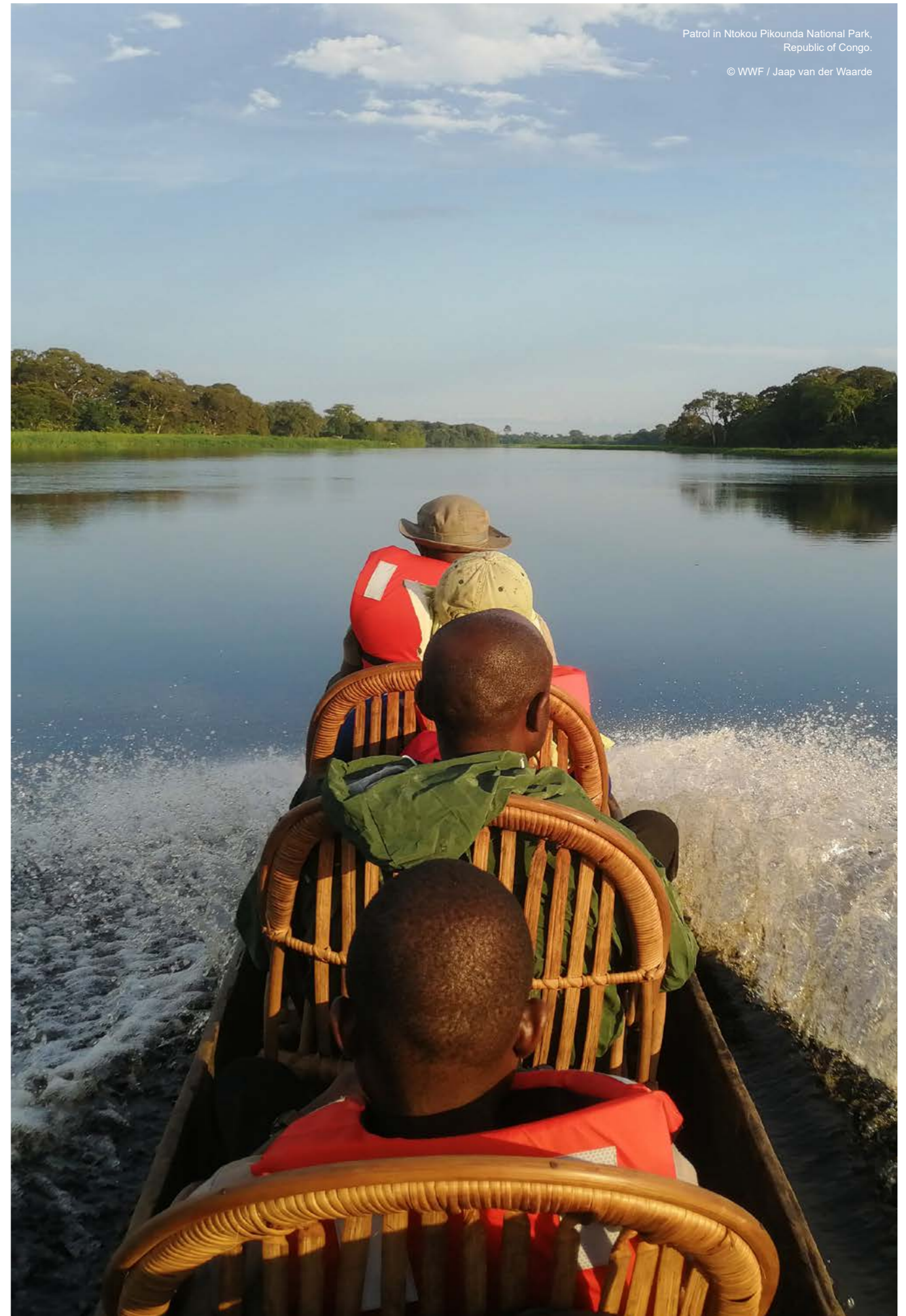
## 7. BUILDING HUMAN RIGHTS CAPACITY WITHIN THE WWF NETWORK.

Most recently we prioritised the development of the [Statement of Principles on Human Rights](#), which was approved by the WWF International Board in March 2023, which provides a foundation for assessing human rights capacity needs, with 10 clearly stated principles that apply to all of WWF's work. Alongside this, we continued work on the development of inclusive conservation principles, many of which are rights-based.

In the *Management Response* to the Independent Panel report we stated our intention to establish a human rights advisory group of external experts in order to advise on specific human rights positions or interpretations. We intentionally did not move ahead on this action while the Statement of Principles on Human Rights remained in draft. Now that it has been finalized, we are reviewing the priority needs for human rights capacity and expertise at multiple levels of the Network (see Section 1, Challenges and Lessons Learned). The option for a human rights advisory group will be discussed by senior leaders in early 2024 and if agreed as a priority, a terms of reference finalized and a candidate search commenced.

**Conservation Initiative on Human Rights (CIHR).**<sup>12</sup> In 2022, CIHR members recognized that the consortium has provided a positive, information-sharing and networking space for members. Based on emerging trends in the international conservation community and increasing calls for human rights protections, CIHR has identified gaps and opportunities to broaden the scope and engage in “external” conversations, collaborate on member organizations’ policy advocacy activities and position the CIHR as a key space for making human rights-focused change in the conservation system. The new strategic lines for CIHR in the coming years include: (i) increasing membership in the consortium to allow for more diverse learning and exchanges, (ii) fostering greater outreach and engagement with local and indigenous communities, and (iii) improving collective learning on environmental and social management frameworks and approaches to conservation.

<sup>12</sup> The CIHR was established in 2009 by eight international conservation organisations including WWF. Centred on four guiding principles, the CIHR has been a forum for discussion, with monthly meetings for members and, historically, in-person events and progress reporting.



Patrol in Ntokou Pikounda National Park, Republic of Congo.

© WWF / Jaap van der Waarde

## D. THIRD-PARTY ASSURANCE

WWF is committed to respecting and advocating for human rights, particularly those of Indigenous Peoples and local community stewards of sustainable development who may be impacted by our conservation efforts. Our work is guided by the fundamental principle that positive outcomes for both people and nature depend on firmly anchoring and integrating human rights into conservation practices. While the duty to protect human rights lies with governments, WWF recognizes that businesses and organizations, including our own, have a role and responsibility in contributing to positive human rights outcomes. Below is an overview of the progress we have made toward strengthening third-party assurance of human rights.

### 1. SHARING AFFIRMATIVE STATEMENTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS WITH GOVERNMENT PARTNERS.

In 2021, we shared our “Affirmative Statement on WWF’s Commitments to Human Rights” with our government partners in Cameroon, CAR, DRC, India, Nepal and the Republic of the Congo. In 2022, we identified seven additional countries (Indonesia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Zambia and Zimbabwe) as potentially “high-risk landscapes”; many of these are listed under the “fragile and conflict-affected situations” (FCS) list maintained by the World Bank. We shared our affirmative statement with four of those government partners: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In 2023, we shared our affirmative statement with our government partners in Mozambique and in Indonesia. We are coordinating with WWF-Myanmar to determine the best approach for sharing our affirmative statement with the government based on the complex situation in that country.

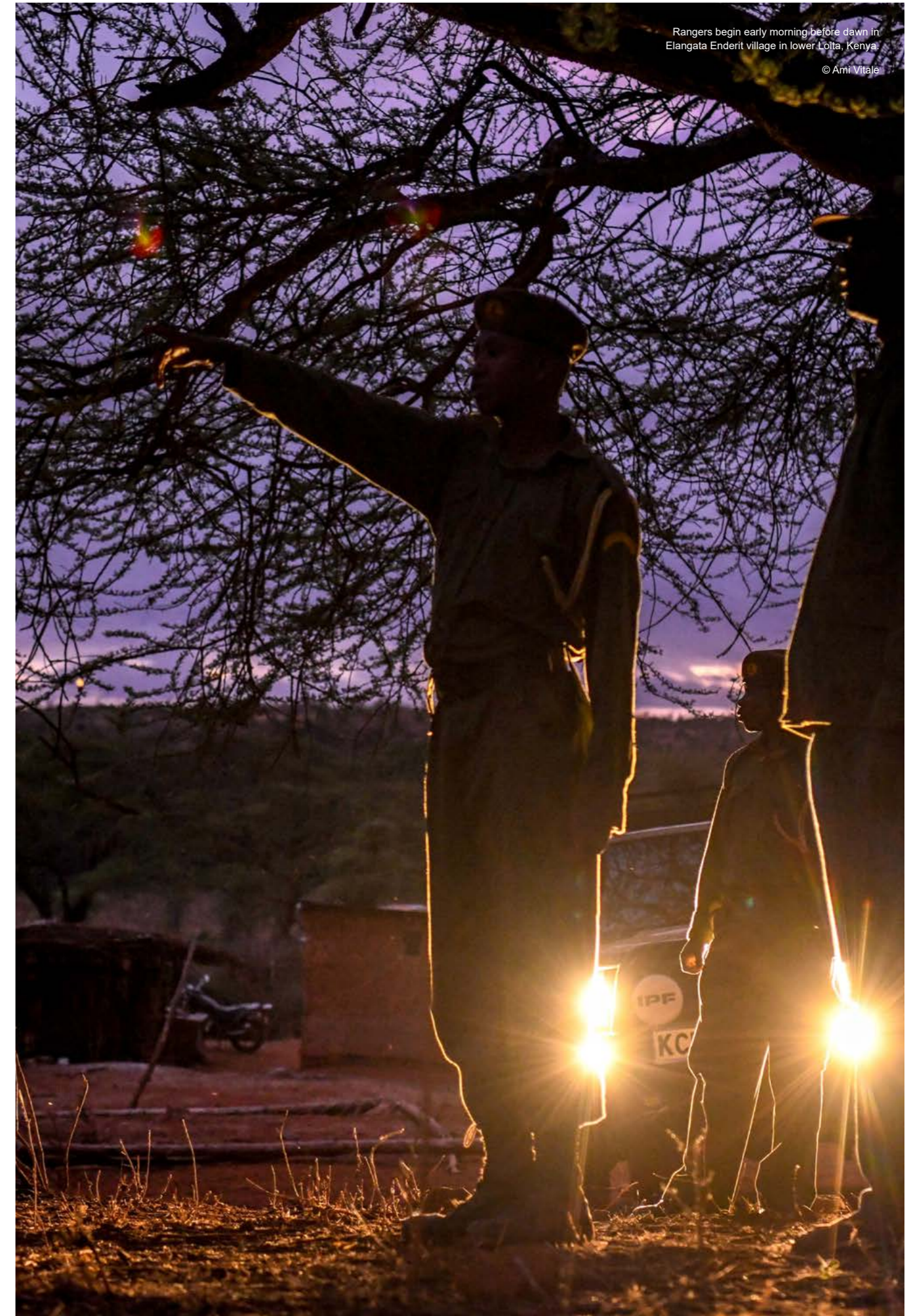
In 2023, we also adopted an “alert system” between the Conservation Quality Committee (CQC), and the legal departments of WWF International and WWF-US. Any time new countries are designated as “high risk” via the FCS list, this will trigger an automatic review and outreach process (as with the countries above) by our legal teams and in-country offices. If there is an agreement with the government, our affirmative statement will be provided, and if the agreement is up for renewal, WWF will negotiate the inclusion of appropriate human rights provisions as part of the new agreement.

### 2. UPDATING CONTRACTUAL CLAUSES TO FURTHER EMBED WWF’S HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITMENTS.

As detailed in the *Management Response*, WWF will include ESSF and human rights commitments in negotiations for new and renewed contracts with governments and other partners implementing area-based programmes. Our templates have been amended to reflect this and promote consistency.

In 2022, WWF drafted contractual clauses to be used across the WWF Network for all new project implementation agreements in place-based programmes. The clauses made clear that: (1) support for human rights as set forth in WWF’s ESSF is an integral part of our contractual agreements; (2) recipients of WWF funding must notify WWF of any credible allegations of human rights abuse related to the work and ensure their response complies with the ESSF; and (3) WWF can modify, suspend and/or ultimately terminate any of its activities or funding that, in its sole judgement, fail to comply with the ESSF. These clauses were drafted in consultation with an external human rights expert and other stakeholders.

In 2023, the language of the contractual clauses was finalized and approved through the action plan steering group. WWF International distributed the clause to all WWF offices, along with a Q&A guidance document that was developed in consultation with ESSF practitioners and other stakeholders. All offices have been requested to begin using the clauses from 01 July 2023, the date for implementation of the updated ESSF and the Statements of Principles. The WWF International legal department also coordinated a network-wide meeting with WWF legal counsels to help coordinate implementation of the clauses across the WWF Network. The new contractual clauses will ensure further consistency in our efforts to embed appropriate clauses on our ESSF and human rights commitments into contracts.



Rangers begin early morning before dawn in Elangata Enderit village in lower Loita, Kenya.  
© Ami Vitale

The rainforest canopy, Tambopata National Reserve in the Peruvian Amazon Basin, Peru.

© Day's Edge Productions / WWF-US

## SECTION 3: PROGRESS ON COUNTRY-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

*The Human Rights and the Environment Report - 2023* is an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come, what we have learned and what remains to be done. This section of the report will refer to each of our commitments at the country level, and provide an update on their implementation from January 2021 until December 2023. Country-level commitments are tailored to local contexts and reflect the specific recommendations of the Independent Panel and this section of the report, therefore, will vary slightly in structure from country to country.



## A. CAMEROON (BOUMBA BEK, NKI, LOBÉKÉ NATIONAL PARKS)

WWF has been active in Cameroon since the 1990s. The country is home to hundreds of ethnic groups, including some who self-identify as Indigenous Peoples and seek recognition of their way of life and their rights to the land and natural resources that they have stewarded for centuries. It is also globally outstanding for its biodiversity, including significant populations of elephants and great apes.

In 1994, the government of Cameroon mobilized international partners to help zone an area of 2.3 million hectares in south-eastern Cameroon as a priority site for conservation and development. In 1995, Cameroon created three provisional development and conservation zones, which later became the three national parks of Boumba Bek, Nki and Lobéké. Boumba Bek and Nki are on the Cameroonian side of Tri-National Dja-Odzala-Minkébé (TRIDOM) landscape and Lobéké is on the Cameroonian side of the Sangha Tri-National (TNS) transboundary conservation complex.

### REPORT BACK ON THE MANAGEMENT RESPONSE IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

In our *Management Response* implementation period – from January 2021 to December 2023 – our efforts focused on the following:

#### » Developing an overarching conservation strategy.

WWF's new strategic plan for Africa (2021-2025) outlines how we aim to meet people's needs while meeting the needs of nature. The Africa Strategy 2021-2025 is WWF's call to move beyond business as usual and seize this moment to strengthen the coexistence between people and the planet. It calls for creating shared spaces' to underpin environmental, economic and social sustainability. Building on WWF's work over the past 60 years, this strategy integrates our work in Africa across 14 countries, seven priority landscapes and a portfolio of regional programmes in a framework aligned to WWF's global goals.

In addition, WWF-Cameroon has its Country Strategy (2021-2025). A mid-term review was completed in 2023 and a revised Country Strategy will be available in 2024 for the 2025-2029 period.

WWF-Cameroon's socioeconomic strategy was finalized in August 2022, based on consultations with Indigenous Peoples and local community stewards of sustainable development in the landscapes where WWF operates. The strategy clearly defines our lines of intervention with Indigenous Peoples and local communities and specifies indicators of well-being.

It was developed in consultation with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and in coordination with other stakeholders within the WWF Network to ensure consistent and integrated implementation. In developing the strategy, riverside communities in WWF's intervention areas, local civil society organisations and the RACOPY Indigenous People's Network were consulted, among others.

#### » Supporting the development of a unified code of conduct and incentives for government rangers.

**Code of Conduct.** WWF engages with the government through the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF). WWF is supporting the ongoing efforts of a government working group in developing a unified and national code of conduct, including disciplinary consequences for government rangers, in alignment with WWF's standards, international norms and human rights commitments. On 28 March 2024, MINFOF adopted the 'Code of Ethics for Forestry Staff Posted in Protected Areas of the National Territory', signalling the national adoption of a code of conduct for rangers.

In addition, WWF and MINFOF have a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which was revised in 2021 to integrate provisions for human rights and respect for environmental and social safeguards – and includes ranger compliance with the code of conduct at the landscape level.

In Lobéké, where WWF has been actively involved, a code of conduct for rangers is in place. Throughout 2022, WWF and MINFOF engaged in a series of working groups to draft a code of conduct to be applied at a national level, based on the model being used in Lobéké. WWF has emphasized that appropriate safeguard measures must be included and implemented in all landscapes where WWF supports MINFOF, including in Boumba Bek and Nki. The code of conduct will apply to all protected areas across the country and is currently in the final stages of review, with the government's formal approval expected by mid 2024.

**Revised incentives for rangers.** The newly adopted national code of conduct for rangers includes a new classification of bonus structures, whereby bonus payments to rangers are based on adherence to the code of conduct, which includes respect for human rights, good conduct and good relations with communities. The proposed system would incentivize rangers to protect human rights while performing their conservation functions and to focus on the activities of major poaching syndicates instead of potentially minor legal infractions by local communities. WWF engaged with MINFOF in developing a revised bonus incentive system for government rangers that is applied under the code of conduct.

#### » MoU signing for Baka Indigenous community access rights.

In February 2022, the three-year MoU between the Baka<sup>13</sup> communities bordering Boumba Bek, Nki and Lobéké national parks – represented by the Baka association ASBABUK – and the government of Cameroon – represented by MINFOF – expired. The agreement stipulated free access by the Baka to the resources in the three national parks. Following stakeholder consultations and reviews, a renewed and improved agreement was signed in **September 2023**. A draft budget to facilitate MoU implementation has been developed and summarizes expected financial contributions from each stakeholder.

WWF supported the renewal of this agreement – noting the limitations of the previous version – and explored solutions with government, communities and civil society. We advocated for the recognition and protection of access rights and sought to use our influence to enable communities to shape this refreshed MoU. Throughout the negotiations, we used our agency with MINFOF to emphasize our interest in the MoU: WWF is a member of a consortium of civil society organizations that advocate for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The consortium supported ASBABUK's consultation with communities in the field and developed the draft MoU submitted to MINFOF.

In a bid to collect the views of Baka communities and produce a much-improved MoU that will meet the hopes and aspirations of local communities, a vast field consultation was carried out in June 2022 involving 88 Baka villages straddling the Boumba Bek, Nki, Lobéké national parks and the Ngoyla Wildlife Reserve. For further information on the Baka consultation process, refer to the [WWF-Cameroon update](#) from January 2023. The review also considered recommendations from an evaluation by the Forest Peoples Programme and the ExCities initiative, as well as from other evaluation reports.<sup>14</sup>

“The MoU is a reliable lever on which WWF must build over the next three years to help strengthen and restore the rights of Indigenous populations in Cameroon.”

<sup>13</sup> The BaMbenga, a group of forest peoples in Central Africa, is found west of the Oubangui River, straddling Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Gabon. This group includes the Ba'Aka (in northern Congo and in southwestern Central African Republic), the Baka (in southwestern Cameroon and northern Gabon) and several small groups in central Gabon.

<sup>14</sup> For further information on the role of WWF, stakeholder consultations and contents of the revised MoU, reference *Human Rights and the Environment Report - 2022*, page 18.

**Building trust and credibility with local communities.** The signing of the MoU between MINFOF and ASBABUK MoU in September 2023, is a historic achievement. Several Baka community representatives were present at the signing ceremony to facilitate the dissemination and awareness of the MoU. Having Baka community members present at the formal signing of the MoU meant they could testify to their communities that the MoU has been signed and access to the parks has been granted. The Baka communities have also received a copy of the signed MoU as evidence of adoption, in an effort to support building trust between the local communities and MINFOF.

» **Supporting grievance mechanisms and procedures.**

WWF is supporting landscape-level grievance mechanisms in Boumba Bek, Nki, Lobéké national parks in south-eastern Cameroon. As previously reported in the *Human Rights and the Environment Report - 2022*, the grievance mechanism has been operational through third-party administration in Boumba Bek and Nki, on the Cameroonian side of TRIDOM, since 2021, and in Lobéké, on the Cameroonian side of the TNS transboundary conservation complex, since 2017. The grievance mechanism has since been extended to the Campo Ma'an landscape, where it has been operational since December 2022. This is in addition to the [WWF-Cameroon country-level complaints channel](#), published on the WWF-Cameroon website in line with our Speak Up! core standard. WWF has been actively working to extend the coverage of grievance mechanisms across the landscapes where we work. This focuses on extending coverage across various axes, with each axis made up of various Indigenous Peoples and local community villages.<sup>15</sup>

WWF partners with other organizations to implement the grievance mechanisms, which are largely funded by WWF. The grievance mechanism is being coordinated by RACOPY and implemented through RACOPY member organizations. The mechanism developed by RACOPY has been endorsed by the Cameroon Human Rights Commission. In TRIDOM (Boumba Bek and Nki), the grievance mechanism is implemented by PERAD (*Organisation pour la protection de l'environnement, la recherche et l'appui au développement*). In Campo Ma'an, the grievance mechanism is implemented by CADER (*Centre d'appui au développement rural*), BACUDA (Bagyeli's Cultural and Development Association) and APED (*Organisation pour la protection de l'environnement, et l'Appui au développement*).<sup>16</sup>

To support the coordination of these grievance mechanisms and ensure they are implemented according to the agreed standards, RACOPY and the Cameroon

Human Rights Commission developed a review strategy. This includes a quarterly lessons-learned and experience exchange among RACOPY member organizations implementing a grievance mechanism on the ground, and a biannual mission to project site areas.

