

GLOBAL OCEAN JUSTICE NOW



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Making the case for
a human rights-based approach
to marine conservation**

GREENPEACE

Local fishing community, Chana
© Songwut Jullanan / Greenpeace



Artisanal fishing, Senegal
© Julien Flosse / Greenpeace

INTRODUCTION

For generations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities have managed extensive areas of land and sea, from sprawling mangrove forests to coastal fisheries that sustain vital species. These ecosystems are fundamental to the livelihoods, cultural traditions and well-being of these peoples, with their customary tenure in turn supporting habitats to thrive. In fact, growing evidence suggests that habitats are more likely to thrive under their expert stewardship.

Yet Indigenous Peoples and local communities continue to be denied rights to these areas, with economic interests driving unsustainable development and contributing to the climate and nature crises.

However, there is increasing recognition and support for human rights-based and community-led conservation, the most significant being the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF), which was adopted by 196 Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in December 2022.

This framework includes promising provisions that, if properly enforced, could recognise and protect these rights (Target 3, 19, 22 and Section C). One crucial opportunity lies in Target 3, which sets out to establish a network of equitably governed protected and conserved areas, recognising Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) and Indigenous and Traditional Territories (ITTs) as pathways to achieving area-based conservation targets.

The Intergovernmental Panel for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) advises that investment in Indigenous and community-led conservation is crucial, yet to date, translating KM-GBF commitments into national policies and in-country implementation remains woefully inadequate. Parties have been slow to update their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) in line with the KM-GBF, and the uptake of Human Rights-Based Approaches (HRBAs) in NBSAPs and National Targets remains limited.

Meanwhile, most marine protected and conserved areas are under the sole management of government authorities, with few community-led marine conservation areas recognised globally. Competing national priorities for infrastructure, extractive and industrial development risk impeding human rights-based and community-led conservation – in direct contradiction to the commitments made.

“IN CALLING FOR OCEAN JUSTICE, THIS REPORT ACKNOWLEDGES WHAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES HAVE LONG KNOWN: THAT THE WELL-BEING OF PEOPLE AND PLANET IS MUTUALLY DEPENDENT – ONE CANNOT BE PROTECTED WITHOUT THE OTHER.”

This report provides evidence in support of policies and programmes that fully recognise and respect the contributions, rights, knowledge, expertise and solutions of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as key actors in the conservation of marine and coastal ecosystems. Via four national case studies, spanning Chile, Senegal, Sri Lanka and Thailand, **it argues that Indigenous Peoples and local communities are well placed to lead conservation efforts that achieve global biodiversity goals, but are being impeded by inadequate or contradictory government policies and investment.** By focusing on marine and coastal environments, this report aims to raise the visibility of community conservation leadership in these areas.

In the lead-up to CBD COP17, where the first global review of KM-GBF implementation will take place, the recommendations in this report intend to strengthen progress toward the framework’s goals – including the 30x30 target – in support of the vision to “live in harmony with nature” by 2050. **It suggests that governments can significantly enhance and accelerate realisation of their KM-GBF commitments, including the 30x30 target, by formally recognising, prioritising and investing in rights-based and community-led conservation.** And in calling for ocean justice, it acknowledges what Indigenous Peoples and local communities have long known: that the well-being of people and planet is mutually dependent – one cannot be protected without the other.

World Oceans Day protest, Sri Lanka © Sameera Liyan / Greenpeace



CASE STUDIES



1 CHILE

In Chile, the longstanding relationship of Kawésqar indigenous communities to their customary territory in the Kawésqar National Reserve (KNR) is being severely impacted by unsustainable salmon farming and processing. Opportunities for rights-based conservation via a community-led approach exist, namely the participatory development of a management plan for the Reserve, and support for Marine Coastal Spaces for Indigenous Peoples (ECMPOs). Yet these critical solutions have been unjustly delayed.

