

Survival



**The global movement
for tribal peoples' rights**

Parks need peoples

Why evictions of tribal communities from protected areas spell disaster for both people and nature

The jungle is only here because of us

Baiga Kanha Tiger Reserve, India

1 Parks need peoples

Tribal peoples' lands are not wilderness

Give us something poisonous to eat... finish us off right here. That's fine.

But don't uproot us from here. The jungle is here only because of us.

If we go from here, you will see... after some time there will be nothing left.

Sukdev Dhurvey, Baiga

Subsequently evicted from Kanha Tiger Reserve, India

It is often wrongly claimed that tribal peoples' homelands are wildernesses, even though these peoples have been dependent on, and managed them, for millennia. In an attempt to protect areas of so-called "wilderness", governments, companies, NGOs and others forming the conservation industry believe in and enforce the creation of "inviolable zones", free of human inhabitation.

Nearly all protected areas such as national parks or game reserves are, or have been, the ancestral homelands of tribal peoples. Today tribal peoples are being illegally evicted from these homelands in the name of "conservation". The big conservation organizations are guilty of supporting this. They never speak out against evictions.

These evictions can destroy both the lives of tribal peoples and the environment they have shaped and cared for over generations.

For tribespeople eviction can be catastrophic. When they are evicted they have their self-sufficiency taken from them. Where once they thrived on their land, all too often they are reduced to begging or receiving government handouts in resettlement areas. Furthermore, when these guardians of the land are removed, their former environment can also suffer, as poaching, over-harvesting and wildfires increase along with tourism and big business.

This report exposes the dark side of the conservation industry and shows why parks and reserves need tribal peoples more than ever.

2 Parks need peoples

Tribal peoples have managed and protected their environments for millennia

Our relationship to the forest is like a child to its mother. The western environmental groups can't understand that.

Muthamma, a Jenu Kuruba leader
Nagarhole Tiger Reserve, India

It is not only important for India but also the world to know and understand the relationship between the Adivasis and the jungle, land, rivers, mountains and environment. We want to put this before the nation: the forest is our heritage; it is not merely our property. The whole world says that we will give you compensation. But I want to ask all of you: have any of you ever sold your mother? Can they give us the price for pure air and water, for our history?'¹

Dayamani Barla, Munda Adivasi
spokesperson
India

It is no coincidence that 80% of the world's biodiversity is found on the lands of tribal peoples² and that the vast majority of the 200 most biodiverse places on Earth are tribal peoples' territories.³ By developing ways to live sustainably on the land they cherish, tribal peoples have often contributed - sometimes over millennia - towards the high diversity of species around them.⁴

As Maasai elder Martin Saning'o Kariongi from Tanzania told the 2004 World Conservation Congress, "Our ways of farming pollinated diverse seed species and maintained corridors between ecosystems. ... We were the original conservationists."⁵

Take the Amazon, for example. Scientific studies based on satellite data show that indigenous territories, which cover one fifth of the Brazilian Amazon, are highly effective and vitally important for stopping deforestation⁶ and forest fires⁷ and are the most important barrier to deforestation there.⁸

Similar effects are seen in the Bolivian Amazon (where deforestation is six-times less in community forests), and in Guatemala (where it is twenty-times less).⁹

The future success of conservation therefore critically depends on tribal peoples.

"When the rights of communities are respected, they are far more effective than governments or the private sector in protecting forests." Andy White, Rights and Resources Initiative.¹⁰

3 Parks need peoples

Exclusionary conservation has a brutal history

The declaration of protected areas on indigenous territories without our consent and engagement has resulted in our dispossession and resettlement, the violation of our rights, the displacement of our peoples, the loss of our sacred sites and the slow but continuous loss of our cultures, as well as impoverishment...

First we were dispossessed in the name of kings and emperors, later in the name of state development, and now in the name of conservation.¹¹

Indigenous delegates' statement
World Parks' Congress, 2003

The idea of conserving “wilderness” areas by excluding people took hold in North America in the 1800s. It was based on an arrogant misreading of the land, which totally failed to recognize how tribal peoples had shaped and nurtured these “wildernesses”. Instead the belief was that “scientific” conservationists know what is best for a landscape and have the right to remove any persons from it.¹²

It was President Theodore Roosevelt who promoted the exclusionary model of conservation and Yellowstone National Park was the world's first example. When it was created in 1872, the Native Americans who had lived there for centuries were initially allowed to remain, but five years later they were forced to leave. Battles ensued between the government authorities and the Shoshone, Blackfoot and Crow tribes. In one battle alone, 300 people were reportedly killed.¹³

Such historical detail is omitted or glossed over to preserve the allure of the park. Yet this model of forced eviction for conservation became standard across Africa and India with devastating impacts - not just for the tribes, but for nature too.