The first joint mission to TRIDOM (Boumba Bek and Nki) – attended by the Cameroon Human Rights Commission, RACOPY and WWF – took place in April 2023. The purpose of the mission was to inform actors about the grievance mechanisms, and to review and follow up on cases collected and managed by PERAD. It also identified capacity building requirements within PERAD, including the need to develop and manage a database of cases, for legal support to follow up cases in court, and for support to carry out our advocacy work. Following the joint missions and other evaluations, RACOPY will draw up a global capacity building plan for all RACOPY members implementing the grievance mechanism and will monitor its implementation. WWF ensures that grants to RACOPY to support the implementation of the grievance mechanism include provision for capacity building of RACOPY members. WWF also has a liaison role, putting RACOPY members implementing the grievance mechanism in touch with other organizations implementing similar initiatives to share their experiences. WWF is also working with RACOPY to mobilize additional funds to support the implementation of the grievance mechanism.

Joint missions continued throughout 2023 to the TNS (Lobéké) and Campo Ma'an landscapes. These missions included the review of cases, case follow-ups, and their escalation to the Human Rights Commission as required, as well as an identification of capacity-building needs. Joint missions are scheduled for June 2024 for the TRIDOM and Campo Ma'an sites and will follow the agreed methodology.

**Rapid response mechanisms.** In March 2021, a joint WWF-MINFOF mission to Lobéké took place to design a rapid response approach to ensure there is a proper investigation, disciplinary review and appropriate sanctions for human-rights-related issues. Following this joint mission, the rapid response mechanism was established. As part of the mechanism, a monitoring and supervision committee produces a monthly report to assess actions taken, which WWF and MINFOF subsequently review. Joint WWF-MINFOF missions occur annually, with the latest mission to Lobéké carried out in April 2023 and to Campo Ma'an in May 2023. This mission evaluated the progress of the implementation of recommendations of the 2021 joint missions. During this mission, rangers were sensitized that issues relating to human rights and administering corrective measures against any violations, are a priority for MINFOF.



<sup>15</sup> For example, in April 2023, the grievance mechanism in Campo Ma'an was extended along an additional axis (Kribi-Edéa), increasing the coverage of the grievance mechanism in the Kudu-Zombo landscape to three out of five axes. Similarly in TRIDOM, the mechanism has been extended to cover a new axis (Zoulabot – Messok), increasing the mechanism's coverage in TRIDOM to three out of seven axes.

<sup>16</sup> For a better coverage of the complaints mechanism in the Campo-Ma'an landscape around the Campo Ma'an national park, RACOPY members of this landscape divided the zones of implementation of the complaints mechanism into six great axes. CADER implements the complaints mechanism in two axes: AKOM II-Ma'an; BACUDA in two axes: Campo-Lokoundje; Cedla in the Zone of Niète; APED in the zone of Kribi-Bipindi-Edéa.

» **Improving ranger training and professionalization.**

**Ranger training on human rights.** WWF supports the government of Cameroon in carrying out conservation activities. The government manages the national parks and employs the rangers who patrol them, and WWF provides support for logistics, technical advice, financing and small-scale infrastructure projects. WWF also supports multi-stakeholder training and regular refresher courses for rangers on human rights and proper law enforcement procedures. This training is also available to Indigenous community members and community representatives.

Training on human rights is now embedded in established ways of working and takes place regularly, with two training sessions taking place in 2023. WWF collaborates with MINFOF on the training, with WWF being responsible for the logistics (including costs), organization and delivery of the training modules.

In addition to delivering regular training on human rights, WWF is working with MINFOF, the Human Rights Commission, the Cameroon Bar Association and the Ministry of Higher Education to develop a human rights training programme to be incorporated into the normal curriculum of forestry and wildlife colleges.

**Professionalization of the ranger workforce.**

WWF-Cameroon has also advocated for further measures to improve the professionalization of the ranger workforce, including promoting the **Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART)**. MINFOF has since formally adopted SMART and institutionalized it within its operations, evidenced by the production of a bi-annual SMART report. WWF reinforces the effective use of SMART by assessing the quality of its implementation in field programmes, including developing recommendations to improve surveillance activity and wildlife monitoring data collection. In addition, WWF supports an annual ranger training on SMART across all WWF-Cameroon intervention landscapes.

» **Improved collaboration with local communities and Indigenous Peoples.**

We have sought to systematically and meaningfully engage with communities. In the last three years, a

significant change in our work has been not only how frequently we engage with local stakeholders, but also *how*. We have sought to co-design our projects and programmes with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, implementing the perspectives and views of local partners.

We have had more frequent and direct engagement with communities in our conservation project areas, which has been prompted by the development and roll-out of the various tools and frameworks outlined above. For example, the development and implementation of environmental and social mitigation plans for our conservation programmes and the finalization of WWF-

**Supporting a system of mixed biomonitoring teams.** WWF has been engaging with Indigenous Peoples to co-design and co-implement conservation activities. WWF has supported co-implementation through a variety of avenues, one of which is facilitating a system of mixed biomonitoring teams and patrols that include local communities and Indigenous Peoples living in the periphery of the parks, including Bantu and Baka. There are Indigenous Peoples and local communities who are permanent and paid members of mixed biomonitoring teams across areas in the TRIDOM and TNS landscape. WWF continues to work to extend this system across key hotspots.

» **Reduction in known human rights violations.**

There has been a perceived reduction in the known number of human rights violations against communities in the places where WWF works. A perception survey conducted from June to August 2022, as part of the MoU revision process for MINFOF-ASBABUK, revealed that over 80% of the 88 Baka communities surveyed – that are living near the Boumba Bek, Nki, Lobéké national parks and the Ngoyla Wildlife Reserve – felt that ranger behaviour and means of engagement had changed positively. An analysis of data collected through the grievance mechanism between 2019 and 2023 on cases of human rights violations involving rangers in WWF's areas of intervention in TNS, TRIDOM and Campo Ma'an shows that allegations involving rangers have dropped from two to three cases per year to zero cases per year in 2023.

## CAMEROON - TESTIMONIAL

“Valuing the role of communities in the sustainable management of natural resources and strengthening their participation in related decision-making”. This is how we can summarize our engagement with stakeholders over the past three years in implementing the recommendations of the Independent Panel of experts.

The MINFOF-ASBABUK MoU for Baka communities' free access to resources in Lobéké, Nki and Boumba Bek national parks, the Ngoyla Wildlife Reserve and their peripheral zones for the exercise of their traditional activities, signed in 2019 and renewed in September 2023, is the materialization of this role that communities can play in the sustainable management of natural resources. The signing of these agreements between MINFOF and the Baka has enabled the Baka to reconnect with their culture and revive their dormant traditional knowledge.

The young Baka, had lost some of their traditional hunting, gathering and harvesting techniques, which form the very basis of their sustainable forest management. The implementation of the MoU enables to revive these practices. Sharing of experience between the communities enables the elders, who still master these techniques, to teach them to the younger ones. The MoU is therefore a reliable lever on which WWF must build over the next three years to help strengthen and restore the rights of Indigenous populations in Cameroon. Its implementation, coupled with other initiatives such as the mixed teamwork communities, rangers and WWF staff as part of bio-monitoring activities, and the implementation of the grievance redress mechanism, will contribute to improve relations with communities, and change the perception that communities have of conservation projects.

Moise Kono Bizdo  
Indigenous Peoples Officer WWF Cameroon







The Dzanga-Sangha Protected Areas (DSPA) complex is a 440,000 hectare protected and conserved area located in south-western Central African Republic (CAR), in the Yobé-Sangha prefecture. Established in 1990 by the CAR government with support from WWF, the DSPA encompasses a multi-use area, the Dzanga-Sangha Special Dense Forest Reserve and the Dzanga Ndoki National Park. Since 2012, the Sangha River Trinational Landscape has been a designated UNESCO World Heritage site. The DSPA is a stronghold of the critically endangered African forest elephant and other iconic and threatened wildlife, including the critically endangered western lowland gorilla.

For further information on WWF's historical involvement in CAR and the DSPA, and more recent socio-development support, please refer to the *Management Response and Human Rights and the Environment Report - 2022*.

## REPORT BACK ON THE MANAGEMENT RESPONSE IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

In our *Management Response* implementation period – from January 2021 to December 2023 – our efforts focused on the following:

### » Continuing to support the Human Rights Centre.

The Human Rights Centre has been present in Bayanga – the largest town in the region – since 2015, and is administered by an independent human rights organization, *Maison de l'Enfant et de la Femme Pygmées* (MEFP). WWF helped establish the centre and has provided technical assistance and funding. The centre works to ensure respect for human rights and provides legal and judicial support to victims of maltreatment and other abuses punishable by law in CAR.

The Independent Panel recommended that “WWF should continue to support the viability of the Human Rights Centre as an independent organization, ideally in a way that allows it to move beyond financial dependence on WWF”.<sup>17</sup> In our *Management Response*, we stated that our medium-term vision is to guarantee sustainable funding through the *Fondation Tri-Nationale de la Sangha* (FTNS) trust fund. Since 2022, the FTNS has agreed to include the running cost of the Human Rights Centre in its annual budget for DSPA on an ongoing basis, with circa US\$20,000 granted per year. Separately, in mid-2023, WWF signed an agreement with the European

Union, which will provide an additional €123,000 to the DSPA over the next three years. We expect this funding stream to continue over a longer period. Furthermore, additional technical support is anticipated to make the centre more effective by increasing its reporting and accounting capacities.

### » Partnering in ranger training.

WWF is committed to improving the ongoing human rights training it provides to rangers with the support of its safeguards experts and by employing good international practices. WWF has signed an agreement with *Chengeta Wildlife* to provide training and continuous mentoring to rangers in DSPA. Over the last three years, WWF has worked with *Chengeta Wildlife* to develop a training programme that includes human rights and Indigenous Peoples' rights and is inspired by WWF social policies. This training has been fully standardized and integrated into ranger training curricula, and is delivered regularly as a refresher module and to all recruits.

The training programme includes a guiding document titled '*Status of DSPA Ecoguards*', which facilitates training on human rights. The objectives of the document are to (a) specify the rules of conduct in matters of moral integrity and professional ethics; (b) help the rangers to respect the fundamental principles relating to respect for human rights as well as the rights of Indigenous Peoples or local communities; (c) encourage professional conscience and good management of the DSPA; and (d) fight against lack of adherence to values in socio-professional circles. The *Status of DSPA Ecoguards* was adopted in 2021 as an official document signed as a Ministerial Order and is a central component of ranger training.

The introduction of ranger training on human rights has led to the professionalization of anti-poaching efforts with no community complaints having been received regarding ranger conduct as of the time of publication. This reflects one of the greatest changes over the last three years in the DSPA. There is also now a distinct grievance management system where cases of abuse are raised and prosecuted as necessary, demonstrating that perpetrators will be held accountable by the justice system. The collaboration between the Ministry of Justice and WWF is ongoing in an effort to prevent potential future cases.

### » Supporting mechanisms for communities to raise grievances.

The grievance mechanism in DSPA has been operational since 2015 and is administered by a local partner. In 2020, a review of the then-existing grievance mechanism was conducted. The purpose of the review was to identify challenges and lessons learned, and provide recommendations for improvement. The review identified an absence of clear roles and responsibilities, with unclear ownership, mandate and roles across the grievance management and escalation process – and called for clear procedures and protocols.

The grievance management procedure that was subsequently developed seeks to address these concerns. An updated grievance management procedure was co-signed in November 2020 by the DSPA and representatives from both the surrounding villages and the Human Rights Centre. The updated procedure is now being implemented, with WWF collaborating with *Ndima Kali* – a local Indigenous Peoples organization – to create an educational film on the DSPA complaint mechanism as a part of its socialization process.

### » Improved collaboration with local communities and Indigenous Peoples.

WWF is committed to more meaningfully and systematically engaging with local communities and Indigenous Peoples in the design and implementation of our place-based work. Across all our offices we adhere to our *Safeguard on Stakeholder Engagement*, developing tailored engagement mechanisms that suit local contexts and environments.

In CAR, we have worked to establish a network of community focal points across the DSPA. A 'community focal point' is an elected community representative who acts as WWF's key point of contact. Currently, this programme is operational across 24 communities, effectively covering all of WWF's DSPA intervention areas.

**Community access rights and involvement in park governance.** When the DSPA was created, it was subdivided into several zones, including:

- The national park area, composed of two discontinuous segments: Dzanga and Ndoki
- The community hunting zone that separates the two segments of the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park
- The dense forest special reserve area, including logging, agriculture and residential areas.

DSPA has adopted a participatory approach, playing the role of facilitator in the negotiations to define these different areas. In this role, we face challenges and concerns raised by local communities who question some of the decisions – including around free access to resources within the national park, perceptions of preferential treatment and local community dynamics, and social demands for the creation of schools, healthcare services and income-generating activities. Despite these challenges, this initiative to divide Dzanga-Sangha into areas of specific interest corresponding to the needs of conservation and community development reflects the ethos of more inclusive conservation, which combines biodiversity conservation and meeting the livelihood needs of local communities.

The purpose of the community hunting zone is to allow space for Indigenous Peoples – the Ba'Aka – and local communities to continue to practise their customary hunting and gathering, economic and cultural activities. Over several years, WWF has worked with community focal points in defining the management and use of park resources. One example of this type of engagement is in

<sup>17</sup> Independent Panel Report – Recommendation 2, pg. 94

the development of a community hunting management plan, linked to the community hunting zone referenced above. The management plan includes a mapping of the community hunting zone across the DSPA and agrees on periods of access (e.g., hunting in the park being limited to six months of the year and agreeing on a community rota). The intention is that this plan will limit the amount of hunting taking place to reduce pressure on biodiversity, and also be a surveillance opportunity to report any unauthorized hunters or illegal activity to the DSPA. WWF's ambition is that the management plan will be adopted by the government in the near future.

It is important to note that since 2023, the “Comité de suivi” (monitoring committee), which functions like a board for DSPA and has decision-making power, and includes representatives of the local communities.

» **Ongoing collaboration with the Ministry of Justice.**

DSPA strengthened its cooperation with the CAR Ministry of Justice, to increase the understanding of environmental and social safeguards as a critical factor in social cohesion. This collaboration also offers an opportunity to solicit stronger support from the Ministry

of Justice for the care of victims of human rights violations and other injustices.

» **Ongoing support to civil society organizations in Bayanga.**

DSPA provides funding and technical support to civil society organizations in and around the DSPA. WWF has been supporting Ndima-Kali since 2016. Ndima-Kali started in 2012 as an initiative of Indigenous Ba'Aka youth in Sangha-Sangha and is the vehicle through which WWF engages with local Indigenous Peoples, including both indigenous groups, the Ba'Aka and Sangha-Sangha. Through Ndima-Kali, Indigenous Peoples can raise concerns with WWF and the DSPA. The **vision of the organization** is to encourage young Ba'Aka and Sangha-Sangha to celebrate their unique cultures, advocate for traditional knowledge, and fight against injustice and discrimination.

DSPA is also involved in **Radio Ndjoku**, a local radio station in Bayanga that broadcasts Ba'Aka music, to help support Indigenous culture throughout the area. In 2023, WWF secured funding for the continued support of these collaborations.

**CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC - TESTIMONIAL**

Since the creation of the Human Rights Centre and the establishment of the grievance management mechanism, the number of victims of abuse perpetrated by agents from the Dzanga-Sangha Protected Area has fallen significantly. The main lesson to be learned is that victims now know where to go to complain and get assistance. This was not the case before.

The recommendation to be made is to establish and strengthen collaborative relations with the Ministry of Justice, to ensure better handling of the abuse cases submitted to it.

The plan for the future is to continue to strengthen the technical capacity of the Human Rights Centre so that it will be able to fundraise by itself and become a real credible partner in CAR

Jean Bernard Yarrissem  
WWF-Central African Republic Country Director



A Ba'Aka Gorilla Habituation Staff member leading tourists through a bai (clearing) past buffalo and elephant, to find habituated western lowland gorillas, Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve, Central African Republic.

© Andy Isaacson / WWF-US

## CASE STUDY #2: CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC – BA’AKA BAND GIVES THE FOREST A VOICE

The Dzanga Sangha Protected Areas complex (DSPA) is the largest intact forest block in the Central African Republic. Today, the DSPA forms the core of the Sangha River Tri-national (TNS). Together with Lobéké National Park (Cameroon), and Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (Republic of Congo) and their respective buffer zones, the TNS forms an extensive trans-border conservation initiative, covering 17,000 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>18</sup> The DSPA was established in 1990 by the CAR government and WWF, and in 2019, WWF signed a formal co-management agreement. The original populations of the region are the Ba’Aka, an Indigenous hunter-gatherer people, and the Sangha-Sangha, fisherfolk by tradition. The ancient culture of the Ba’Aka is intimately connected to the forest with a reliance on forest resources for their livelihoods, and where the forest is an integral part of cultural expression and spirituality. A 2021 survey recorded around 30,000 people living in and around DSPA, with the majority of inhabitants originating from outside the area – the Ba’Aka make up around 30%. Although the Ba’Aka have lived in harmony with nature for generations, increasing pressure on the forest ecosystem – driven by weak governance, poverty, poaching and bushmeat hunting, logging and a growing human population – continues to threaten their cultural heritage.

WWF has been working with local partners to promote the rights and culture of Indigenous communities around DSPA. One such avenue is through providing financial support and technical assistance to the **Ndima-Kali** Association. Since 2012, Ndima-Kali – which consists of youth from Ba’Aka and Sangha Sangha villages in the reserve – has taken part in workshops, excursions and other activities to explore and document their intangible heritage. During these workshops, members also learn about national and international legislation concerning the civil and cultural rights of Indigenous peoples. This experience seeks to strengthen youth’s cultural self-esteem and commitment, and build confidence to promote their culture, which is intimately linked to the natural environment.

As part of this effort, a music group was formed, with the mission of “enlightening public opinion on the interest of the Ba’Aka communities in supporting and accompanying conservation efforts”. Kingo ya Ndima – meaning “voice of the forest” – is a traditional-modern Ba’Aka band, made up of Ba’Aka singers and dancers accompanied on modern instruments by Bantu musicians, all from the DSPA region.

The group gave its first performance in February 2022 at the Bayanga general education college with a

600-person audience, including the local administrative authorities. The following month, they held a performance attended by an audience of staff from the park authorities, WWF-CAR and WWF International. They have continued to tour villages in the area, with an estimated 3,000 people having attended the concerts.

In November 2022, the group went to Berberati to record six of its songs to be broadcast on Radio Ndjoku in Bayanga - closest major town near DSPA. Following the initial recording in Berberati, we invited a producer to travel to Bayanga for the second iteration of recordings, so as to include local instruments and voices (literally and figuratively). The recording and broadcasting of songs was a solution to some of the more logistical challenges of having the band travel across the Central Africa republic. The song titles reflect the singers’ intimate connection to the forest, including *Ndima Yesso* (“Our Forest”), *Ndima Bepa* (“The Forest is Being Spoilt”) and *Medwa na Ndima* (“We Are Going to the Forest”).

With the support of WWF, musical instruments and equipment have been purchased to support the group’s development, and a cultural centre is now being built in Bayanga. As well as offering a space to rehearse and safely store equipment, the centre will provide a base for DSPA’s Indigenous young people to promote their culture.



Listen to the band



© WWF-CAR

18 <https://dzanga-sangha.org/facts-infos/>

Butterflies on the forest floor, Salonga National Park, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

© Karine Aigner / WWF-US

## C. DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

(SALONGA NATIONAL PARK)

WWF has worked in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) since the early 1980s and has played an important role in the creation or management of several protected areas, including Kahuzi-Biega, Okapi Wildlife Reserve, Salonga and Virunga. WWF has been active in Salonga through a co-management agreement since 2016. We are currently working jointly with the *Institut congolais pour la conservation de la nature* (ICCN), or Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation, on the management of Salonga National Park and the establishment of the Salonga Foundation, which will manage and raise funds for the park in the future.

Salonga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site, lies at the heart of the central basin of the Congo River, in an area so remote that it can only be accessed by water or air. At 3.4 million hectares (about the size of Belgium), it is Africa's largest forested protected area. It stretches over four provinces of the DRC, namely Kasai, Mai Ndombe, Sankuru and Tshuapa. Salonga National Park and surrounding priority intervention areas of WWF and partners make up almost 9.5 million hectares and contain 778 villages as well as the urban centres of Boende, Dekesse, Kole, Lomela and Oshwé.

### REPORT BACK ON THE MANAGEMENT RESPONSE IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

In our *Management Response* implementation period – from January 2021 to December 2023 – our efforts focused on the following:

#### » **Renewing our agreement with ICCN.**

In 2021, WWF negotiated a new partnership agreement that met the conditions laid out in the *Management Response*. This includes that ICCN undertakes to ensure that all law enforcement operations and activities comply with WWF's Principles Regarding WWF's Support for Enforcement and Rangers, and that all law enforcement staff are trained to uphold human rights commitments and on relevant environmental and social safeguards, and that the conduct guide (see below) applies to all ICCN staff responsible for law enforcement. WWF's opposition to the resettlement of communities was also affirmed in the new ICCN-WWF partnership agreement. An ongoing challenge is linked to the changes in leadership at ICCN, with three directors-general in post over the past two years requiring WWF to remain adaptive and responsive to change.