Salmon farming, Chile © Sergio Salazar / Greenpeace

2 SENEGAL

In Senegal, the environment, food security, and livelihoods of coastal fishing communities are being undermined by extensive commercial overfishing, including a huge increase in the production and export of fishmeal and fish oil (FMFO). This development is in contrast to Senegal's pioneering community-led conservation, through community co-managed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and conservation areas managed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities (ICCAs), which have helped restore biodiversity and improve livelihoods. Furthermore, these initiatives are constrained by a lack of sufficient resources, legal recognition, and consistent political support.



Fish processors, Senegal
© Clément Tardif / Greenpeace



3 SRI LANKA

In Sri Lanka, Mannar Island is a critical biodiversity hotspot that sustains community livelihoods while serving as a vital habitat for hundreds of thousands of globally important migratory birds. Yet proposed sand mining is threatening to destabilise the island's already delicate ecosystem, while wind development projects are restricting local access to common lands and grazing areas. Communities protesting these developments have faced excessive use of force by the police, following which the President announced that wind power projects could not proceed without local consent. Meanwhile, promising national plans and Sri Lanka's global commitments under the CBD and other multilateral fora offer potential for community conservation alternatives.

Sperm whale, Sri Lanka © Paul Hilton / Greenpeace

4 THAILAND

In Thailand, coastal environments and communities are facing devastating threats from mega-projects, including a planned Land Bridge connecting the Andaman Sea with the Gulf of Thailand, and an industrial estate in Chana on the Gulf of Thailand. Communities protesting these developments have initiated their own solutions, calling for areas under traditional management to be formally recognised and conserved as an OECM. If realised, it would become the first marine OECM in the country.

Fishing family, Chana
© Sirachai Arunrugstichai / Greenpeace



CROSS-CUTTING THEMES & KEY INSIGHTS

A review of the four case studies reveals a number of recurring themes, offering important insights into the opportunities and threats facing community-led conservation:

▶ **Community-led conservation is a powerful strategy for success but requires more support from governments**

Community-led initiatives to conserve coastal environments and resources are widespread, offering tremendous potential for more effective, equitable, and lasting conservation. However, these initiatives require much greater policy, programmatic, and financial support.

▶ **Slow implementation of NBSAPs**

The KM-GBF is a vital opportunity to secure human rights-based and community-led approaches to conservation, yet governments are missing key opportunities to advance them in national implementation.

▶ **Unsustainable coastal development**

Extractivism, infrastructure and industrial developments are impacting coastal environments and the communities who rely on them. This includes increased food insecurity, pollution, and restrictions on access to traditional lands, cultural practices and fisheries.

▶ **Weak community tenure rights**

Contrary to international frameworks and guidelines, as well as standards set in the KM-GBF, governments are failing to recognise and support customary and community rights over land, fishery resources, and marine and coastal waters.

▶ **Lack of community voices in decision-making**

Indigenous Peoples and local communities are being denied a meaningful way to participate in decisions that affect their environments and ways of life.

▶ **Threats to environmental human rights defenders**

Where Indigenous Peoples and local communities do assert their voices, protests are met with harassment, threats, violence, criminalisation and/or legal actions. This intimidation further restricts community participation in decision-making and harms those targeted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Greenpeace calls on governments to deliver on their global commitments under the CBD and the KM-GBF to curb biodiversity loss through a human rights-based approach:

- ▶ **Legally recognise and support the customary and tenure rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities over their territories, lands and waterways.**
- ▶ **Secure full, meaningful participation for Indigenous Peoples and local communities in all levels and stages of marine and coastal protection and management processes.**
- ▶ **Urgently recognise and scale up Indigenous and local community-led conservation initiatives to close the implementation gap of the KM-GBF, particularly Goal A, Target 3, Target 22 and Section C, through a human rights-based approach to protected areas, other effective area-based conservation measures and Indigenous and traditional territories.**
- ▶ **Close the finance gap by mobilising adequate, predictable and sustainable funds, and ensuring direct access to Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' coastal conservation efforts.**
- ▶ **Mainstream rights-based nature protection as a primary filter through which all industrial and coastal development must pass.**

This is an executive summary of: *Greenpeace International. (2026). Global Ocean Justice Now: Making the case for a human rights-based approach to conservation.*

Full report is available at: greenpeace.org/international/global-ocean-justice-now