Protected areas are usually created with the stated goal of preserving an area in the interests of flora and fauna - not people. They take the form of national parks, conservation zones, nature reserves, and so on. As of 2014, there are now over 200,000 protected areas¹⁴, which cover approximately 15% of the land on Earth.^{15 16}

Protected areas differ in their levels of restrictions, but, in most cases, those people who depend on the park's resources see their activities strictly curtailed.

Over 70% of parks in tropical areas are inhabited.¹⁷ An even higher percentage area of parks is depended upon by the communities that surround them. Tribespeople are expected to change their ways of life and/or relocate, their connection to their territories and livelihoods is severed, and they are given little if any choice about what happens.

4 Parks need peoples

Why are tribal peoples, the best conservationists, illegally evicted?

It's strange when these outsiders come and teach us development. Is development possible by destroying the environment that provides us food, water and dignity? Our government sheds crocodile tears about environment protection. Here, we live with the hills and forests, having preserved them since our forefathers' time.

Lodu Sikoka, Dongria Kondh
India

Mike Fay, an influential ecologist with the NGO Wildlife Conservation Society, is quoted by journalist Mark Dowie as saying in 2003:

“Teddy Roosevelt had it right. In 1907, when the United States was at the stage in its development not dissimilar to the Congo Basin today...President Roosevelt made the creation of 230 million acres of protected areas the cornerstone of [his domestic policy]...My work in the Congo Basin has been basically to try to bring this US model to Africa.”¹⁸

President Roosevelt was wrong, yet his influence lives on through many key conservation organizations today, with devastating impacts.

However, evicting people from parks is costly for governments - in both money and popularity. So why do governments do it? Reasons include:

Tourism

Evictions are justified in the interests of the lucrative tourist trade and the belief that tourists want to see wilderness and wildlife, not people.

Control

The desire of a government to have complete control over both the area and the people. This is made a great deal easier by separating one from the other.

Paternalism and racism

Some governments have evicted tribal peoples from parks in a paternalistic, and racist, attempt to force them to assimilate into the mainstream society. Botswana's removal of the Bushmen from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, for example, was - in part - due to this attitude and a false claim that the Bushmen were “overhunting.”¹⁹

The big conservation organizations are guilty of supporting evictions

Look, this is a game reserve, the whole purpose...is to protect and conserve the flora and fauna. [Even though the Bushmen] have had this way of life for many years, they have to be moved into the modern way of doing things.

Ian Khama, President of Botswana and Board member of Conservation International
Botswana

WWF is funding projects which destroy populations.

Baka
Cameroon

International conservation organizations fuel evictions by encouraging governments to step up policing and protection. Sometimes governments cede power to them, so they too acquire the right to arrest and evict. Historically, these conservation organizations have mostly been run by conservation biologists whose concern for individual species or habitats overrides their ability to appreciate the ways in which whole ecosystems have been nurtured and managed by tribal peoples, the very same people who should therefore be the primary partners in their conservation.

Three examples:

After the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) bought land in Kenya that was home to a community from the Samburu tribe, Kenyan police began a series of brutal evictions. Men, women and children were beaten and villages were torched. Two thousand Samburu families were forced to live in squats on the edge of the land. AWF did not condemn the violence.²⁰

Since a wildlife corridor between Botswana's Central Kalahari Game Reserve and the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park was proposed, local and national authorities have pressurized Bushmen of Ranyane community to leave. Conservation International was involved in the creation of the project²¹ but, when Bushmen took to court to fight forced evictions, its CEO Peter Seligmann declined to speak out on the tribe's behalf.

Across India, tribal peoples are being forcibly evicted from tiger reserves.²² Big conservation organizations such as the Worldwide Fund for Nature and the Wildlife Conservation Society provide logistical and financial support to India's Forest Department, which carries out the evictions. Both WWF and WCS claim that relocations are "voluntary." When presented with evidence to the contrary, they remain silent.

Evictions in the name of conservation are a global problem

The forced displacement ... especially of indigenous communities...poses a severe threat to their survival as peoples.

Senator Alexander Lopez
Colombian Government Official

Please believe us when we tell you that pressurizing people to leave their ancestral land, and moving them to new settlements to live like other Batswana, will be sentencing them not to development, but to decades of misery.

Innu (plea to Botswana authorities)
Canada

It is extremely difficult to quantify evictions from parks as records do not exist in many areas and are unreliable in others.²³

Examples suggest the scale of the problem:

Africa

One study of Central African parks estimates that over 50,000 people have been evicted, many of whom are tribal people. Others put the figure in the millions.²⁴

India

An estimated 100,000 people had been evicted from parks by 2009²⁵ with “several million more deprived fully or partially of their sources of livelihood and survival.”²⁶ An estimated three or four million people are living in the country’s parks network, which has expanded considerably over recent years, with the fear of eviction hanging over them.²⁷

Thailand

The picture is similar in Southeast Asia, where - in Thailand alone - half a million people are threatened with eviction for the protection of forests and watersheds.²⁸

Thus it is possible only roughly to estimate that, globally, many millions of people either have been evicted from their homes or currently live with the threat of eviction hanging over them, in the name of conservation. The majority are tribal peoples.