#### » **Rolling out the conduct guide.**

As signalled in the *Management Response*, we co-developed with ICCN a conduct guide based on international norms for government rangers in Salonga. These served as the foundation for reviews and improvement of nationally agreed codes of conduct and procedures. The conduct guide for rangers has been in

use since December 2019, and all rangers now sign the code of conduct upon completion of their training cycle. Rangers are introduced to the code of conduct in the training they receive from a third party service provider, Chengeta Wildlife. A booklet titled '100 lines' – 50 lines on what to do and 50 lines on what not to do – has also been distributed and signed by all rangers. The booklet has been translated into Lingala, a Bantu language widely spoken in the DRC.

#### » **Advancing the professionalization of law enforcement.**

**Human rights training.** The training of rangers on human rights is an ongoing process that is delivered to recruits and in regular refresher training. In partnership with Chengeta Wildlife, over 160 rangers were trained on human rights, ethics, community engagement, first aid, conservation and other law enforcement themes between 2020 and 2022. Training sessions also offered the opportunity to provide rangers with a refresher on the SMART approach to community surveillance and monitoring. Training on human rights is an ongoing process and will continue in 2024 and beyond.

**Establishing a monitoring and response coordination headquarters in Salonga National Park.** WWF is supporting the construction of a ranger monitoring and response coordination headquarters in Monkoto, a village on the northern edge of the south block of Salonga National Park. Rangers operating in Salonga National Park are responsible for patrolling 3.6 million hectares of tropical rainforest – Africa's largest rainforest reserve. The monitoring and response coordination headquarters will provide a professional, secure and central location for rangers to carry out biomonitoring activities, including monitoring the movement of patrol teams and coordinating their activity and response. The establishment of this centre will also further enable the use of SMART and inREACH – a satellite community system. The use of SMART monitoring is ongoing at Salonga National Park. The construction of the headquarters is expected to be completed in March 2024.

In addition, the establishment of ranger stations throughout Salonga National Park is ongoing. There are currently six ranger stations in Salonga National Park reporting to the command centre, with plans for an additional 10 stations to be established.

#### » **Reinforcing grievance mechanisms in Salonga National Park.**

In 2021, WWF entered into a partnership with the local NGO *Juristes pour l'Environnement au Congo* (JUREC) to manage the grievance mechanism. WWF developed a framework for the grievance mechanism using best international practices (i.e., being a legitimate, accessible, predictable, equitable and transparent mechanism). In particular, the framework is designed to help ensure the grievance mechanism is based on engagement and dialogue, managed by an external organization not involved in the park management and implemented through community monitors.

As such, JUREC manages the grievance mechanism, maintaining a secure database where grievances are systematically recorded and managed. As per the agreed grievance management protocol, cases are, depending on the nature of the grievance, either handled locally or escalated to WWF and ICCN for further investigation and review. In some instances, we have struggled in gathering required information and this is a challenge we are committed to working through.

In addition to grievance management, JUREC is responsible for socializing the mechanism and facilitating access to the mechanism by all communities. Community outreach is ongoing. As of March 2024, 235 of 500 villages have been reached, with JUREC aiming to reach a total of 500 villages by December 2024.

In addition, WWF has been actively working to install additional VSAT satellite ground stations. As of 2023, there are seven VSATs installed that cover 125 villages, with WWF aiming to reach 500 villages by December 2024. This represents a 25% coverage of the park. This communication technology offers previously isolated communities an avenue to raise grievances and voice any concerns.

Grievance mechanisms are a fundamental pillar of [WWF's safeguard on Stakeholder Engagement](#), and they seek to provide a transparent and trusted avenue for individuals and communities who may be adversely impacted by conservation activities to voice their concerns and seek resolution. WWF supports JUREC by enhancing its operational capacity through equipment provision and providing organizational development support in administrative and financial management and strategic planning, and training on grievance mechanism management and data protection.

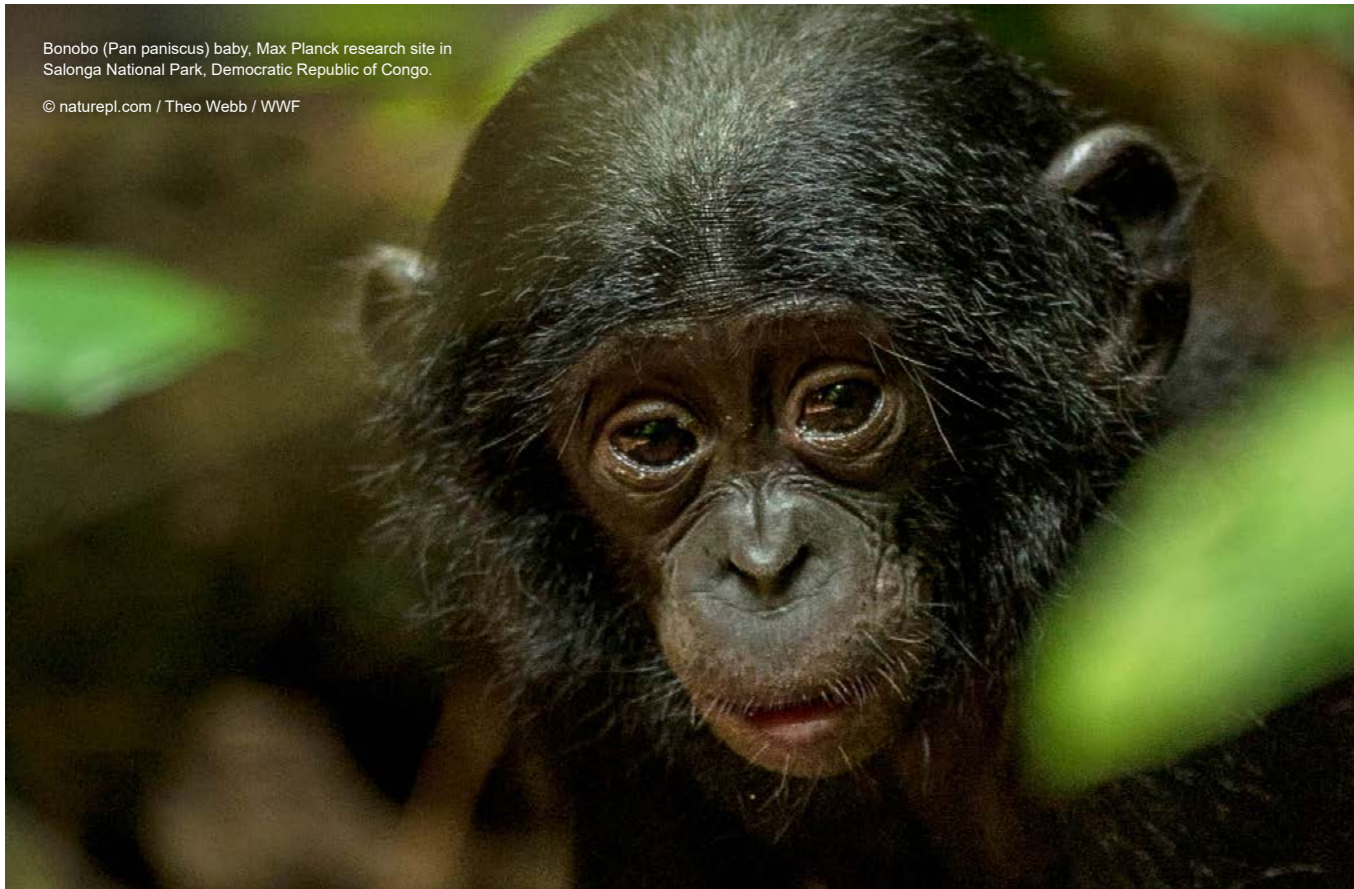
Appropriation of the mechanism by local communities for other purposes is evidenced by the types of grievances received, which are not only related to conservation but also reflect general community-related concerns such as complaints about the government, wildlife conflicts and issues between and among communities – over one-third of the complaints fall into this category. Awareness of these types of complaints will lead to wider improvements in governance, communication and accountability.

Through the Human Rights Due Diligence project (Ref. Case Study 2), WWF is working to reinforce grievance mechanisms in three pilot sites, including Salonga National Park.

In addition to the third-party-managed grievance mechanism in Salonga, ICCN has a dedicated unit embedded within its structure – *Cellule des droits humains* – that monitors and conducts field investigations on complaints against ICCN staff and rangers raised through the JUREC mechanism. In 2022, ICCN also formally adopted the "National Guidance on Complaint Management Mechanism for the Protected Areas" in the DRC, which was developed with the support of the German government and JUREC.

Bonobo (*Pan paniscus*) baby, Max Planck research site in Salonga National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo.

© naturepl.com / Theo Webb / WWF



#### » Increasing community participation.

In the last three years, WWF has adopted systematic measures to more frequently and meaningfully engage and collaborate with local communities and Indigenous Peoples. In addition to engagement with communities through our core standard on Stakeholder Engagement, one of these measures is through Site Coordination Committees (CoCoSi), instituted by ICCN, which is a consultation platform WWF uses to gather local perspectives and enable local involvement in Salonga National Park governance.

The latest ‘provincial CoCoSi’ was organized in Buende on 25 and 26 May 2023. Plans are ongoing to organize regional CoCoSi – four in total, for each of the relevant provinces. However, at the time of publication, only one provincial CoCoSi has taken place due to funding and logistical constraints. The dialogue continues with the Salonga Management Unit on opportunities for a more cost-effective participatory consultation framework to engage in dialogues with local communities.

#### » Advocating for community access rights to park resources.

In Salonga, WWF seeks to use its agency with ICCN to encourage the establishment of special provisions for Indigenous Peoples and local communities to access the park for sustainable use and subsistence activities.<sup>19</sup> In addition to opening this dialogue with ICCN, WWF is deploying various instruments to support community livelihoods, as detailed below.

**Community forest concessions.** WWF is seeking to influence the planning and zoning of areas in and around Salonga National Park for community access and use. As a part of this work, WWF supports local communities through the establishment of community forest concessions that reflect customary rights and accommodate needs and asks based on local contexts.

There are currently six community forest concessions established in Salonga National Park. In 2023, WWF received funding for this programme and will use these funds to strengthen existing concessions and establish an additional four.

**Alternative livelihoods.** With the support of USAID, WWF is working to socialize options and opportunities for alternative livelihoods, such as agroforestry, coffee, lima, rubber and manioc plantations. This is part of an effort to support community-led models for development and land use management that improve the livelihoods of local communities while also contributing to the conservation of Salonga National Park. To date, WWF has engaged with over 2,000 people across the Salonga landscape and shared information with over 30 schools.

## DRC TESTIMONIAL

“We are witnessing a great change in the rangers’ behaviour towards us”, declared a member of the Indigenous People in a group meeting during my visit to Salonga. We will continue our efforts to strongly anchor rights-based law enforcement practice across the Salonga National Park and to set up a strong justice access mechanism for all vulnerable people.”

Yaouba Kaigama, Country Director, WWF-DRC

“In the past, all problems resulted in arrests and other concerns for communities. Today, things have changed, since in case of doubts, we have a place where we can be listened to, and I have seen eco-guards get arrested. This was not the case in the past.”

Chief of the Nkole-Lokolo (Bianga sector)  
Traditional Chief, Donatien Lokoku Lokandjola. ▶



#### » Supporting the protection and promotion of Indigenous Peoples’ rights in the DRC.

In 2022, the President of the DRC signed and promulgated Law n° 22/030 in favour of the “Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples – Pygmy Peoples”. This historic law – the result of 14 years of work by WWF and partners – is the DRC’s first-ever legislation to formally recognize and safeguard the rights (particularly land rights) of Indigenous Peoples. It is expected to have a **lasting effect** on improving their land tenure security and livelihoods.

WWF was involved throughout the various stages that led to the **promulgation of the law**. WWF worked with partners to engage with political, administrative and legal committees from the National Assembly and the Senate to push for its adoption.

Through the “Human Rights Due Diligence” project outlined above, WWF participated in consultations with the Ministry of Home Affairs, the General Secretariat for Customary Affairs, and other partners to support the definition of a roadmap to implement the new law. The roadmap includes a dissemination, awareness raising and training campaign and recommended measures for its effective application – namely, the roadmap details methods for the promotion of Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge (e.g., through mapping Indigenous Peoples’ lands and forests), delivery of socioeconomic development plans, and the monitoring of instances of human rights abuses affecting Indigenous Peoples. WWF will support the delivery of this roadmap.

#### » Ensuring the long-term sustainability of Salonga National Park.

In 2023, ICCN and WWF launched a consultation to investigate foundation models for park governance and to draft a plan to establish a Salonga Foundation, which will assume responsibility for all aspects of park operations including governance, fundraising and partner engagement.

Establishing and delivering on the vision of the Salonga Foundation aims to raise the park’s profile and attract funders. It is expected that establishing the foundation will enable the park to achieve international standards of protection and management by securing long-term partnerships with technical experts, local and international NGOs, and community leaders. It is also expected that the Salonga Foundation will help strengthen the involvement of local communities and Indigenous Peoples as well as women in the governance and oversight of the park.

Currently, WWF operates with ICCN under the Salonga National Park Programme, which is a five-year vision – developed in 2023 – that aligns with WWF’s vision and strategy for the park. The Salonga National Park Management Unit developed the US\$50 million Salonga Programme roadmap, which includes specific budget lines for human rights and inclusivity (e.g., the hiring of a human rights manager, costs for CoCoSi meetings, the Chengeta Wildlife partnerships, etc.).

19 DRC law stipulates that national parks cannot be accessed for consumptive use.

## CASE STUDY #3: DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, CAMEROON, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC – PROMOTING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ RIGHTS IN THE CONGO BASIN

Humans have inhabited the forests of the Congo Basin for well over 50,000 years. Today the region is home to around 150 distinct ethnic groups such as the Baka, hunter-gatherers whose ancient culture is inseparable from the forest.

Instead of being recognised as custodians of the forest, however, Indigenous Peoples and local communities have historically been excluded from conservation efforts. Protected areas in the region were established without their consent or involvement, depriving communities like the Baka of their customary lands and resources. Resource extraction, land-use change and a population influx further threaten their way of life.

The project “*Human Rights Due Diligence in the Congo Basin - Strengthening the Rights of Indigenous and Local Communities in and around Protected Areas, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Central African Republic*” was launched in December 2020, following allegations of human rights violations by government park rangers. Coordinated by WWF-DRC, it seeks to build on an initiative launched in Dzanga Sangha in the Central Africa Republic (CAR) in 2015 and promote a new model of inclusive conservation in the Congo Basin by promoting the rights and participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The project focuses on three World

Heritage sites where WWF is active: Salonga National Park in the DRC, Lobéké National Park in Cameroon and Dzanga Sangha in CAR.

In each site, the project has supported local partners to establish and manage independent grievance mechanisms. These are now operational, and provide models that can be used in other protected areas in the region. The project has also focused on strengthening the capacity of local civil society organisations that work with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, to provide training and technical support in areas such as administrative and financial management, grant applications, project management and advocacy. Our key partners working on the implementation of grievance mechanisms are CEFAID in Cameroon, JUREC in DRC and MEFP in CAR.

At the national level, the project advocates for stronger legal and policy frameworks to protect and promote the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. This has contributed to progress in each country. In the DRC, we have contributed to the collective efforts with a large spectrum of stakeholders and provided technical assistance to political, administrative and legal commissions in the National Assembly and Senate in reviewing and adopting a new law on Indigenous rights that was passed in 2022. In Cameroon, we worked with the

Ministry of Social Affairs to renew the country’s three-year action plan for protecting and promoting Indigenous peoples’ rights, while in CAR we have been active in the process of setting up a government agency for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. National consultations were presented with a roadmap to stakeholders in November 2023 for validation and conclusions on the best way forward to further advance the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in CAR.

The project also works to improve regional coordination between organisations working in this area, to share experiences and learning, and ensure national and regional efforts reflect realities on the ground. A regional evaluation on grievance mechanisms in support of Indigenous Peoples and local communities living in and around protected areas is underway with the objective to improve their effectiveness and to develop a regional reference guide for the Congo basin region. To support this, we have partnered with two regional Indigenous Peoples’ networks, **REPALEAC** and **IPAAC**. Best practices from the project have been shared at various regional and international meetings, including the UN Climate COP27 in Sharm El Sheik and the Convention on Biological Diversity COP15 in Kunming-Montreal.



Michele Walo, Village Monitor with The Human Rights Centre (“Centre des droits de l’homme”), based in Bayanga, Central African Republic.

© Andy Isaacson / WWF-US



Michel Gounda, Deputy Director at the Human Rights Centre (“Centre des droits de l’homme”), in Bayanga, Central African Republic.

© Andy Isaacson / WWF-US



Sensitization meeting with the PAs of Bongale III village, Boangi sector in Monkoto Territory.

© WWF DRC



# D. REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

(MESSOK DJA)

*Espace TRIDOM Interzone Congo (ETIC)* is a conservation programme of the Ministry of Forest Economy (MEF) and WWF that covers 2.1 million hectares in the northern part of the Republic of the Congo (ROC) on the border with Cameroon. Messok Dja is part of the Tri-National Dja-Odzala-Minkebe (TRIDOM) landscape, which is one of the most intact forest blocks remaining in the Congo Basin. The region is home to the largest elephant population in the Congo Basin, western gorillas and chimpanzees, 11 species of monkeys, three species of pangolin, the endangered African grey parrot, the enigmatic picatharte (rock-fowl) and the majestic crowned eagle.

Alongside this incredible wildlife, Messok Dja is also home to about 8,000 inhabitants, of which approximately 300 (3-4%) are Indigenous Baka, living in villages that dot the meandering roads alongside the forest. People here, especially the Baka, depend primarily on the nature surrounding them for their lives and livelihoods.

In this context, WWF is working with local communities and stakeholders in the ROC to help ensure the protection and sustainability of Messok Dja's forests with the support and participation of all those who depend upon it for their livelihoods.

The government is proposing to designate Messok Dja as a protected area. In this process, WWF has been focusing its efforts on collaborating with local communities to engage in the process, to ultimately strengthen conservation outcomes. We aim to ensure that the Indigenous inhabitants can give their free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) before a protected area is designated, and our aim is that the FPIC process will lead to an agreement that allows for the effective inclusion of communities in protected area management.

## REPORT BACK ON THE MANAGEMENT RESPONSE IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

In our *Management Response* implementation period – from January 2021 to December 2023 – our efforts focused on the following:

### » Establishing a country office presence and building our capacity.

In the past three years, our priority has been establishing a country office presence, which was officially granted by the Ministry of the Interior, Decentralization and Local Development in August 2023. WWF is now legally registered in the ROC.

Currently, WWF is migrating all its processes and contracts in the ROC into the new structure. The next phase will include negotiations with the government to establish a Country Agreement (“Accord de siège”), which will create additional operational benefits and further strengthen the position of WWF in the country.

In addition, since the establishment of our country office presence (called WWF-ROC) was granted, it has been focused on building local capacity. Over the last year, WWF-ROC has hired a country coordinator and a country conservation manager. This new management team is leading the implementation of the Independent Panel’s recommendations, working closely with the project-site teams and regional leadership, and, with the WWF Network, continuing to provide technical and financial assistance.

WWF’s presence in the ROC is a foundation upon which to strengthen our capacity in the country. For local administrative reasons outlined below, a period of staff turnover and a hiring freeze was necessary before renewing our efforts to put in place our team. While the office registration remained pending, our capacity to hire staff was limited and we were unable to renew contracts of key field staff who were implementing engagement programmes with Indigenous Peoples, communication and safeguards. Our unregistered status also limited our ability to fundraise for investments in basic services, support to the multi-stakeholder platforms and law enforcement, and other programmes. With the WWF-ROC registration having since been granted, we expect to reach full capacity and bolster our delivery in 2024 and beyond.

### » Increasing community and Indigenous Peoples participation.

While WWF-ROC office registration was pending, WWF continued to deliver on its conservation efforts where and how we could. A central part of our conservation is leveraging the knowledge, opinions and practices of local communities and Indigenous Peoples, to ensure that efforts are tailored, place-based and do no harm – in line with our ESSF and Statement of Principles.

In ETIC, since 2019, WWF has established a multi-stakeholder platform for natural resource management as a method of engagement to share resources and collaborate with local stakeholders. The multi-stakeholder platform is composed of local communities, Indigenous Peoples, members of the private sector and government representatives. The platform decides on activities and implements them with the support of the community team of the ETIC programme, of which WWF is a part, and also includes a community-led complaints and grievance system. The platform has several working groups dealing with specific issues, including a working group focusing on women and Indigenous Peoples, typically lesser-heard voices in governance bodies. The platform provides advice to the ETIC programme and is involved in strategic planning. For example, we presented the Independent Panel report and its recommendations to the platform, and members made suggestions on how ETIC could implement the recommendations.

### » Supporting mechanisms for communities to raise grievances.

Grievance mechanisms were put in place in the ETIC in 2017 and are open to anybody, designed to respect confidentiality if requested, and can receive complaints in any official ROC language or the native language of the affected party. Implementation of the ETIC grievance mechanism shifted to the local multi-stakeholder platform – consisting of representatives from Indigenous Peoples and local community stewards of sustainable development, local authorities, local associations, etc. – when it was formed in 2017.

Due to the pending establishment of our country office and related challenges, the ETIC multi-stakeholder platform operated less effectively in the last two years due to capacity and funding gaps. An ESSF Coordinator

was recruited in July 2020 to support the implementation of the grievance mechanism; however, because labour laws prevented us from offering employment contracts without a legal presence in the ROC, their contract could not be renewed beyond the two-year limit in July 2022. Once our office registration was granted, a new ESSF Coordinator was recruited in May 2023.

Despite the financial challenges between 2020 and 2022, WWF-ROC has worked on improving the ETIC grievance mechanism to align it with the requirements of the revised ESSF as well as other international good practices such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. In April 2023, the WWF Regional ESSF Head supported WWF-ROC in updating the grievance mechanism, including the protocol and procedures, new templates and clear guidelines on the process, with clear responsibilities established from the field staff to the Country Director. It was concluded that the current grievance mechanism is effectively managed by the platform.

For further insights into the management of complaints through the multi-stakeholder platform, refer to the [Human Rights and the Environment Report - 2022](#) (pg. 64) and this [short video](#).

In addition, WWF continues to participate in the ETIC disciplinary committee. However, there has been no need for a disciplinary board session as no cases of misconduct have been reported.

### » Implementing our environmental and social safeguards in ETIC.

An external consultant was recruited to complete an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) of the WWF programme in ETIC. This ESIA was used as the foundation for the consultant to develop an Environmental and Social Risk Mitigation Framework (ESMF) which describes the safeguards WWF needs to put in place to reduce risks related to our programmes to acceptable levels. Following a risk review, this ESMF is now in place. Feedback from stakeholders on the engagement by WWF in general is positive and the number of complaints received by the multi-stakeholder platform has declined, apart from complaints about elephants.

### » Advancing the professionalization of law enforcement.

**Ranger training.** WWF-ROC has continued to provide input into the design of the national training curriculum for rangers on human rights, ethics, criminal procedures and gender issues.

WWF-ROC has drafted a training guide on human rights compliance and a code of conduct for wildlife law enforcement officers and rangers. The final draft of the training guide was submitted in late 2021 to the government and the National Human Rights Commission for their review and validation. Once validated, this guide will be used country-wide to orient and harmonize training modules on codes of conduct and human rights for rangers and other personnel involved in wildlife

law enforcement. Unfortunately, feedback on the draft document has yet to be received.

WWF also supports the government in ETIC in anti-poaching efforts, including efforts to train and retrain rangers on human rights obligations as codified in Congolese law. As reported last year, a total of 45 rangers from ETIC, jointly with rangers from Ntokou-Pikounda National Park (NPNP), received human rights, ethics and compliance training in 2022. Ongoing refresher training has also taken place, with two refresher and update training sessions focusing on human rights in conservation law enforcement provided to NPNP and ETIC rangers in June 2023.

**Code of conduct.** In October 2018, the ETIC programme developed a code of conduct for rangers, which is being drawn upon by MEF to develop a national code of conduct for rangers throughout the ROC. While waiting for the government to formally approve and adopt the national code of conduct,

ETIC integrated the key elements into its internal regulations, which have been in force since July 2020.

The ETIC code of conduct includes guidance on the prevention of misconduct, corruption and discrimination, ensuring ethical behaviour, local community engagement, and respect for Indigenous rights and human rights. Breaches are grounds for disciplinary action, including dismissal, which is the responsibility of the ETIC disciplinary committee, of which WWF is a standing member.

In October 2022, we joined other international NGOs based in the ROC, including African Parks Network, the Wildlife Conservation Society and Noé Conservation, to offer our support in finalizing and implementing the national code of conduct. In a joint letter on 12 May 2023, we expressed our availability to create a working group to support MEF and the Congolese Agency for Wildlife and Protected Areas (ACFAP). No feedback had been received from ACFAP by the time of publication.

#### » Revising the MoUs between WWF and the government of the ROC.

**Country Agreement.** In November 2022, a new cooperation agreement was signed between the ROC government (MEF) and WWF-ROC against the backdrop of the UN COP27 climate change conference. Since then, WWF's country office presence was officially granted by the Ministry of the Interior, Decentralization and Local Development in August 2023. The next phase will include negotiations with the government to establish a Country Agreement ("*Accord de siège*"), which will create additional operational benefits and further strengthen the position of WWF in the country.

**ETIC MOU.** WWF and MEF signed a new cooperation agreement in November 2022 defining the principles, obligations, and terms and conditions which will apply to all their joint activities, projects and partnerships, including the ETIC MoU.

The ETIC MoU was extended by one year to allow for an agreed joint evaluation and WWF is currently operating on the basis of this extension until the new agreement is signed. A joint MEF and WWF review and revision process of the ETIC MoU took place in June 2023, which concluded positively, with both parties expressing their interest in renewing the MoU. WWF has drafted a revised MoU, which will be reviewed by MEF and WWF

in early 2024. The ETIC MoU is expected to be signed by MEF and WWF in mid-2024 and will include WWF's safeguards and human rights commitments.

#### » Our work in Ntokou-Pikounda National Park

Ntokou-Pikounda National Park (NPNP) was created in 2013 by the government of the ROC, with support from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). Located within the Tri-National Dja-Odzala-Minkébé (TRIDOM) transborder forest, NPNP is one of the most significant biodiverse areas in the Congo Basin and covers 4,572 km<sup>2</sup> of forests and swamps. It is part of the Central Congo peatlands, which are amongst the most carbon-dense ecosystems on Earth.

In November 2017, WWF International entered into a partnership for the co-management of NPNP with the ROC government through the MEF. WWF is responsible for leading the conservation strategy within the park, including capacity building for government rangers, biological research and natural resource management. WWF supports the implementation of conservation and the responsible use of natural resources, including biological research and support for community management of development activities for the benefit of local people. WWF also provides logistical, financial and technical support to MEF and ACFAP for anti-poaching efforts, as well as technical and financial support for the human rights training provided to park rangers. In February 2024, a summary of conclusions was published from a fact-finding mission, jointly commissioned by WWF and the government of the ROC, into alleged incidents of serious misconduct by rangers based in and outside the NPNP raised by local civil society organization, *Centre d'Actions pour le Développement* (CAD). The report documents the conclusions of this fact finding, recommendations to WWF, the government and NPNP management, together with follow-up actions to be taken by the respective parties, including by the government under whose management rangers are placed. This report also provides a brief contextual overview of the park itself, including the roles and responsibilities which are assumed by WWF and the government.

For further information on our work in NPNP, biodiversity significance, complexities and challenges, and our approach in practice, refer to WWF's description of [Protected and Conserved Areas](#).



A Baka settlement near Messok-Dja National Park.  
© Daniel Nelson



Animals graze at sunset in the Kaziranga National Park, Assam, India.

© Karl Egloff / WWF-US

## E. INDIA (KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK)

The Kaziranga Karbi Anglong landscape (KKL) is located in the state of Assam in north-eastern India. The landscape covers an area of about 2.5 million hectares, including a national park and a tiger reserve (Kaziranga), nine wildlife sanctuaries and two elephant reserves, along with numerous forest reserves and district council reserve forests. WWF-India has been working in this landscape since 2004 to secure landscape connectivity for wildlife.

### REPORT BACK ON THE MANAGEMENT RESPONSE IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

In our *Management Response* implementation period – from January 2021 to December 2023 – our efforts focused on the following:

#### » Mainstreaming human rights training.

WWF-India collaborates with the National Tiger Conservation Authority, the government of India, state forest and wildlife departments, and the Global Tiger Forum to inform and influence the training curriculum for rangers in India. Regional consultations have been held with staff at all levels in the state forest departments and the relevant central government authorities. There was an overall consensus that an orientation/training on human rights should be included in the training curriculum for rangers.

Simultaneously, human rights training modules have been developed and tested with several forest department staff at multiple levels, including in some key landscapes, to gain buy-in for incorporating human rights modules in the curricula. The four modules are titled: Introduction to Human Rights, Understanding Basic Concepts of Human Rights, Human Rights and its linkages to Environment, and Conservation and Implementing Human Rights. For this purpose, we hired a legal firm, which developed a detailed background reader on *Human Rights in Conservation*. This includes a resource primer, relevant provisions of the Indian constitution, and national laws and policies.

The intention is to develop a human rights training presentation and dedicated module that will be delivered to forest department staff. These training modules are currently being refined and WWF-India hosted a session at the International Ranger Federation workshop in November 2023 in Guwahati, India to test and obtain feedback on the human rights training modules. The session also raised queries and suggestions from rangers, which are being incorporated in the training manual. Ultimately, the aim is for human rights modules to be embedded into the ranger training course in training institutes across India.

A training manual on “Gender Mainstreaming in Biodiversity Conservation” has also been developed. It is being field tested with WWF-India staff and partners. It was shared with the Governance Practice and select ESSF practitioners for feedback and use in December 2023.

#### » Continuing the roll-out of the grievance redressal process.

The grievance redressal process is a system that WWF-India has set up in line with the core [Safeguard on Grievance Mechanisms](#) to resolve any grievances from the communities with which we work. The grievance redressal process has been established and translated into 12 languages and rolled out in villages around Kaziranga. It has been well received by both tribal and non-tribal communities.

WWF-India has also collated and put into locally accessible formats information on the different levels of government grievance mechanisms in the districts where we work. Government grievance redressal mechanisms were compiled for over 100 districts across 15 states and one union territory, by April 2022, covering all landscapes and place-based programmes where WWF-India works. These are periodically updated as needed.

Translations of the complaint templates and the revised safeguards are ongoing. It has been difficult to develop translations, especially in tribal languages like Karbi. This is because translators for tribal languages are not easy to find, and it can be difficult to create a diction that is simultaneously colloquial, simple and accurately reflects the original intent. Most translations are completed by a professional and vetted by a member of the WWF team; however, in some instances, WWF collaborates with local Indigenous groups to translate the content.

In addition, an internal mechanism has been established to enable WWF-India to raise concerns and communicate externally (as appropriate) on alleged human rights abuses related to our government partners in the landscapes where we work, especially the Forest Department. Colleagues operating in WWF landscapes have been asked to assess the situation and inform the WWF India Secretariat about any red flags. The Secretariat then determines whether concerns should be escalated to the government, protected area managers and/or NGO partners. With this mechanism, a close watch is being kept, as needed, in our landscapes.

WWF-India is committed to embedding human rights in its work. While the grievance redressal efforts of the last three years focused on one landscape, it has helped WWF-India establish a process for communities to formally reach out and raise their concerns, as well as strengthened WWF-India’s processes for documenting work with communities. Setting up the grievance redressal process was a new initiative for WWF-India and has supported its efforts to establish credibility with community partners. So far, WWF-India has not received any serious grievances but when (and if) these arrive, this will further test WWF-India’s commitment to ensure that inclusive conservation drives its work.

#### » Supporting recognition of tenurial rights.

WWF-India’s conservation programme includes field projects, campaigning and policy work, education and outreach, research and networking. WWF-India engages with local communities and this engagement deepened in the early 2000s with the initiation of larger, more complex landscape-scale conservation programmes. The role and involvement of local communities in conservation is diverse and depends on a range of social, economic, ecological and political factors.

Since 2007, we have been working with Indigenous Peoples and local communities to support sustainable use of resources and, where possible, towards the formal recognition of their tenurial rights. A range of approaches are used to engage with tribal and local communities, including:

- Designing and implementing sustainable livelihood initiatives with communities to enhance incomes and diversify livelihoods while reducing pressure on natural resources.
- Using enabling policy to help communities secure rights over forests and natural resources, and to manage these sustainably.
- Strengthening community institutions to set up and manage conservation areas, implement diversified livelihoods and access government schemes and funding for development.
- Providing access to clean energy for communities living in forest fringe areas for productive uses (e.g., drinking water, value addition to commodities, energy, transport, space heating).
- Developing and implementing community-based mechanisms to mitigate and manage human-wildlife conflict.
- Working with marginal and small-scale farmers to increase resilience of subsistence and commercial agriculture, enhance economic returns and reduce negative ecological footprint.
- Working with local communities to develop and implement locally driven initiatives for the protection and management of rivers and wetlands.
- Facilitating the establishment of community conserved areas in Karbi Anglong in collaboration

with the Karbi Autonomous Council and local communities has been initiated in 2022. These areas are owned and managed by local communities and linked to conservation and sustainable livelihoods

Please visit WWF-India's website for more details on WWF-India's work.

» **Supporting implementation of the Forest Rights Act.**

India is unique in that Indigenous (scheduled tribes) rights are strongly recognized in the country's constitution and governance systems. The tribal-dominated areas have special provisions to protect the land and rights of such communities. In 2006, India promulgated the [Forest Rights Act](#) that further recognized the historical rights of Indigenous and forest-dwelling communities. Under this Act, individual rights over nearly 2 million hectares and community rights over approximately 5 million hectares of forest land have been granted to Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

These laws and acts provide a basis for inclusive conservation and WWF-India has been working across its landscapes to mobilize local communities to sustainably manage their forest areas and natural resources under their custodianship. In northeast India, the Western Ghats and central India, we are supporting diverse traditional community-initiated and -driven conservation initiatives to sustainably manage forests and natural resources, protect species, restore degraded sites, enhance ecosystem services and ensure livelihood security.

WWF-India supports conservation that is human-rights-based, benefits all and is led by the custodians of nature, the tribes who have safeguarded their territories of life for biodiversity, livelihoods and culture. This kind of approach to conservation, with appropriate safeguards and capacity, has social legitimacy and enhanced accountability, builds trust and solidarity, and results in more effective and equitable use, conservation and governance of natural resources at scale.

In order to strengthen our relationship with local Indigenous groups, community-based organizations and grassroots NGOs in the Northeast, we hosted a joint consultation in August 2022, where groups from all the northeastern states came together and committed to strengthening conservation and sustainable management efforts. Their main expectations and asks from conservation NGOs like WWF-India were related to support for spatial planning, ecological monitoring, policy engagement, federating groups for participatory planning and to establish ecological connectivity between their areas, and institution building. A follow up training on raptor conservation for select community youth from the Northeast was also held in November 2023.

**Relations between forest departments, WWF-India and Indigenous Peoples.** A key challenge is WWF-India's close relationship with the forest departments in the states where we work. Generations of hostility between Indigenous Peoples and forest departments are difficult to eliminate, and we are sometimes seen as allies of the government. However, in most cases, we have managed to maintain a neutral stance and helped to build bridges. Entrenched attitudes against communities as 'encroachers' and 'exploiters' of forest resources are also changing and WWF-India is in a good position to demonstrate the long-term benefits of inclusive conservation approaches.

» **Building strong institutions.**

Meaningful inclusion needs to be sustained through robust participatory institutions at the appropriate scale. WWF-India is working to strengthen local community institutions and supporting these institutions to develop management plans for their resource use areas. There is now a clear recognition within the WWF place-based teams that for any conservation initiative to be sustainable and successful, we need to embed human rights and safeguards into conservation efforts.

**Equitable and environmentally friendly growth.**

India is one of the fastest-developing economies globally and the most populous country in the world. At the same time, it is a megadiverse country with the largest populations of many iconic wildlife species in the world. This is only possible because of a cultural ethos that respects all forms of life, coupled with strong environmental and wildlife legislation. As India looks towards lifting millions of people out of poverty, we need to ensure that this happens in an equitable and environmentally sensitive manner that does not harm the interests of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

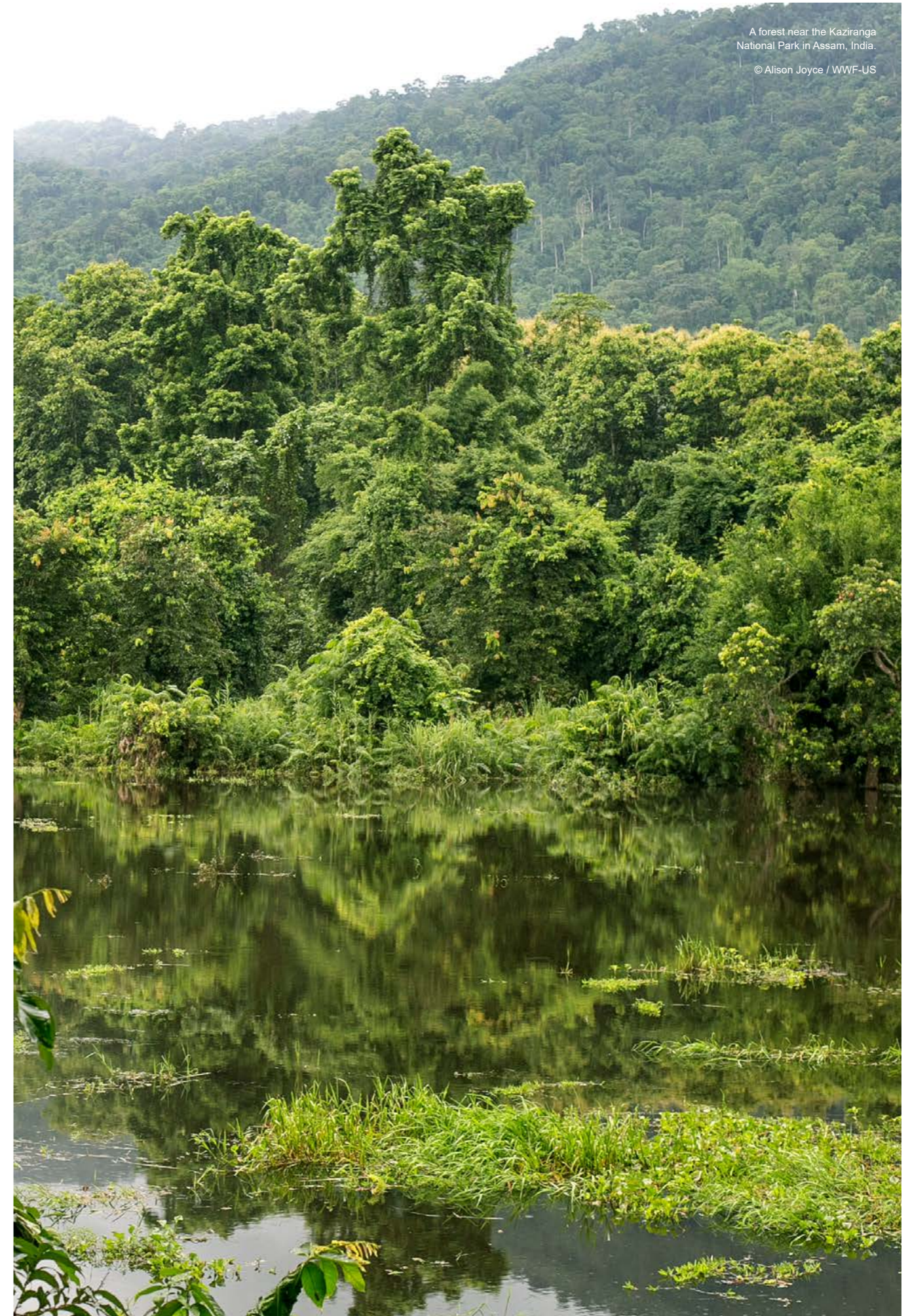
**INDIA TESTIMONIAL**

“While WWF-India has always worked closely with local communities and promoted inclusive conservation, the systems we put in place over the last three years have helped to further strengthen this aspect of our work. As a result, our teams and partners are more sensitized, our processes are more robust, and we are able to better demonstrate the role of empowered communities in conservation.”

Dr. Sejal Worah, Programme Director, WWF-India

A forest near the Kaziranga National Park in Assam, India.

© Alison Joyce / WWF-US





WWF began working in Nepal in 1993. The Chitwan National Park comprises 93,000 hectares of grasslands, wetlands and forest. It lies in the low-lying Terai area of southern Nepal and is part of the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL). The TAL is home to more than 7.5 million people with several ethnic groups represented, including Chepang, Danuwar, Majhi and Tharu. The population of the TAL increased rapidly after malaria was eradicated in the 1940s and many people moved down from the hills, clearing forest for agriculture and livestock. The TAL is now the ‘rice basket’ of Nepal; the main sources of income for households are agriculture, animal husbandry, direct employment and remittances.

## REPORT BACK ON THE MANAGEMENT RESPONSE IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

In our *Management Response* implementation period – from January 2021 to December 2023 – our efforts focused on the following:

### » Annual review process in Nepal supported by Indigenous partner organizations.

WWF-Nepal has put in place a robust framework to ensure strong and independent feedback on landscape-level environmental and social risk management. The process is supported by the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN). Currently, NFDIN members participate in periodic WWF site visits and provide feedback, advice and recommendations on strengthening the human-rights-based approach. Site level implementation of the new framework began in June 2023. NFDIN will help to identify local Indigenous Peoples’ organizations/civil society organizations in key project areas to conduct joint visits with WWF to monitor project activities in accordance with ESSF and social policies. WWF also continues to engage with and receive feedback from Nepal’s National Human Rights Commission through briefings and periodic site visits.

### » Strengthening WWF-Nepal’s grievance mechanism.

In 2022, we carried out an assessment of the functioning of the existing system of complaint and suggestion boxes used by sub-grantees (local civil society organizations) in

TAL. Based on this, we allocated budgets to sub-grantees for strengthening local-level grievance mechanisms in project areas in the TAL and mountain landscapes. This includes support for training, documentation and periodic checks. More broadly, WWF-Nepal has continued to provide orientation to partner organizations on ESSF compliance measures such as establishing grievance mechanisms and adhering to WWF’s social policies (i.e., policy statement on human rights, Indigenous Peoples policy and gender policy).

In addition, new requirements have been issued for all local partners to strengthen their internal grievance processes. Organizations receiving funding from WWF-Nepal must now place complaint boxes in their offices and establish committees to review complaints as a condition of WWF funding.

In the past, WWF’s grievance mechanism relied more heavily on informal and verbal communications whereas now we have a more systematic process to receive feedback and complaints from community members.

### » Support the inclusion of marginalized people in Nepal.

WWF-Nepal has appointed a dedicated gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) specialist to advance work on mainstreaming inclusive conservation. This position was established as a full-time role in early 2022. The specialist has developed a framework to systematically mainstream GESI throughout the project cycle at three scales: personal, communal and institutional. Additionally, site-specific GESI assessments are periodically conducted to identify and strengthen activities focusing on marginalized groups (e.g., people with disabilities). All new project proposals include a GESI and ESSF assessment conducted by WWF staff experts to ensure projects better incorporate human rights, gender and social inclusion activities.

**Applying human rights principles in conservation work.** In 2021, WWF-Nepal conducted a joint consultation and assessment of human rights policy and practice gaps in Chitwan National Park and its buffer zones, working together with the Nepal Forum for Protection of Consumer Rights and the National Human Rights Commission.

### » Capacity building in Nepali buffer zones.

We organized periodic capacity building in buffer zones covering issues including natural resource management, livelihoods, ESSF, human-rights-based approaches, gender equality and social inclusion. One example of this was our new initiative Women in Dolpa, which aims to empower women through active participation in conservation. Under this initiative, in FY22, 42 women’s groups in Dolpa were revived after being stagnant for almost two decades. A total of 10 capacity building sessions were conducted, providing training for 192 women. Additionally, we helped strengthen the management skills of a local women-led NGO, Women Community Service Society. These groups collectively helped to create a waste management plan with the park to coordinate and run a clean-up campaign. The

clean-up campaign took place in snow leopard habitat during harvest season for Yartsa (*Cordyceps sinensis*), a caterpillar fungus used in traditional Chinese medicine that is a major source of community income. It also ran a litter clean-up campaign in coordination with the park agency. In FY23, as a result of our continuous engagement in women’s empowerment work for conservation, 58 women’s groups have been institutionalized under Shey Phoksundo Park. These women’s groups aim to actively engage in conducting local level conservation related engagements.

WWF-Nepal rolled out training on the Universal Ranger Code of Conduct of Nepal with rangers and their institutions in four provinces in May/June 2023. The training aims to ensure rangers uphold the values and commit to the Code of Conduct, adapting it to the local context.

### » Implementing environmental and social safeguards.

In addition to implementing our ESSF and integrating ESSF into our project lifecycle, WWF-Nepal has disseminated information on safeguards, including the TAL mitigation plan, widely and transparently across the landscape. This has included [posting on WWF-Nepal’s website](#), and translating key documents into Nepali (safeguards risk categorization memo, TAL mitigation plan, grievance mechanism).

WWF-Nepal is committed to applying the ESSF to all work being carried out in its landscapes, including implementation of all stakeholder engagement and environmental and social risk mitigation requirements. A human-rights-based approach is now taken into consideration when designing activities, and mitigation actions are inbuilt within the project cycle to minimize risk and possible adverse impacts. We have learned that taking a rigorous approach to applying safeguards adds new demands in terms of time, energy and resources to project design, planning and implementation. Additionally, many donor organizations – including WWF and non-WWF donors – are placing greater emphasis on safeguards and imposing new requirements for demonstrating how they will be applied at a project level. This can lead to confusion and duplication of effort in demonstrating how the ESSF, done at a landscape level, is being applied to a given project. These issues have led to delays in project design and implementation. This, in turn, has called into question our ability to remain competitive as a partner of choice in delivering conservation effectively and efficiently. However, the situation is improving as we build and strengthen capacity, knowledge and experience in using and applying safeguards.

Disseminating information and proactively promoting the development and use of grievance mechanisms with WWF’s major sub-grantees, including community-based organizations, is a critical step towards wider adoption of a human-rights-based approach to conservation. We have been working with our partners to put in place and strengthen local grievance mechanisms and processes so that issues arising from the community

can be voiced and as far as possible resolved locally. Most sub-grantees now have grievance mechanisms and processes in place, which we have begun monitoring for effectiveness. It has been a relatively smooth process to track grievance procedures, record and where necessary respond to grievances raised via our partners. The challenge, however, is that it takes time and an ongoing commitment of resources from WWF to support local organizations in building the capacity and culture to effectively apply these grievance mechanisms.

Beyond our commitment to working with our sub-grantees on applying ESSF and promoting a human rights approach to conservation, we are also taking on the challenge of strengthening capacity and understanding among all key actors in the landscape, including other civil society organizations and partners who are not receiving direct WWF funding.

WWF-Nepal has also recruited a new safeguard specialist, who is supporting the full roll-out of the environmental and social safeguards process and mitigation plan activities in Nepal and strengthening our country-level grievance mechanism.

This reflects a change in the last three years: project implementing partners are aware of risk mitigation measures and safeguards. In addition, government and civil society partners have accepted the safeguards clauses, which are now part of WWF's standard grant agreement.

» **Improved collaboration and meaningful engagement with local communities and Indigenous Peoples.**

Over the last three years, we have continued to partner with local communities, Indigenous Peoples and other stakeholders who are directly affected by conservation initiatives. We have made it a priority to partner with Indigenous Peoples' organizations as well as those that support human rights. These include the Forum for Protection of Consumer Rights Nepal, Freed Kamaiya Women Development Forum, National Human Rights Commission, Sowa Rigpa Association, National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities, Nepal Buddhist Federation, and Sonaha Bikas Samaj. Partnering with these organizations has contributed to joint work to uplift Indigenous community voices in conservation.

WWF-Nepal's MoU with the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities, focusing on collaboration to uplift Indigenous community voices by promoting a rights-based approach to conservation, had led to the development and launch of the *National FPIC Implementation Guidelines 2023 for biodiversity conservation*, which are being disseminated and applied. Cross-learning and joint capacity building has been conducted with organizations such as Abilis Foundation, NFDIN and Save the Children, and has covered topics that include inclusive conservation, child welfare and FPIC.

For example, WWF-Nepal and Save the Children International Nepal have signed an MoU to join in a

strategic alliance to complement each other's expertise and amplify our voices, influencing the social agenda around children/youth, nature conservation, climate justice and the LGBTQI+ community.

In the last three years more participatory planning processes have been put into practice, empowering marginalized communities, Indigenous groups and people with disabilities to raise their voices. The human-rights-based approach is well-oriented to local partners and community-based organizations that WWF-Nepal works with, and all sub-grantees are trained to apply this approach during the project implementation cycle.

» **Growing our knowledge and expertise in inclusive conservation.**

In WWF-Nepal, the practice of more inclusive conservation has evolved in the last three years, namely through increased participation and meaningful stakeholder engagement. Participatory methods are applied during project design by engaging community leaders and incorporating their voices and concerns in the project. This is done via rapid or more in-depth gender equality and social inclusion analysis and creating GESI action plans based on the analysis. Potential risks identified through the participatory analysis are addressed and mitigated by designing project activities that are responsive to these risks.

Livelihood programmes are designed for people affected by our projects through community consultations with Indigenous organizations. Additionally, WWF-Nepal has set clear and transparent criteria to select who these programmes target. The criteria have been developed in an inclusive manner with communities, putting special emphasis on the engagement of vulnerable community members (e.g., women, youth, people with disability, members of single-headed households). Special attention is paid to the engagement of Indigenous groups.

**NEPAL TESTIMONIAL**

**"WWF-Nepal continues to strengthen environmental and social safeguards work and strives to create a centre for excellence to showcase how community safeguards have helped achieve prominent conservation impact."**

Ghana Shyam Gurung (PhD),  
Country Representative, WWF-Nepal

**"I recognize Terai Arc Landscape Programme's and WWF-Nepal's remarkable engagements for continuously uplifting the voices of Indigenous People, in its consolidated efforts with diverse stakeholders, from government to CSO's to communities, for inclusive conservation impact."**

Prem Shankar Mardaniya,  
Indigenous Person from the Amaltari community and  
President of Homestay Federation



## CASE STUDY #4: NEPAL – STRENGTHENING THE INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN COMMUNITY FORESTRY

Nepal's community forestry programme has worked to uphold the rights of traditional forest users. Begun in the late 1970s, the programme supports local communities' control over protecting, managing and sustainably using their forest resources. Today, over 22,000 forest user groups are responsible for managing about 35% of Nepal's forests. The programme aims to be inclusive and participatory, and explicitly considers gender, ethnic groups, Indigenous Peoples, and people from diverse social and economic strata.

One area that is missing, however, is the inclusion of people with disabilities. In Nepal, people with disabilities face extreme marginalization and stigma, and are locked into a vicious cycle of poverty. In rural areas in particular, limited access to services leads to high infant mortality rates, poor health, low life expectancy, and a lack of educational and livelihood opportunities.

Recognising these challenges, WWF-Nepal has placed greater emphasis on disability inclusion in its work in the Terai Arc Landscape, which has strong connections to the community forestry programme. We are seeking to empower people living with a disability by strengthening economic independence and education.

We piloted the initiative in the Laljhadi-Mohana corridor, which connects Shuklaphanta National Park with Dudhwa National Park in India. In 2019, a survey of 16 community forest user groups identified 121 members with disabilities: 21 people with visual impairment, 20 with hearing impairment, 20 with speech impairment and 60 with physical disabilities. Since 2021, we have provided targeted skills training and livelihood support to people with disabilities, benefiting 89 households in the pilot area. People with disabilities supported through the programme are working and generating income through a wide variety of activities – including goat,

poultry, fish and mushroom farming, selling fruit, tea and groceries, and repairing bicycles and appliances.

One of those who has benefited is Ram Karan Rana. Paralysed at the age of 10, he now runs a bicycle repair shop. With his new economic independence, he states that he feels more included within the community. He and his wife, who also lives with a disability, can sustain a good life for themselves and their children. "People in my community do not discriminate against me," he says. "In fact, they embrace the fact that I am a part of their community and accept what I am doing."

We have since expanded this work into the Khata Corridor and part of the buffer zone around Chitwan National Park. At this stage, our efforts are focusing on providing alternative livelihood opportunities to people with disabilities. We are also discussing how to empower people with disabilities to play more of a role in community forest governance to ensure their needs are heard and addressed.

Promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities is challenging. Due to limited awareness, the rights and needs of people with disabilities have not been meaningfully included in community forestry in Nepal to date. There is a general lack of disability-friendly training materials, and existing community training sessions are not always accessible. Although represented in some community forest user groups, greater efforts are needed to reach people with disabilities at grassroots level.

Inclusive conservation can only be achieved when all members of the community are included. We are committed to continuing to empower people with disabilities in Nepal, ensuring that all community forestry stewards enjoy the benefits of conservation.





## SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

Through the implementation of our *Management Response* commitments, we strengthened our people-centred and inclusive approach to conservation.

We recognize that the journey is ongoing, that there will be continuous learning and adaptation into the future, and that our strategies will further evolve to address emerging challenges and opportunities in our ambition to achieve positive outcomes for both people and biodiversity.

We look forward to the findings of the evaluation of our three-years of implementation of our *Management Response*, and learning where we can make adjustments, and strengthen our actions.

Looking ahead, we will also continue exploring how best to share our learnings with all stakeholders on our rights-based approach to conservation. People and nature can only thrive through harmonious coexistence and WWF is committed to this vision.

Farmer bearing seedlings of rice to plant in paddy, Viet Nam.

© Shutterstock / TOM.foto / WWF



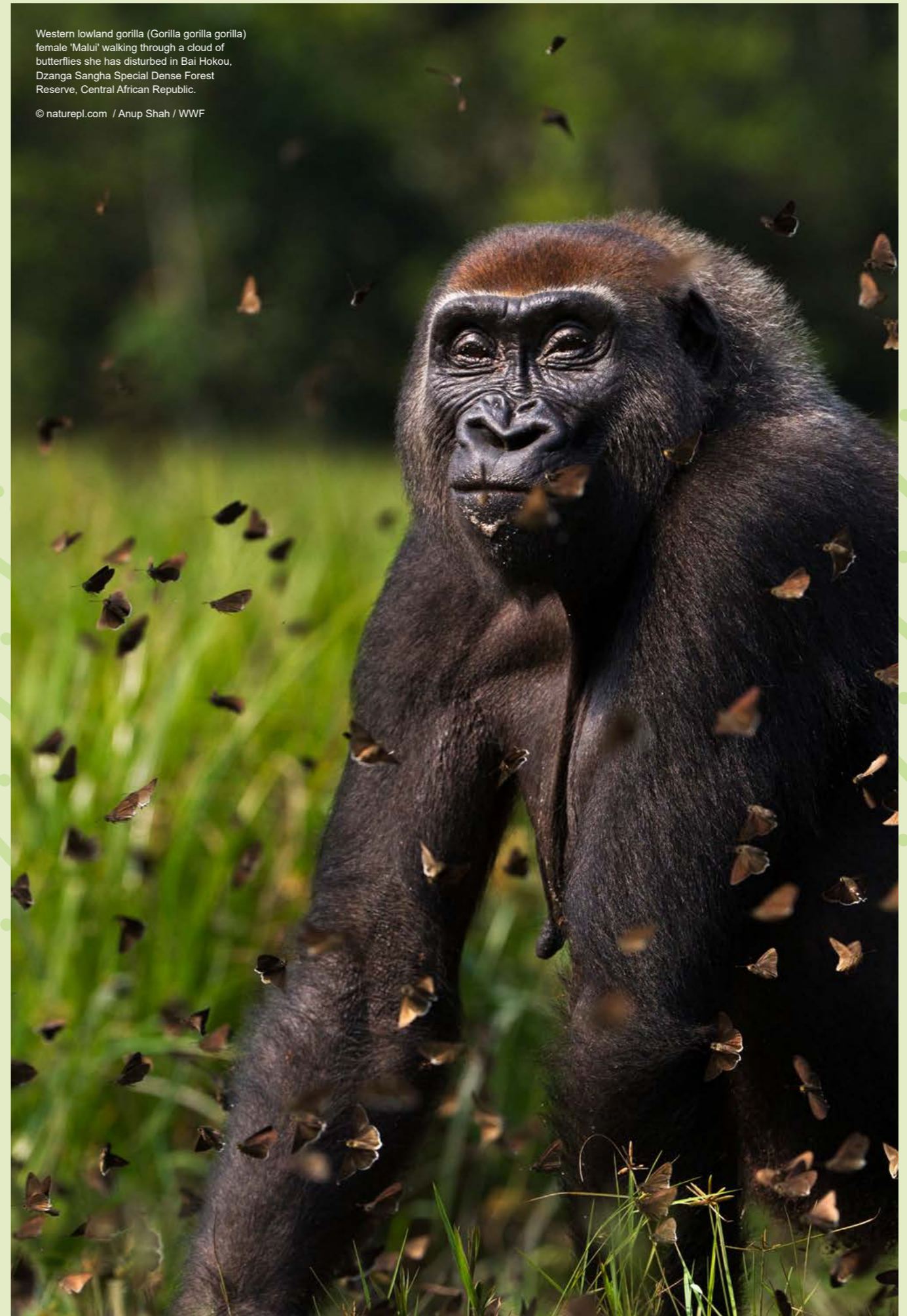
## SECTION 5: INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION: STORIES FROM THE FIELD

We have included 15 case studies in the Human Rights and the Environment Report 2023, from across our global network – three from Africa (including two in Section 3 above), seven from the Americas, three from the Asia and Pacific regions (including one in Section 2 above), and one global – in an effort to bring to life WWF's journey towards the delivery of impactful and inclusive conservation. We have sought to share an account of milestones achieved, challenges uncovered and lessons learned in our place-based work as we continue to deliver on our mission to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and nature.

Inclusive conservation approaches are critical to deliver well-being and equitable outcomes for people as well as restore and regenerate nature. The crises of biodiversity loss, climate change and inequality require systemic responses, and they challenge us to confront the structures and power dynamics that perpetuate inequalities inhibiting conservation.

Inclusive conservation consists of a variety of approaches that embrace diverse values and visions for how nature should be conserved while providing benefits for both people and nature. WWF strives to holistically understand the contexts in which we work and the dynamics between diverse actors and rights-holders. WWF recognizes and promotes the agency and leadership of local communities, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, and other groups experiencing marginalization. In addition to rights-holders, WWF engages government, civil society and private sector actors for collective action that contributes to systems transformation at multiple levels.

The stories shared in this report cast a spotlight on our conservation work across the six of WWF's key intervention areas – climate, food, forest, freshwater, oceans and wildlife – and link these to our broader ambition of embedding human rights in conservation and the roll-out of WWF's environmental and social safeguards.



Western lowland gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*) female 'Malui' walking through a cloud of butterflies she has disturbed in Bai Hokou, Dzanga Sangha Special Dense Forest Reserve, Central African Republic.

© naturepl.com / Anup Shah / WWF



**CASE STUDY #5: MADAGASCAR –  
STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS CAPACITY  
WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF WILDLIFE LAW  
ENFORCEMENT IN MADAGASCAR**

In mid-2021, TRAFFIC – a leading NGO working globally on trade in wild animals and plants – evaluated Madagascar’s capacity needs in law enforcement agents, including customs, judiciary, police, gendarme and forest agents, in combating Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT). The findings from the assessment, which included approximately 100 agents from the various agencies in IWT hotspots, would inform the development of training content for these law enforcement agents. The assessment revealed significant gaps in human rights compliance among the agents. The former Director General of Forest Governance of the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development recognized this unexpected finding and proposed a dedicated capacity-building effort to address these gaps across all enforcement agencies.

To understand the specific challenges faced by law enforcement officers and rights-holders, TRAFFIC, in collaboration with WWF International, under the Swedish Sida-funded

Voices for Diversity programme, conducted a rapid risk assessment among wildlife law enforcement agents of where human rights violations might occur and what were enforcement agents’ capacity needs. The assessment involved written tests, plenary discussions, and roleplays with 38 officers from various agencies. To deepen this understanding, TRAFFIC and WWF-Madagascar, supported by WWF International, sought the perspectives of community members in four landscapes regarding law enforcement agents’ human rights compliance during wildlife-related activities.

The findings of these two assessments guided the development of a targeted training module addressing the gaps identified in human rights principles and practices. The training module was developed by a renowned Malagasy human rights expert. Every law enforcement school approved the inclusion of the training module into their training curriculum, including the School of National Police, the National Gendarmerie

School and the National Training Center for Forestry Technicians.

In August 2023, after a request of the National Gendarmerie School’s senior management, training sessions were conducted at the National Gendarmerie School in Ambositra, focusing on raising awareness of human rights compliance in wildlife law enforcement. This training reached 1,500 gendarmerie students, just before their graduation, and in time for them to be operational in the field in 2024. A train-the-trainer session was also scheduled for 2024 to ensure that these efforts are sustainable.

Similar efforts were undertaken at the National Training Center for Forestry Technicians (CNFTF), where a two-day train-the-trainer (ToT) session involved 20 trainers – the vast majority of the school’s trainers. The session was led by a human rights expert – who is a member of the National Commission on Human Rights as well as a human rights professor at the University of Antananarivo law enforcement – with support from a human rights expert from the partner NGO

Transparency International. The training covered basic human rights principles, including the rights of local communities to access and use natural resources, fair trial rights and the typology of torture and torture prohibition, and sparked engaging discussions on challenges related to human rights compliance, lack of resources and external factors contributing to violations during law enforcement duties, especially in remote areas. The participants highlighted the need for them to advocate for an increased budget in order to better respond to the needs and rights of suspects and offenders.

WWF and TRAFFIC welcomed these suggestions, which show a greater understanding of the human rights obligations of duty bearers, and look forward to continuing to support law enforcement agencies in Madagascar to integrate human rights in their training curricula and practice. This will contribute to building strong and trust-based relationships with local communities and rights-holders for more just, sustainable and effective conservation.



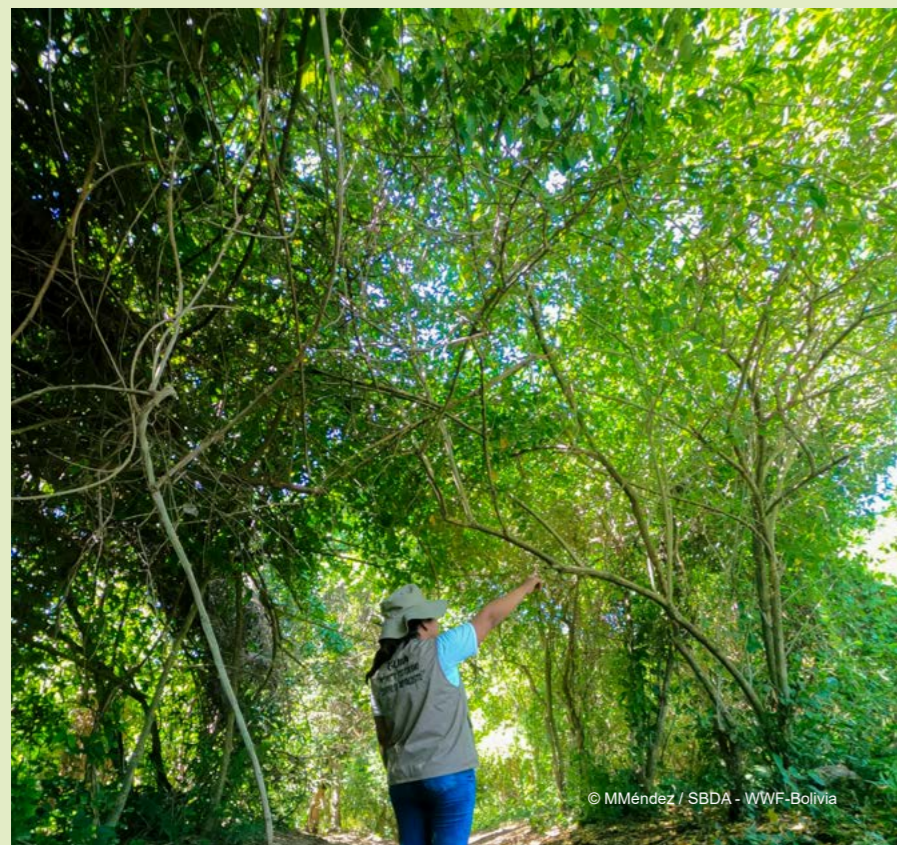
Panther Chameleon (*Furcifer pardalis*), threatened by illegal wildlife trade. © Kaisa Siren / WWF

“In most cases, poaching occurs in remote areas where law enforcement agents are left to their own devices. Due to various factors (remoteness, logistics gaps, human and financial resources, etc.), the risks of violating the offenders’ and local people’s rights are very high. However, these risks can be reduced or minimized if the agents are equipped with and sensitized to the basic human rights compliance principles when dealing with wildlife law enforcement. This is why we welcome the inclusion of this module into our training curricula”

Representative of Madagascar’s Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MEDD).

## CASE STUDY #6: BOLIVIA – A GROUP OF RURAL WOMEN SUCCEED IN SECURING THE DECLARATION OF A PROTECTED AREA IN THE BOLIVIAN PANTANAL

Thanks to the initiative of local women, 880 hectares of Motacusito will be dedicated to the conservation of water sources, as well as the development of community-based ecotourism as a critical economic activity for families in the region.



© MMéndez / SBDA - WWF-Bolivia

Quidian Román Samaricha, Ana María Tomichá, Marisol Román and Dayana Espinoza walk every day through the mountain range where they grew up: Motacusito. Among caves and springs, they have been working as guides for three years under the Association of Tourist Service Providers Motacusito Nuevo, created by themselves and accredited by the Federation of Tourism at the national level.

On July 10 of this year, they achieved the declaration of a law to protect the ecosystem of their territory for the first time in their history. The first Municipal Protected Area Law 252/23 in the Germán Busch province establishes that, of Motacusito's 1,508 hectares, 880 hectares are destined for the conservation and protection of the ecological functions of water springs, aquifer and surface water recharge, and the development of community ecotourism, the main economic activity of the families.

Their achievement represents an unprecedented triumph for the conservation of this place and for a community whose main activity is ecotourism, led by women. As a municipal protected area, the Motacusito community now has more legal tools and more guarantees that the management of its territory will be shared and that sustainable tourism, the main economic activity of the families, will be carried out while protecting the most important area in the region in terms of water recharge.

The rural community of Motacusito – or Motacú as its almost 200 inhabitants affectionately call it – is located eight kilometers southwest of the municipality of Puerto Suárez,

**“Some told us that we should stay at home, cooking, washing, but we did not listen to them and we went ahead.”**

Quidian Román Samaricha,

in the heart of the Bolivian Pantanal, which is considered the largest freshwater Ramsar site in Bolivia. It is a destination that attracts an increasing number of tourists and researchers from the interior of the country and Brazil because of its water springs and a cave declared a Site of Importance for the Conservation of Bats (SICOMs), which serves as a refuge for several species of bats (such as *Natalus macrourus*, *Carollia perspicillata* and *Desmodus rotundus*). Tourism activities benefit the women, who are the local guides, and are also a source of income for the entire community and the municipality because they boost the local economy with lodging, food, and transportation services, among others.

### A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CONSERVATION OF THE PANTANAL

In Motacusito, water is a strategic resource for its development and local economy, and it was precisely water that united the courageous women of Motacusito, Quidian, Ana María, Marisol and Dayana, with the Autonomous Municipal Government of Puerto Suárez, the Bolivian Society of Environmental Law (SBDA) and WWF, who from the establishment and management of the Puerto Suarez Monitoring Center together conducted technical studies on the state of the municipality's water resources, to propose public policies that support conservation actions, supported by scientific and technical information, under the leadership of the women of the community. “A team effort in which we did receive attention,” adds Quidian, who was elected vice-president of the community in 2022.

The Bolivian Pantanal is part of what is known as the Gran Pantanal, the largest continuous freshwater wetland in the world, which shares its majesty between Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay. Occupying 67% of the territory of the municipality of Puerto Suárez, the threats of forest fires, droughts and climate change in the Bolivian

Pantanal also affect the rest of the ecoregion. There, Motacusito is a key site for water recharge because it is home to the springs that feed the Cáceres Lagoon, which supplies water and bathes the Pantanal and connects to the life-giving Paraguay River.

### SUPPORTING WOMEN LEADERS

The diagnosis carried out in the area in 2016 initiated a process of “years of articulation,” says Víctor Magallanes, coordinator of the Pantanal Chaco Landscape (PACHA) of WWF Bolivia. Today, it concludes a stage with the first municipal protected area for the conservation of water resources, managed by its women leaders. “We are talking about a protected area where local culture is everything, where there are natural leaders of the processes,” she says. “Success belongs to the community and we can proudly say that we have been able to be part of that, facilitating spaces and providing technical and legal assistance.”

“We were simple advisors, the women took care of everything, they stood firm,” says Mauricio Méndez, SBDA project coordinator. “We were interested in understanding why there was a 60% decrease in water in Laguna Cáceres between 2019 and 2020. When we arrived in Motacusito there was a huge amount of water eyes, and the studies we conducted showed that one of their watersheds is the first one that contributes to the lagoon, it works as a water tank and it is born there in their community. They didn't know that, but they took the courage to know it and that made the difference.

The Motacusito Nuevo Association of Tourism Service Providers, made up of seven women from Motacusito, was born as a result of several trainings on leadership, organization, community tourism and sustainable resource management. “As women who work for the good of the family, we fought for it from the beginning, knocked on many doors and sought each other out, even in the most

difficult moments,” says Quidian. “We insisted on a bill that would transform Motacusito into a protected area, to take care of our resources and make them useful for future generations.

The Motacusito caves have an extension of 120 m, with a garden of cacti and bromeliads on the outside and inside an interesting wildlife, such as toads and frogs, blind fish, whip spiders. With rock formations of stalactites and stalagmites, its cave functions as a sponge for subway water storage. “It is like entering another world where men stay at the door, women go down until the water reaches their waists and bats flutter around,” says one of its visitors.

In recent years, Quidian, Ana María, Marisol and Dayana alternated their walks down to the cave, dressed in marsh boots and fisherman's hats, with long days sharing coffee and mates to define the articles that would be included in the draft law. “Some told us that we should stay at home, cooking, washing, but we did not listen to them and we went ahead”. Others, like the secretary general of Motacusito, Roberto Viera, “trusted us a lot.

On July 10, in front of the entire community, the first Municipal Protected Area Law was declared. It was, as Victor explains, “one of those moments when you feel, we are doing well and we are not alone”. In Roberto's words, “a historic day because when they want to support the community, everything is achieved”. It was “a celebration for all the struggle” for Quidian, Ana Maria, Marisol and Dayana.

“We know that what we did is still not 100% visible because it is a long-term thing,” says Quidian. “We want to work more and more for Motacusito, with communal vegetable gardens, bird watching and handicrafts with the motacú palm leaf. We have already visited other women from other communities, such as San Juan del Mutún and San Salvador, to tell them what we have done and what we want to do...this is just the beginning.”

## CASE STUDY #7: BRAZIL – TACKLING CONVERSION AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE CERRADO

The conversion of native vegetation in Brazil's Cerrado threatens not only the region's extraordinary biodiversity but also the rights of its traditional inhabitants. The "Tamo de Olho" ("We are Watching You") strategy aims to identify and address the most pressing threats through policy advocacy and legal action. The initiative was launched by WWF-Brazil in 2020, in collaboration with a group of NGOs and the Cerrado Network of grassroots organizations.

We developed an [online platform](#) to identify critical cases of deforestation and legal violations in Matopiba (the Cerrado portion of the states of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí and Bahia). Deforestation alerts are overlaid with maps of protected areas, Indigenous peoples' and local

communities' territories, priority areas for biodiversity conservation and embargoed areas. The more these overlap, the more critical the alert. The platform is open access, and the database includes data from official Brazilian government sources which users can also download. The data and spatial analysis is complemented by bottom-up information on land, resource use and socio-environmental conflicts from members of the Cerrado Network.

When priority cases are identified, we have different approaches to advocacy. Firstly, we are working to strengthen the capacity of public prosecutors in Matopiba to act against illegal deforestation. Where there is a strong case, we work with public prosecutors to initiate legal proceedings. This involves working with partners on the ground to gather information on the context and build an advocacy and communication strategy. We also pursue legal cases with public environmental administrations, and have had several meetings with federal and state agencies to discuss illegal deforestation, transparency and inspections.

Another avenue is strategic litigation: the initiative is working with colleagues from the WWF Network to build a case involving the soy value chain, considering

mainly traders and buyers. Finally, international advocacy efforts have included sharing a letter from local communities from the Cerrado to the Council, Commission and Parliament of the European Union, about the importance of including the Cerrado biome (classified as "other wooded lands") within the EU regulation on deforestation-free supply chains.

To date, the initiative has engaged in 25 legal proceedings. Among these, one helped prevent the relaxation of environmental legislation in the state of Tocantins, while another upheld the rights of traditional peoples in Maranhão to be consulted before any interventions that affect their territory.

IBAMA (the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources) is using the platform to prioritize cases for surveillance, and the information provided by the initiative has been used by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change to structure the National Plan to Control Deforestation in the Cerrado, which was launched in September 2023. There is also a demand from the teams within the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Agrarian Development and Family Agriculture to work with the initiative to identify conflicts and develop strategies for mediation.

### Examples of advocacy in this context are included below:

Letters from the Peoples of the Cerrado to the European Union asking for a more ambitious deforestation-free law. More than 130 NGOs and working groups are working for the inclusion of all natural ecosystems, to achieve transparency to the origin and to ensure the respect for human rights.



Joint letter from the Brazil's Indigenous People Articulation (APIB) and the National Coordination for the Articulation of Black Rural Quilombola Communities (Conaq) to the European Union, asking for the inclusion of all Brazilian ecosystems under the scope of the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR).



Agricultural workers working on a soy plantation. Workers are often migrants who come from poorer regions in Brazil for seasonal work on soy plantations. Cerrado, Brazil.

© Peter Caton / WWF-UK

**CASE STUDY #8: COLOMBIA –  
CONFLICT-SENSITIVE CONSERVATION IN COLOMBIA**

Conflict continues to drive environmental degradation in Colombia, despite the signing of a peace agreement in 2016 and ongoing peacebuilding efforts, including through “total peace” and “peace with nature” initiatives. In remote regions that were once the domain of paramilitary fighters, armed groups fight for control over drug trafficking and other illegal activities. Far from state control, illicit crop production, illegal mining and land grabbing have proliferated, threatening the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and increasing social inequalities.

Local people whose livelihoods depend on nature are left especially vulnerable. Health, education and other public services are largely absent in rural and isolated areas, and community members often come under pressure to join in illegal activities. Those who resist or seek to defend their land and tenure rights may be threatened or even killed.

The Amazon and Pacific regions of Colombia where WWF works are particularly affected. In these areas, WWF-Colombia’s conflict-sensitive processes seek to ensure conservation projects also support community development, human well-being and socioecological resilience, ultimately improving prospects for peace and stability. Inclusive conservation and “do no harm” approaches are the cornerstone of WWF’s interventions, as per our Environmental and Social Safeguard Framework.

In Nariño, near the southern border with Ecuador, WWF-Colombia has been supporting Indigenous Peoples and other local communities to develop sustainable and alternative livelihood opportunities, and to strengthen their capacity to uphold their rights. Violence is common in this area, with local people subjected to constant threats, attacks, assassinations and displacement by illegal armed groups.

In this context, WWF has worked with the Awa and Los Pastos Indigenous communities to develop ecotourism opportunities, including scientific tourism, birdwatching and handicraft production. In La Nutria Awa Indigenous Reserve, we have supported efforts to engage young people – who are especially vulnerable to being recruited by armed groups – through education and capacity building in conservation and traditional knowledge, strengthening community cohesion.

In Guaviare, in the heart of the Colombian Amazon, conflicts over land use and tenure drive deforestation and forest degradation as well as undermining the rights and well-being of communities. In this region, WWF-Colombia is working with local communities to manage protected areas through the “Protected Areas and Peace” project, funded by the German government and WWF.

We have also supported community alliances such as Asoproagro (Association of Agricultural Producers of Guaviare), which provides technical support for sustainable production alternatives, including for community members who had previously been involved in illicit activities. Another focus is on strengthening gender equality, empowering women to develop alternative livelihoods and become conservation leaders.

“In Colombia, we operate at the crossroads of social, political, economic and environmental issues,” says Sandra Valenzuela de Narvaez, CEO of WWF-Colombia. “Working in conflict-sensitive areas and striving to promote human rights, alternative livelihoods and security is a fundamental part of WWF-Colombia’s inclusive, whole-of-society approach to conservation.”

“Working in conflict-sensitive areas and striving to promote human rights, alternative livelihoods and security is a fundamental part of WWF-Colombia’s inclusive, whole-of-society approach to conservation.”

Sandra Valenzuela de Narvaez  
CEO of WWF-Colombia



WWF has been supporting and strengthening indigenous, afro Colombian and peasant conservation efforts in the Pacific Andean foothills in the border between Colombia and Ecuador. In this photo, volunteers from the WWF - Fundación SURA alliance are working on improving trails in the La Nutria - Piman indigenous reserve of the Awa community of the Gran Sabalo resguard, an initiative to strengthen environmental governance, traditional knowledge and promote communitarian tourism as income opportunities for improve livelihoods.

© WWF-Colombia

## CASE STUDY #9: ECUADOR – A PATH TOWARD GENDER EQUALITY IN CONSERVATION IN THE ECUADORIAN AMAZON

WWF-Ecuador conducted a Rapid Gender Analysis in the Amazon to understand the conditions, needs and priorities of Indigenous and rural women. What are the findings, and how did this exercise lay the foundation for greater gender equality through the conservation of the Amazon?



Using a participatory mapping with a gender lens to understand the varied viewpoints of men and women regarding their territories.

© María Aguilar/WWF-Ecuador

Generally, women and men tend to have different experiences with nature due to the culturally constructed roles and stereotypes around femininity and masculinity. That's why gender is a relevant category for understanding dynamics around the use, access and control of natural resources and, by extension, for designing and implementing conservation actions that are both inclusive and effective.

A global literature review conducted by the CARE-WWF Alliance (a WWF partnership with CARE, the international humanitarian organization that works with populations of women and girls to fight poverty and hunger) found that gender inequality and the absence of women in leadership positions are correlated with ecosystem degradation. The review found that women's participation and leadership in managing territories and resources result in better conservation and governance outcomes. Women's access to education and financial resources that allow them to realize the power of their voices and hone their leadership skills are, in fact, an important basis for conservation action.

In Ecuador, for example, 35.5% of rural women live in poverty and engage in agricultural activities without the same economic and social power as men. In the Amazon region, 88.2% of producers are men, while only 11.9% are women, according to the latest national agricultural census (conducted in 2000). Women's limited access to agricultural land increases their social and economic dependence, as well as increasing their dependence on communally held resources like forests and reducing their income.

In addition to gender gaps, social complexities like cultural identity must be considered when designing conservation activities with Indigenous communities. Although the goal may be to enhance women's roles and improve their quality of life, some conservation projects, historically, have exacerbated inequalities between men and women by overlooking how

Indigenous communities construct gender roles. Understanding women's realities, perspectives and aspirations in these territories is key to ensuring inclusive conservation processes.

That's why WWF-Ecuador adapted and applied CARE's Rapid Gender Analysis methodology in the Amazon through a pilot initiative with three Indigenous communities and cocoa associations. The information gathered allows WWF to understand gender roles in their unique, in this case Indigenous, rural context. Understanding the differences between men's and women's access and use of natural resources, their participation in decision-making and share of benefits, as well as women's unique barriers in a particular context, are critical to defining strategies to promote inclusive conservation processes and equitable outcomes.

### A LOOK AT THE REALITY OF WOMEN'S LIVES IN THE ECUADORIAN AMAZON

Amazonian agricultural plots, or chacras, are sustainable agroforestry systems focused on biodiversity preservation. While they seek to cultivate and produce organic food for consumption, they also conserve endemic plants – some of which are endangered – and protect the soil. Since they are not monocultures, the variety of plants helps prevent erosion, maintain environmental diversity and safeguard traditional food and medicine. Chacras are also a source of products that communities can market to generate income.

All of this can be seen in the work of three cacao producer organizations in the Province of Napo, in the northern part of the Ecuadorian Amazon. Kallari, Wiñak and Tsatsayaku are committed to establishing a sustainable cocoa supply chain that prevents deforestation and halts the sale of Indigenous Kichwa lands for the development of mining projects in the area.

In this province, although Kichwa women work alongside men in the

chacras, they face inequalities in labour and participation. According to the findings of the Rapid Gender Analysis, women perform physically demanding tasks in planting and maintaining crops, yet their participation in technical areas and decision-making is limited. Additionally, men have greater control over the land and economic resources, granting them authority in family and community decision-making. Cultural norms in these communities dictate that women cannot inherit land and impose barriers that hinder their ability to manage their income, or access leadership positions. Although women are involved in cocoa associations, they face limitations in controlling and accessing resources and benefits from them, which contributes to economic dependency and challenges in meeting family needs.

“In general, there is a marked gender disparity in participation,” says Alexandra Vásquez, a consultant for WWF-Ecuador and specialist in gender, climate change, sustainable development and biodiversity, who participated in the analysis. “There is a difference between the productive activities of men and women. This is due to stereotypes indicating that women should be responsible for caregiving and men for productive work.” According to the expert, this situation limits women's educational opportunities, political participation, leisure time and personal fulfilment.

### THE PROCESS AND FUTURE OF RAPID GENDER ANALYSIS FOR CONSERVATION

Core to the WWF-adapted Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) methodology is a review of secondary information (local to national), interviews and focus group discussions with men and women who are part of local conservation efforts. The RGA mapped how men and women produce and market cocoa to understand persistent inequalities and inform culturally relevant and appropriate strategies for

inclusive conservation. The analysis explored four areas of research: the gendered division of labour; decision-making positions and leadership; holistic health of the body and the territory; and women's livelihoods, aspirations and strategic interests.

The learning from this pilot has helped WWF-Ecuador to refine the RGA as a tool within the inclusive conservation toolbox. The tool can help WWF-Ecuador mainstream gender considerations into its conservation portfolio, in line with WWF's Gender Equality Statement of Principles and Social and Environmental Safeguards Framework.

As an inclusive conservation tool, RGA offers field teams step-by-step guidance to ensure that data collection in projects is conducted with a rigorous, participatory and context-sensitive gender focus. It collects information to inform how projects can address key issues, including: inequitable use, access, and control of natural resources; the participation and representation of women in decision-making; and advancing men and women's equitable access to material and non-material benefits generated by conservation projects.

Also, the versatility of this methodology extends beyond its initial application, offering opportunities for implementation across varied contexts and associations. By harnessing its adaptable tools and instruments, tailored gender equality strategies can be crafted to suit the unique needs of different environments.

Indeed, the RGA demonstrates how leveraging CARE's expertise in gender analysis, women's rights and economic development can strengthen WWF's toolbox for developing inclusive conservation processes in strategic territories like the Ecuadorian Amazon. This is the first important step for WWF in Ecuador and other countries to engage in more thoughtful project co-design and achieve more inclusive and sustainable results in the daily lives of culturally diverse women and the equally diverse natural environments they inhabit.

**CASE STUDY #10: GUYANA –  
INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN GUYANA COLLECT  
DATA AND INFORMATION ON THEIR TERRITORIES  
FOR PROTECTION PURPOSES**

After nearly a decade of operation in the area using the Forest Reporting, Monitoring and Verification system, over 9,000 people have benefited from a model for making informed decisions.



Monitors from the South Rupununi District Council conducting water quality testing.  
© WWF-Guyana

Located in the north of South America, and bordered by Brazil, Suriname and Venezuela, is Guyana. Despite being a relatively small country, it has the second-highest percentage of tropical forests on Earth, with unique biodiversity and abundant freshwater resources. In fact, its Amerindian name means "land of many waters". Along with Suriname, French Guiana, southeastern Venezuela, southeastern Colombia and northeastern Brazil, they make up what is called the Guiana Shield, an area of around 30 million hectares that constitutes the world's largest tropical forest.

Over 10% of Guyana's population consists of Indigenous communities, who are not only guardians of biodiversity but also depend on 14% of the country's titled forest lands. Along the Caribbean coastline reside the Arawak, the Carib and the Warrau tribes. In the villages of the interior, the Akawaio, Arekuna, Makushi, Patamona, Wai-Wai, and Wapichan peoples reside. Despite their conservation efforts, these lands, protected by Indigenous communities, face threats due to activities such as gold and diamond mining, agricultural expansion and improper logging, with concessions that have disrupted the stability of tropical forests.

Aware of the need to preserve their forests, in 2009, the government of Guyana began promoting low-carbon development proposals, and in November of the same year, they signed an agreement with Norway to reduce deforestation rates in exchange for funding of around \$250 million for emissions reduction caused by deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+). This agreement led to the creation of a national Reporting, Monitoring and Verification (MRV) system in Guyana, which has been improved over the years.

**COMMUNITY PARTICIPATORY  
MONITORING, A KEY ELEMENT IN  
THE FIGHT AGAINST DEFORESTATION**

Between 2011 and 2013, Global Canopy, the International Iwokrama Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development, and 16 Indigenous communities from the North Rupununi District Development Board established an initial participatory MRV model in Guyana. This initial project involved strengthening the capacities of 32 local monitors to collect data from their communities and introduced innovative concepts and approaches, such as the use of smartphones and open-source software for data collection.

In 2014, utilizing resources from the agreement with Norway, WWF initiated a new project aimed at fostering the development of participatory MRV as a crucial step in preparing Guyana's Indigenous communities for active participation in REDD+. While building upon the achievements of the previous project, this initiative sought to refine the model, ensuring it was both replicable and sustainable, while remaining manageable for local communities. The overarching objective was to establish a participatory measurement system through capacity-building efforts, enabling effective monitoring that would provide the necessary data and analytical capabilities as a foundation for informed decision-making.

**“What our grandparents didn't know, we are learning. We hope that what we are doing here will mean something for the new generations.”**

Susan George,  
Women of the indigenous  
village of Katoka

This marked the commencement of a training process involving the Indigenous community of Wai Wai Kanashen, which holds legal title to a substantial 1.5 million hectares, constituting nearly 3% of Guyana's landmass. Collaborating closely with governmental agencies and the North Rupununi District Development Board, WWF led this endeavour.

Equipped with laptops, open-source software, and Wi-Fi connectivity, coupled with well-defined data collection and information exchange protocols, they embarked on the collection and analysis of data. Initially experimenting with mobile phones and cloud-based data storage, the team soon recognized the need for enhanced control over data monitoring and verification, leading to the development of Data Labs: small, Internet-enabled cabins equipped with power sources. Community monitors rotated through these data labs, with field personnel visiting to download data and produce printed reports for the communities.

From this process emerged the 'traffic light' system for information access control, defined as follows: Green – freely shareable; Yellow – subject to potential circulation restrictions; and Red – information restricted to specific groups, notably in cases involving mining sites or valuable tree resources. Crucially, the decision-making authority regarding information sharing or restriction was vested in the hands of community elders, mentors and botanical experts, fostering a collaborative approach.

Within this MRV framework, all generated information remains community-owned, with the most pertinent data shared with governmental bodies and other authorized agencies, as per the community council's approval. This collaborative effort has enabled continuous monitoring of activities related to agriculture, fishing,

hunting, forest management and river conservation. Notably, it has empowered these communities to exercise control over their data and influence its utilization. This collaborative initiative has been undertaken in partnership with WWF, the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC), the Kanuku Mountains Community Representative Group (KMCRG), the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDB) and the South Rupununi District Council (SRDC), providing the community with valuable insights to make informed decisions regarding their present and future.

Until today, a total of 48 Indigenous communities in Guyana have strengthened their data analysis capabilities. The data has allowed them to respond to declining animal populations due to hunting patterns and make adjustments, for instance, in their water usage practices. Community environmental workers also provide monitoring services, creating an additional source of income. The skills they have acquired are essential for these communities to access the resources of the REDD+ programme.

It has been years of collaborative work, overcoming distances, the digital divide and lack of access, demonstrating that this process is replicable for other countries interested in a diversified and inclusive economy where Indigenous communities monitor their well-being and that of their ecosystems. “I don't know if there's another project like this in the world,” says Susan George, one of the 30 women who are part of the community monitors, hailing from the Indigenous village of Katoka, located on the banks of the Rupununi River in southwestern Guyana. “But what our grandparents didn't know, we are learning. We hope that what we are doing here will mean something for the new generations.”

## CASE STUDY #11: PARAGUAY / BOLIVIA – WOMEN, INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, AND HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS IN THE CHACO-PANTANAL: VITAL VOICES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

Since its establishment in 2021, Voices for Just Climate Action has amplified the voices of those most vulnerable to climate change in the Chaco-Pantanal, who demand specific actions to adapt and to protect their rights, territories, and future.



At a time when the world faces an unprecedented climate crisis and traditional approaches to addressing it have proven insufficient, it is urgent that local civil society becomes a catalyst for change and influences policies and practices for relevant climate solutions. This is the founding premise of Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA), a global alliance that promotes the leadership and empowerment of local people and organizations in climate action around the world.

One of those places is the Chaco-Pantanal, the second-largest forested ecoregion in South America after the Amazon, shared by Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina. It is a unique and crucial ecosystem in the fight against climate change: the Chaco is one of the regions with the greatest environmental and biological diversity on the planet, while the Pantanal is the world's largest and best-preserved tropical wetlands.

Both ecosystems face enormous degradation and ongoing threats from the expansion of agricultural and livestock frontiers. In recent years, there have been disruptions in the Pantanal's flood patterns, and forest fires have become more common and extensive, affecting its residents, livelihoods, ecosystems, and even the cities in the region. The Gran Chaco still has nearly 70% natural coverage, but it is decreasing at an alarming rate. It is estimated that up to 1,800 hectares can be deforested in a single day.

In this scenario, it is imperative to initiate processes for equitable and just climate adaptation and mitigation. One of the goals of VCA is to ensure the effective participation of those most vulnerable to climate change, such as women, Indigenous communities, youth, and marginalized groups who live in and directly or indirectly depend on the Chaco-Pantanal, as well as those in the region's cities.

### VCA IN BOLIVIA AND PARAGUAY

In the Chaco-Pantanal region spanning Paraguay and Bolivia, VCA seeks to connect and strengthen the actions of civil society organizations (CSOs), grassroots movements, indigenous and rural communities, and other actors, in a region where the state historically has been absent. WWF and Avina Foundation - the implementing organization of VCA in the region - sub-grant half of VCAs' financial resources to local partners and provide technical support for the development of conservation, climate advocacy, and rights defence agendas. To achieve this, WWF-Paraguay collaborates closely with the Avina Foundation, a Latin American foundation focused on supporting and promoting collaborative processes.

In two years of building mutual trust between the two organizations, WWF has focused more on interventions in roundtable discussions in municipalities, with particular attention to nature-based solutions, environmental education, capacity development, and the creation of shared agendas. The Avina Foundation, on the other hand, adds value through its regional networks, leveraging existing cross-border partnerships and platforms with a focus on women, municipal and community-level climate adaptation.

In the Chaco-Pantanal region across Paraguay and Bolivia, VCA has supported 33 local partners, including rural and urban civil society organizations and Indigenous communities, with a strong focus on women, gender, and intersectionality. This has given WWF the opportunity to collaborate with additional partners with whom WWF had not directly worked before, such as human rights organizations, independent media, and religious organizations.

Local partners were selected for their experience in promoting human rights and equity, with a particular emphasis on the rights of women, youth, and vulnerable communities. With each of them, WWF engaged in a joint process to identify their needs and co-create the relevant activities in their workplans that would resource and technically support them. These activities include initiatives related to access to water, accessing climate finance, knowledge and capacity-building in climate action, and overall strengthening of local capacities for initiatives that can inspire information dissemination, public discourse, and political advocacy.

### IN PARAGUAY, UNUSUAL PARTNERS ADD GREAT VALUE

One of the new partners supported by VCA is the Association of Relatives of Victims of the Marina Kue Massacre in Paraguay, a rural community striving for land rights. The group emerged following a massacre, in which 11 civilians and six police officers died in a land dispute. The case of Marina Kue is emblematic, because it symbolizes the struggle of more than 300,000 landless families in Paraguay seeking access to land. More than ten years after the massacre, the association continues to seek justice and legal mechanisms to access a legally recognized territory for their community. Through VCA they receive not only funds for their activities but also technical support and advocacy assistance.

Another partner is the Mutual Aid Center Health for All (Centro de Ayuda Mutua Salud Para Todos) (CAMSAT), a local organization composed of residents of Bañado de Tambacú that seeks to reduce marginalization and extreme poverty in an urban neighbourhood located in a flood-prone area. With

the support of VCA, CAMSAT promotes the adoption of new energy alternatives, mobility solutions, waste management, recycling, new forms of gardening, and responsible water use, via environmental education, capacity building, content creation and advocacy, all of which are crucial in the face of climate change.

Another new partner is Emancipa, a regional feminist magazine that won the Amnesty International Peter Benenson Award in the alternative media category for its journalism committed to human rights. Their feminist perspective on climate justice is a valuable addition to regional climate coverage, content produced in part due to VCA's support.

### SUPPORTING A MOVEMENT FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

These are just a few examples of the local partner groups that have been able to raise their voices as part of the Alliance in Paraguay. Joining forces with Bolivia, VCA has mobilized local actions and activities – including advocacy campaigns, legal assistance, and proposed legislation – in more than 130 Indigenous communities from across 14 municipalities and 10 Indigenous Peoples as well as other marginalized groups. As any of these local partners' stories demonstrates, it is not possible to effectively engage in inclusive conservation and climate change action without centering the rights and agency of Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized populations.

**CASE STUDY #12: PERU –  
"LOVE THE RIVER": THE YOUTH MOVEMENT IN THE  
PERUVIAN AMAZON THAT DEFENDS RIVERS  
THROUGH ART, CULTURE, AND COMMUNICATIONS**

In November 2019, WWF-Peru rallied young people from the cities of Iquitos and Pucallpa to build a critical mass of youth advocates for the defence of Amazonian rivers. This call to envision and initiate collective action for nature conservation snowballed into a full-fledged movement.

The Peruvian Amazon is a sprawling expanse of floodplains, lagoons, navigable rivers like the Amazon, and a vast rainforest that benefits the entire planet. It serves as the home to a diverse range of Indigenous and local communities, and has the highest population of initially contacted and isolated Indigenous groups in Peru. This magnificent ecosystem – shared by Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela – plays vital roles for the planet, including climate regulation and water generation. Therefore, the Peruvian Amazon is seen as a natural solution to climate change, yet it faces threats from deforestation, expanding gold mining operations, dams, monocultures of cocoa and oil palm, and road construction.

Peru is the second largest country in the Amazon area and is home to 73 million hectares of forests. Here, the presence of the Andean Mountain Range is the foundation for one of the world's most astonishing and biodiverse ecosystems: from unique cloud forests to massive, flooded rainforests. These forests harbour record numbers of diverse birds, plants, insects and mammals endemic to the area, including species that do not exist in other areas. Moreover, it is home to over 50 ethnic groups, and refuge of some of the last Indigenous Peoples in voluntary isolation, who depend on these forests and rivers for their main livelihoods.

Amidst this expansive jungle stand two cities, Iquitos and Pucallpa, that share a close relationship with the

forest and river – key elements in maintaining the natural balance of the Peruvian Amazon. Historically, Amazonian communities have harnessed the forest's resources for survival while also taking steps to conserve them, maintaining a delicate balance. They understand that their survival is directly linked to the health of nature. Their knowledge, values, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes are crucial for the management and conservation of rivers and forests, as acknowledged by WWF-Peru.

However, this balance is now crumbling. Urban areas continue to expand, pressure for exploiting the Amazon intensifies, and there's a lack of collective awareness about the immeasurable value of this ecosystem. The residents of Iquitos and Pucallpa are pivotal in confronting these threats and maintaining the balance. Youth play an essential role in this mission, bringing innovative and creative ideas, a capacity for action and awareness-building, and a commitment to sustainability and natural preservation. Additionally, it's the youth who will become the future leaders, making critical decisions to preserve the life of this ecosystem.

**YOUTH AS AGENTS OF CHANGE**

WWF-Peru recognized that the youth of Iquitos and Pucallpa should be at the forefront of the "Love the River" movement, aimed at envisioning and initiating collective actions to defend the Amazon rivers. This initiative seeks genuine, full and effective youth participation in Amazon cities. Historically an underrepresented and vulnerable group, these young people are being involved in spaces for communication and artistic creation. In November 2019, WWF-Peru called upon youth aged 18 to 24 from these two communities to establish a network aimed at strengthening the emotional bonds between communities and their rivers, fostering public awareness of the Amazon as a life

source, and empowering youth to take on a crucial role in conservation while developing their leadership skills. Currently, the "Love the River" initiative boasts more than 100 young champions actively involved across four cities and an additional thousand youths participating in specific activities, such as digital forums.

At that time, the "Love the River" youth volunteer network in Iquitos and Pucallpa was established. This network has leveraged communications and artistic creation to build bridges between communities and both public and private entities, rallying the community around the vital cause of river and forest conservation. The "Love the River" initiative is supported by various organizations, including the National Water Authority (ANA), the Regional Culture Directorate of Loreto, the Amazon Council for Aquaculture and Fisheries Development (CADAP), the Amazon Earth Environmental Group (GATIA), the Ucayali and Loreto Interquorum Networks, the Technological University of Peru (UTEC), Healthy City, WCS Peru, and WWF-Peru.

**THE VOICES OF THE YOUTH**

Arantxa Valentina Babilonia Nolorbe is one of these young activists. Hailing from Iquitos, she is 23 years old and holds a degree in environmental management. Her mother grew up on the banks of a small village called Juancho Playa, next to the Napo River, while her father is from the city. They raised their three children, teaching them about the importance of growing and harvesting their own food, instilling a love for plants, and educating them on coexisting with animals. This upbringing ignited her passion for protecting nature. This passion drove her to choose her career, join the environmental association "Interpreting the Environment for Iquitos Awareness", and become an environmental leader.



© WWF-Peru



She dreams of becoming an environmental educator, preparing children and young adults to share their knowledge and love for the Amazon. “We don’t have a strong environmental culture here. One of the biggest issues is solid waste. People dump trash on the riverbanks because it’s easy. How can this change? Primarily through education, by fostering a culture of environmental care,” she says. Arantxa feels that the “Love the River” movement has empowered her to strengthen her leadership skills, learn effective communication techniques, connect more seamlessly with other leaders, rediscover photography as a conservation tool, and even overcome her shyness. “Before, it was challenging for me to connect with other people,” she says. Furthermore, she explains that this journey has taught her “how to navigate community engagement more effectively”. “When you work with groups, it’s crucial to exhibit self-confidence and clarity in what you’re conveying... This helps people better understand the message you’re trying to share,” adds Arantxa.

About 500 kilometres from Iquitos (a week’s journey by river, or an hour’s flight) lies Pucallpa, a city situated in the central-eastern Amazon that also plays a vital role in the conservation of this ecosystem. Living there is Gustavo Adolfo Carrasco Zúñiga, a

29-year-old biologist and member of the “Love the River” movement. Gustavo explains that this city, often called “the youngest in Peru,” was founded by newcomers who came to harness the area’s resources. The local communities, who originally lived along the riversides, underwent a process of cultural blending that changed their unique character.

There were also changes in the land. Resources began to deplete, hunting and fishing declined. “The region became fixated on extracting natural resources and on fostering growth. Wildlife was pushed aside,” Gustavo notes. This situation galvanized young people like him to organize, prepare, and work to tackle these threats. While still in college, he founded Viridis Tours, an ecotourism company. “I wanted to introduce scientific tourism, to reclaim ancestral Indigenous wisdom tied to nature, mainly with the Shipibo people, especially for the benefit of local communities,” Gustavo explains. He also devoted himself to photographing the unique places, expressions and cultures he was discovering. In 2017, along with other young people, he founded “Ucayali Biodiversity Volunteers”, and this leadership role led him to the “Love the River” initiative.

Gustavo says that this initiative has been “an opportunity to make visible

the work we were doing, to showcase the environmental leadership we have developed”. His proposals and actions within “Love the River” have been focused on campaigns against wildlife trafficking, teaching sustainable habits and alternatives to reduce the impact on Amazonian rivers, and river clean-ups.

For Gustavo, one of the greatest accomplishments of this movement has been to inspire, nurture and bolster youth leadership. One of the actions he cherishes most was curating an exhibition that invited local and Indigenous artists to express their worldview concerning the Amazonian rivers. At the same time, he says that one of his biggest challenges is getting environmental authorities to recognize, believe in, and collaborate with young people in their innovative approach to conservation. “In the case of private companies, we’ve had good relations; they appreciate these kinds of initiatives. In contrast, institutions often aren’t as interested due to bureaucratic issues or differing priorities,” Gustavo explains.

Both Arantxa Babilonia and Gustavo Carrasco are convinced that their roles in this story are pivotal—as young people, as environmentalists, and as inhabitants of that vast jungle that requires their creative and protective energy.

“In the case of private companies, we’ve had good relations; they appreciate these kinds of initiatives. In contrast, institutions often aren’t as interested due to bureaucratic issues or differing priorities”

Gustavo Adolfo Carrasco Zúñiga, biologist



Gray dolphin. River dolphin  
(Sotalia fluviatilis), Amazonas, Peru  
© WWF-Peru

## CASE STUDY #13: AUSTRALIA – EMBEDDING INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

Aboriginal people have cared for Country in Australia for at least 65,000 years. “Country” is a term used by First Nation Australians to describe a complex system of law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity. As one of our own WWF-Australia staff often says: “People and Country are one and the same. You can’t have one without the other.”

Aboriginal people have cared for Country in Australia for at least 65,000 years. “Country” is a term used by First Nation Australians to describe a complex system of law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity. As one of our own WWF-Australia staff often says: “People and Country are one and the same. You can’t have one without the other.”

WWF’s vision is to build a world where humans live and prosper in harmony with nature. WWF-Australia believes that supporting First Peoples to continue to care for Country, Saltwater and Sky is integral to this ambition, and accept and respect their rights, connections, Cultural Authority and Knowledge. We have been working alongside Traditional Owner Groups for over 15 years, and are on a continuous journey to enhance and embed Indigenous engagement and empowerment across all our operations – not only in conservation programming but across leadership and governance frameworks, human resource practices, advocacy and communications, and engagement with partners.

WWF-Australia appointed its first-ever Indigenous board member in 2019 and has added four highly qualified national Indigenous leaders as governors of the organization. The expertise and knowledge of each of these governors are highly valued, and their input into the strategic and business planning was inspirational in helping to redefine our current vision and ambition. It was their influence that led to our **new strategy using an Indigenous framework**: Sky (climate), Country (land, including freshwater) and Saltwater (oceans).

In developing our new strategy, we undertook a deep listening exercise with communities across Australia. In 2022, the WWF-Australia board and executive team visited Giringun Aboriginal Corporation on Girramay Country in north Queensland. This was the first official step in WWF-Australia’s strategic planning process,

inviting input from Traditional Owners, communities and rangers to understand the challenges that First Peoples face in caring for Country. Listening to their needs, barriers and goals allowed us to set the foundations for our new strategy, with a co-designed vision for Indigenous engagement and an understanding of ways of working to develop solutions that align with First Peoples’ aspirations and WWF’s vision – in line with our ESSF standard on Stakeholder Engagement.

We also held forums with the business sector, met with state and federal ministers and officials, and strengthened collaboration with WWF offices across Asia-Pacific. This included an Oceania-wide dialogue between Indigenous communities working on climate change.

WWF-Australia’s new FY24-26 Strategic Plan underpins the intent to continue to work with and for Indigenous Peoples and local communities in a meaningful, impactful and transformational way. This intent is articulated through a crosscutting strategic objective that, by 2026, at least 50% of projects and programmes will be delivered in collaboration with and/or support the sustainable development aspirations of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

**WWF-Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and their continuing connection to their lands, waters and culture. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present, and their emerging leaders.**

**REGENERATE NATURE BY 2030**  
TOGETHER, WE WILL RESTORE AND REGENERATE OUR SKY, COUNTRY AND SALTWATER THAT WILL ALLOW NATURE TO HEAL. WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND TRADITIONS OF FIRST PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES, WE CAN BRING CHANGE ON A GLOBAL SCALE FOR CLIMATE, NATURE AND PEOPLE.

**SKY**  
Support Australia in joining global leaders to secure a healthy climate, powered by communities, nature and renewable energy.  
**WHAT WE'LL DO**  
• Support COP28 to be hosted in Australia with the Pacific and secure a binding agreement for climate nature and communities that will stabilize global warming to 1.5°C.  
• Ensure Australia's position as a renewable energy superpower is on track amounting to 80% coal and gas transition to 100% renewable energy production by 2050.  
• Support Indigenous and local communities in Australia, the Pacific and Southeast Asia to harness the power of nature to build resilience and solutions to climate change.

**COUNTRY**  
We will transform Australia from a deforestation to a reforestation nation and working with communities, protect and regenerate vital landscapes and species here and abroad.  
**WHAT WE'LL DO**  
• Lead the transition to a reforestation nation by restoring 100,000 hectares, reverse the threat of logging to 1 million forest hectares and protect 20 million hectares of land.  
• Leverage \$2 billion in funding for threatened species to double the number of Aussie and Tiers by 2030 and protect more than 10 culturally significant species.  
• Fast-track Australia's move towards producing net-zero emissions by 2030.

**SALTWATER**  
We are rallying our region to safeguard our oceans and blue foods, create safe passages for marine wildlife and support coastal communities.  
**WHAT WE'LL DO**  
• Call on the region to protect 100 million hectares of ocean in the southern hemisphere.  
• Establish blue superhighways to protect and connect critical habitats and migration corridors of vulnerable whales and dolphins.  
• Ensure transparent sourcing pathways for at least one key marine product in the southern hemisphere oceans.

**HOW WE'LL DO IT**  
OUR AMBITION IS SIMPLE: RESTORE AND REGENERATE OUR PLANET FOR EVERYTHING THAT CALLS IT HOME.

**REGENERATIVE FUTURE**  
Protect nature from current threats, reset the course of our global economy and society, to allow for a Regenerative Future where people and nature thrive.

**PEOPLE & COMMUNITY**  
Build a future-fit organization that is ready to adapt through practical leadership and a safe and inclusive workplace. Remain transparent, accountable, and financially sustainable. Grow, engage and rally a diverse 'Indigens strong' community of supporters and partners who will stand by WWF.

**OUR COMMITMENT - INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION**  
Embrace innovation and First Peoples Knowledge so that our projects and programs are delivered in full collaboration. Support the hopes of Indigenous Peoples & local communities. Focus on fast, best and just outcomes for communities, nature, and climate.



## INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION IN KIMBERLEY, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The remote, rugged Kimberley region in Western Australia has a rich biodiversity and a rich Indigenous culture dating back 65,000 years. Around 40% of the region's sparse population identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

WWF-Australia is supporting Indigenous ranger-led conservation in the region. The programme focuses on supporting strategic conservation actions that respect and support cultural authority, are rooted in and integrate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), and ensure resilience and protection of natural and cultural values across a complex eco-cultural landscape.

The programme supports eight Indigenous ranger teams to lead efforts to heal and improve the health of Country. For example, a key component is “[Right-Way Fire management](#)”, in alignment with Indigenous cultural practices as well as cutting-edge fire science. This involves Traditional Owners using less intense, smaller patches of fire that heal the land and protect its biodiversity – administered “at the right time, in the right place, by the right people.”

Respecting cultural protocols and cultural significance plays a central role. Cultural practices guide conservation efforts but also direct priority actions. For instance, the Nyikina and Mangala Traditional Owners of the west Kimberley are working to prevent the extinction of the *wiliji* (black-footed rock-wallaby), a culturally important species endemic to Nyikina Mangala Country. [A partnership with WWF-Australia](#) is seeking to address factors contributing to *wiliji* decline and protect this important species and its rocky habitat to improve resilience in a future of changing climate.

To further enhance commitment, WWF-Australia has employed a local Yawuru/Karajarri man, Pius Gregory, to provide cultural guidance and support to the Kimberley team, who work in close partnership with Traditional Owners. Indigenous partners consider this a positive initiative for the programme, improving partner engagement and demonstrating WWF-Australia's commitment to understanding and incorporating Indigenous perspectives in its conservation efforts.

More information is available here on [WWF-Australia's 'Scat Chat' podcast](#) episode featuring Pius and species conservation manager Dr. Leigh-Ann Wooley.

## AUSTRALIA'S WOMEN RANGERS ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK (WREN)

The roles of Indigenous women in Australia are usually different from those of men, and many Traditional practices in caring for Country are associated with women only. Indigenous women have unique knowledge, which is essential for proper care of key environmental and cultural assets, sites and species, and is transferred between generations in different ways. Women's work on Country varies according to cultural protocols, landscape, language, location, funding and resources.

All this is essential to protecting vast areas of high biodiversity across Australia: Indigenous protected areas make up approximately half of the country's national reserve. Yet, women represent less than 25% of the Indigenous ranger workforce.

“Male rangers have made up the majority of rangers since the beginning,” says Gooniyandi ranger coordinator Russell Chestnut Junior. “We need more women as rangers before all our old ladies leave us and all that knowledge is lost.”

The [Women Rangers Environmental Network \(WREN\)](#) began in 2017 with Kimberley Land Council, WWF-Australia and a small group of women rangers. Today, WREN links more than 450 Indigenous women, primarily in northern Australia, through regional coordinators, state and territory forums, national programmes and global opportunities. Across the national network, the WREN knowledge exchange and professional development programmes support new and emerging women rangers, the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and experience, career development and emerging leaders in conservation. WREN has supported travel to international ranger forums, and this year, in partnership with Australian Volunteers International, arranged the first Indigenous women rangers group exchange to Solomon Islands.

To address the unique barriers to women's full participation in the ranger programme, these women need a culturally safe space where they can access emotional and professional support, pursue new opportunities, engage in knowledge exchange, and come together to unite their voices on common issues. Through supporting their culturally aligned systems of conservation, management, and leadership, WREN seeks to address the obstacles facing women looking after Country and develop “one strong voice for women”.

“Last year, I was part of the event and saw the impact elevating the voices of these women and giving them agency over their own solutions for Country and community,” says Indigenous singer-songwriter Shellie Morris. “I firmly believe in this process as a way forward that will have flow-on effects to the greater community.”

[Explore more about women caring for Country through the Caring on Country hub](#)

## OCEANIA'S FIRST VOICES

First Nations people are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, despite having contributed the least to the problem. And there's growing acknowledgement that First Nations people's expertise and Traditional Knowledge are vital to climate action.

More than 40% of Key Biodiversity Areas are within the lands and territories of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and more than 90% of those lands are in good or fair ecological condition. This has significant implications for global efforts to address climate change. Recent analysis from the [World Resources Institute](#) and Climate Focus, for example, found that lands managed by Indigenous People and local communities can sequester more than twice as much carbon as non-Indigenous lands.

Indigenous knowledge and practice strengthen local communities, foster transdisciplinary engagement with scientists and policymakers, and offer novel ways to understand climate change impacts and drive tailored local solutions. However, Indigenous knowledge continues to be excluded or marginalized from global climate science and policy processes.

The [Oceania's First Voices programme](#) aims to provide platforms for Indigenous knowledge holders, leaders, elders, youth and frontline land and sea practitioners to inform and drive change. Beginning as a partnership between WWF-Australia, WWF-Pacific and WWF-New Zealand,

the first phase of the initiative took the first steps in establishing a First Nations-led network, fostered regional relationships across WWF's long-time partner communities and connected First Nations climate leaders across Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands to raise a collective voice for climate justice.

The programme supported community leaders, carried out community advocacy training and organized an [inaugural regional forum](#). The forum brought together community leaders and advocates from across Oceania to share climate solutions and elevate Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and first-hand insights on climate impacts and environmental change.

In a coordinated joint effort in the lead-up to the 2022 UN climate summit COP27, participants agreed on a collective call for climate justice and action under the spirit of “One Voice, One People, One World”. WWF-Pacific's regional policy and advocacy manager, Alfred Ralifo, delivered these recommendations at multiple WWF and Australian government side events at COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. The recommendations were also communicated at formal negotiations on the Global Biodiversity Framework at the CBD COP15 in Montreal.

The next phase of the programme aims to mobilize and build capacity and community engagement in collaboration with First Nations partners in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, ready for the Australia Pacific joint bid for COP31.

## AMPLIFYING INDIGENOUS VOICES

WWF-Australia has a longstanding record of supporting Indigenous-led conservation through amplifying Indigenous voices across our communications. To underpin this work, we have an Indigenous communications strategy, designed with input from an internal Indigenous engagement working group. This strategy, alongside an Indigenous communications style guide, outlines principles for stories and communications centred around First Nations peoples.

First Nations voices are also supported through a dedicated section on the WWF-Australia website, called the [Caring on Country Hub](#). This hub was launched in May 2023, and is the first of its kind for WWF-Australia. The hub is a central component of our Indigenous communications strategy, structured around the themes of cultural burning, women caring on Country, Saltwater people, and the relationship between Traditional Knowledge and state-of-the-art conservation technology.

WWF-Australia integrates the amplification of Indigenous voices across all our communications – in our annual business plan it is identified as an “always on”, forming part of our communications activities throughout the year. All WWF-Australia campaigns and communications are seen as an opportunity to amplify Indigenous voices. Our strategic commitment to inclusive conservation enables us to support and celebrate transformative achievements together, in culturally informed ways.

## CASE STUDY #14: NEPAL – ZERO POACHING IN NEPAL

In the last decade, Nepal has been remarkably successful in clamping down on poaching. As a result, the tiger population has nearly tripled while rhinos have returned to many parts of their historic range.

Conservation law enforcement agencies have played a key role in this success. Armed forest guards and police are employed to prevent poaching and wildlife crime, with Nepalese armed forces lending support in some national parks. The mandate of the conservation law enforcement agencies with regards to conservation and wildlife crime is to investigate, arrest, prosecute and support legal decisions. These actions are supported through establishing outposts, regular and special patrols when there is some information received from a particular area, or in areas that may not be covered by the regular patrols, surveillance, area control, deterrence of illegal activity, and raising awareness with communities who live beside the Protected and Conserved Areas.

There is high leadership turnover, and WWF involvement is essential. WWF has supported these frontline efforts in a variety of ways, from providing field equipment to training sniffer dogs and supplying drinking water to guard posts.

But preventing poaching is not just about enforcement. The Zero Poaching toolkit, developed through our work in Nepal, is built on six pillars – community, capacity, prosecution, technology, cooperation and assessment. The first of these, working with local communities, has made a vital contribution to preventing poaching and driving down wildlife crime in Nepal.

Our work with communities has included ongoing programmes to improve people’s livelihoods, address human-wildlife conflict and strengthen community management of natural resources. As a result, local people have been motivated to support the efforts of conservation law enforcement agencies. Community-based anti-poaching units have played an active role in tackling wildlife crime, while local assistance can also support successful investigations and prosecutions.

Ensuring that human rights are upheld is a vital part of our ongoing

engagement with conservation law enforcement agencies in Nepal. The roll-out of our Environment Social Safeguards Framework (ESSF) over the last three years seeks to minimize the risk of any negative social impacts from this engagement.

WWF supports integrated activities related to forests, wildlife, climate change and energy, fresh water and governance. Conservation law enforcement activities have also been undertaken, which include:

- » Orientation and training related to conservation and management, investigation and prosecution
- » Provision of field equipment to support conservation activities
- » Provision of technologies such as CCTV, drones, sniffer dogs to support zero poaching and reduce wildlife crimes
- » Provision of fuel and vehicle/ maintenance to support mobility

- » Provision of basic facilities of infrastructures such as: construction and maintenance of a fireline, guard post construction and maintenance, improving facilities such as drinking water
- » Technical and financial support for the formation of institutions/forums that support conservation law enforcement.

“Over the past 12 years, we nearly tripled the tiger population and achieved zero poaching of rhinoceros on seven occasions. We keep people at the centre and adopt ‘conservation with human face’ in all our actions on the ground to bring conservation benefits to the greater cause of both people and nature.”

Ghana Shyam Gurung  
Country Representative of WWF-Nepal



Guards surveying the Park from a boat.  
Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal.  
© Michel Gunther / WWF

## CASE STUDY #15: GLOBAL – COASTAL COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

The impacts of climate change and nature loss are wreaking havoc on many coastal environments together with the Indigenous People and local communities who depend on them. WWF’s Coastal Communities Initiative recognizes that, as long-standing custodians of nature and eye witnesses of the environmental degradation where they live, local people are best placed to identify what action to take. It also supports their inherent rights to a healthy environment and to shape their own future.

Some case studies and other stories from around the world are featured in the WWF Coastal Communities Initiative Impact Report, available for download from <https://coastalcommunityledconservation.org/publications>.

Currently, the initiative is active in 128 sites across six seascapes: Coral Triangle, Latin America, Mediterranean Sea, Northern Indian Ocean, Pacific Ocean and South-west Indian Ocean. Each community-led conservation initiative in these sites adopts a similar framework, which enables a human-rights-based approach to coastal and marine conservation to be implemented. This involves the establishment of self- or co-management rights, a focus on the socio-economic well-being of communities and the development of ecosystem resilience.

Tackling deep-seated issues such as rising sea levels, depleted fisheries and the loss of vital habitats requires collaboration between all those who have a role to play, including civil society organizations, government institutions and the communities themselves. The initiative therefore encourages the development of strong partnerships that support efforts to build resilient communities and ecosystems, while also promoting inclusivity and equity.

Here are some examples of community-led conservation that the initiative seeks to scale:

### CHILE

Seeing gender equity as a vital foundation for sustainable development and effective conservation, WWF supported the efforts of a coalition of Chilean women to establish a national law in 2021 that created gender quotas in fishing regulatory bodies. The new law also seeks to formalize previously unrecognized traditional female roles such as smoking seafood products, enabling female workers to appear on work registers and

apply for grants to improve their businesses. The work does not stop there – we are now supporting a new bill that promotes gender equity in artisanal fishing harbours.

### INDONESIA

In Indonesia’s Wakatobi National Park, the country’s third-largest marine park encompassing 1.4 million hectares, WWF has worked with partners since 2002 to strengthen the park’s management effectiveness, promote sustainable livelihoods and build the conservation capacity of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Over the years, there have been significant increases in local community involvement in conservation decision-making alongside government and fishers, with the Bajau people’s wisdom and experience of the sea proving particularly valuable.

### SOLOMON ISLANDS

WWF’s support is helping local communities in the Solomon Islands combine scientific data analysis with their local and traditional knowledge to make the best possible decisions on the sustainable management of their resources. Our training enabled community rangers and facilitators to undertake reef baseline surveys in 10 communities that support the design, monitoring and implementation of their community-based fisheries management plans. Improved decision-making is vital due to the increased pressure on resources from climate change, rapid growth and overfishing.

Refer to the recently published case study that further shines light on our work in the Solomon Islands through a community-based marine resources management model.

### SOUTH AFRICA

A collaboration between WWF and the Keiskamma Art Project (KAP) in the coastal town of Hamburg in South Africa led to the creation of a major artwork highlighting the impacts of the climate crisis. WWF ran climate change workshops with local artists from KAP, who then created a large tapestry, called Umlibo, infused with their lived experiences of climate change. The tapestry has been used at the COP28 UN Climate Conference where it was lauded by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa who said that the artwork is in and of itself “the full speech that should really ever be given by any head of state in talking so eloquently about the impacts of climate change”.

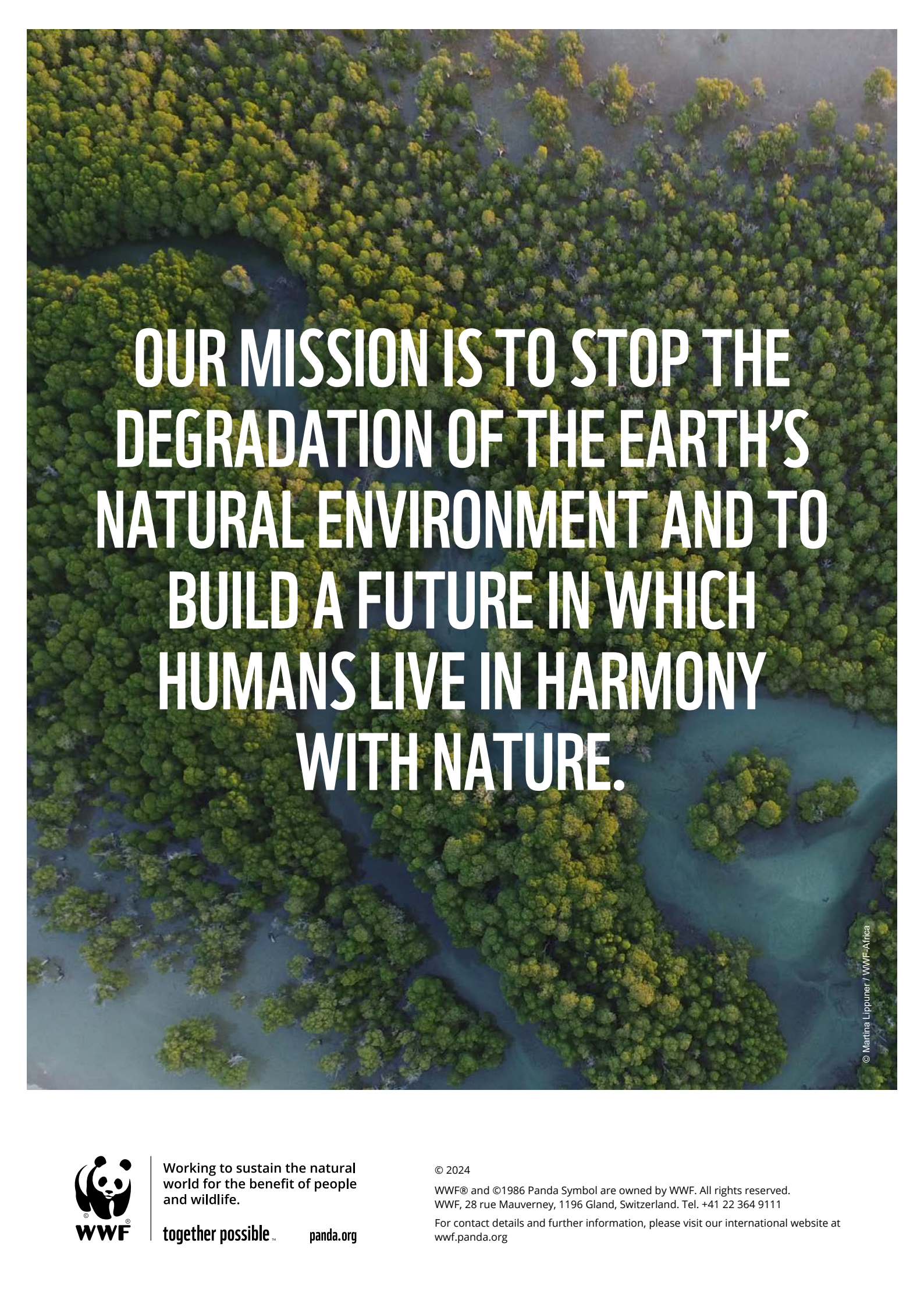


Indigenous women and girls in the Menarbu sasi ceremony, Indonesia  
© Yosias Menarbu / WWF-Indonesia

## ACRONYMS

ABBREVIATION	DEFINITION
<b>ANA</b>	National Water Authority (Peru)
<b>APED</b>	Organisation pour la protection de l'environnement, et l'Appui au développement
<b>APIB</b>	Indigenous People Articulation (Brazil)
<b>ARCC</b>	WWF International Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee
<b>Asoproagro</b>	Association of Agricultural Producers of Guaviare
<b>BACUDA</b>	Bagyeli's Cultural and Development Association
<b>CADAP</b>	Regional Culture Directorate of Loreto, the Amazon Council for Aquaculture and Fisheries Development (Peru)
<b>CADER</b>	Centre d'appui au développement rural
<b>CADER</b>	Centre d'Actions pour le Développement
<b>CAMSAT</b>	Mutual Aid Center Health for All (Centro de Ayuda Mutua Salud Para Todos)
<b>CAR</b>	Central African Republic
<b>CEFAID</b>	Centre pour l'Education, la Formation et l'Appui aux Initiatives de Développement au Cameroun
<b>CIHR</b>	Conservation Initiative on Human Rights
<b>CoC</b>	Code of Conduct
<b>CoCoSi</b>	Site Coordination Committees
<b>CONAQ</b>	National Coordination for the Articulation of Black Rural Quilombola Communities (Brazil)
<b>CQC</b>	Conservation Quality Committee
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>DSPA</b>	Dzanga-Sangha Protected Areas
<b>ESMF</b>	Environmental Social Mitigation Framework
<b>ESSF</b>	Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework
<b>ETIC</b>	Espace TRIDOM Interzone Congo
<b>EUDR</b>	<i>European Union Directive on Deforestation</i>
<b>FCS</b>	Fragile Conflict and Violent Situations
<b>FPIC</b>	Free Prior and Informed Consent
<b>FTNS</b>	Fondation Tri-National de la Sangha
<b>GATIA</b>	Amazon Earth Environmental Group (Peru)
<b>GBF</b>	Global Biodiversity Framework
<b>GESI</b>	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
<b>GFC</b>	Guyana Forestry Commission
<b>HiiL</b>	Hague Institute of Innocation of Law

ABBREVIATION	DEFINITION
<b>IBAMA</b>	Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources
<b>ICCN</b>	Institut congolais pour la conservation de la nature
<b>IPCG</b>	Indigenous Peoples Consultative Group
<b>IRF</b>	International Ranger Federation
<b>JUREC</b>	Juristes pour l'Environnement au Congo
<b>KAP</b>	Keiskamma Art Project
<b>KKL</b>	Kaziranga Karbi Anglong landscape
<b>KMCRG</b>	Kanuku Mountains Community Representative Group
<b>MEF</b>	Ministry of Forest Economy
<b>MEFP</b>	Maison de l'Enfant et de la Femme Pygmées
<b>MINFOF</b>	Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife - Cameroon
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>MRV</b>	Monitoring, reporting, and verification
<b>NET</b>	Network Executive Team
<b>NFDIN</b>	National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities
<b>NPNP</b>	Ntokou-Pikounda National Park
<b>NRDDB</b>	North Rupununi District Development Board (Guyana)
<b>PACHA</b>	Pantanal Chaco landscape
<b>PERAD</b>	Organisation pour la protection de l'environnement, la recherche et l'appui au développement
<b>RACOPY</b>	Réseau Recherches Actions Concertées Pygmées
<b>REDD+</b>	Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation; '+' stands for additional forest-related activities
<b>ROC</b>	Republic of the Congo
<b>SBDA</b>	Bolivian Society of Environmental Law
<b>SRDC</b>	South Rupununi District Council
<b>TAL</b>	Terai Arc Landscape
<b>TNS</b>	Tri-national de la Sangha
<b>TRIDOM</b>	Tri-national Dja-Odzala-Minkébé
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNGP</b>	United Nations Guiding Principles
<b>URSA</b>	Universal Ranger Support Alliance
<b>UTEC</b>	Ucayali and Loreto Interquorum Networks, the Technological University of Peru
<b>VCA</b>	Voice for Just Climate Action
<b>WREN</b>	Women Rangers Environmental Network (Australia)



**OUR MISSION IS TO STOP THE  
DEGRADATION OF THE EARTH'S  
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND TO  
BUILD A FUTURE IN WHICH  
HUMANS LIVE IN HARMONY  
WITH NATURE.**

© Martina Lippuner / WWF-Africa



Working to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and wildlife.

together possible™ panda.org

© 2024

WWF® and ©1986 Panda Symbol are owned by WWF. All rights reserved. WWF, 28 rue Mauverney, 1196 Gland, Switzerland. Tel. +41 22 364 9111

For contact details and further information, please visit our international website at [wwf.panda.org](http://wwf.panda.org)