These evictions are happening because the dominant conservation model relies on the creation of people-free protected areas in the form of national parks, sanctuaries and wildlife reserves. This is based largely on unscientific assumptions that tribal peoples are incapable of managing their lands “sustainably”, that they overhunt, overgraze, and overly use the resources on their lands. But it is also based on an essentially racist desire by many governments to integrate, modernize and, importantly, control, the tribal peoples in their countries.²⁹

National policies are therefore devised to require the eviction of tribal peoples and force forest-dependent peoples to learn new ways to make a living, shifting cultivators to adopt more intensive

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Land is what will see us through, not only us but our children. We are not dependent on anyone for our subsistence... We will not give up our land for anything in this world. We believe that there is no future without land.

S. Pollanna, Nimalapadu villager
India

My people are very saddened because we have lost our living culture. My people have lost much of their sense of identity and are sad because we are missing the strength and energy that nature gives us.

Marta Guarani
Brazil

Our livelihoods and the survival of our future generations depend on healthy forests. Water is the biggest benefit, and then there are all the plants we use for medicines and food and fodder and agricultural implements and housing... and the festivals and rituals and... we would be orphaned without forests.

Sukartibai Panchgia, Baiga
India

agriculture, nomadic peoples to settle, and peoples who have always acted collectively to accept individual titles to pockets of land or to “compensation packages.”

This amounts to taking independent, self-sufficient peoples and turning them into dependent “beneficiaries” who, it is presumed, will fit into the national “mainstream.”³⁰

Rather than celebrate and harness the fact that tribal people are the “eyes and ears” of the forest, this is used as the rationale to evict or harass them. Where habitats are being degraded or species lost, the finger of blame is often pointed at the tribal peoples for whom the park is home, rather than at the more politically challenging culprits like poachers, timber smugglers, and tourism businesses, all with powerful allies, or at major government-sanctioned programs such as forestry³¹, mining and dam building.

What happens when tribal land is turned into a protected area?

Our mothers said: “go dig wild yams: mea, ngange, ekule. Child go get me honey, go hunting.” Who can teach them now that they are so frightened? Now they just walk aimlessly in life. Our life has turned upside down. And nobody cares. If we walk in the forest, we are taken by the anti-poaching squads. This is why we don’t go into the forest anymore. Now we just stay in the villages, not the forest camps. And so the wisdom of the ancestors is disappearing. Listen, we don’t eat meat anymore. This is what the government has done to us.

Bayaka (Mbendjele)
Congo Brazzaville

Before, when a child was ill, his father would take his machete into the forest and bring back boyo, or lando [forest medicines]. Now we go to the hospital which is far away and expensive.

Mpera Pierre, Baka
Cameroon

When the park boundaries are drawn, communities abruptly find themselves barred from religious sites or burial grounds, prevented from accessing medicinal plants, and deprived of the bare necessities of life – food, fuel for cooking, forest produce to use and to trade.

Overnight, resources that have sustained the tribe since time immemorial are out of bounds. If they hunt in the park they are accused of “poaching.” If they are caught gathering, they can be fined or imprisoned.³² The community finds itself subject to the whims of park guards, irrespective of official policies that may recognize their right to “sustainable use” of forest produce.³³

Some initiatives attempt to compensate these losses with “alternative livelihood schemes” or “income-generating activities.” While some choice may be presented, the option of keeping – and indeed developing – a community’s current livelihood is almost never considered. On the contrary, these projects usually ignore the real needs and values of the tribe, and impose change and integration. They usually fail to provide a long-term income sufficient to replace the people’s former dependence on their land, which was sustainable, and instead simply drag people into a cycle of new dependence on outside schemes, which is not.

Evictions destroy tribal peoples' lives

First they make us destitute by taking away our land, our hunting and our way of life. Then they say that we are nothing because we are destitute.

Jumanda Gakelebone, Bushman
Central Kalahari Game Reserve, Botswana

Since we were expelled from our land, death is following us. We bury people nearly every day. The village is becoming empty. We are heading towards extinction. Now all the old people have died our culture is dying too.

Batwa
Evicted from Kahuzi-Biega National Park,
Democratic Republic of Congo

Farmers who had destroyed forestland to make farms [since Mgahinga National Park was gazetted] in the 1930s received recognition of their land rights and the vast majority of the available compensation. The Batwa, who owned the forest and had lived there for generations without destroying it or its wildlife, only received compensation if they had acted like farmers, and destroyed part of the forest to make fields. This is a classic case of hunter-gatherers' land rights being ignored.³⁴

Jerome Lewis
Anthropologist

Evictions for mining, dam construction, and conservation projects can all have equally devastating consequences: tribespeople who were once self-sufficient and secure become refugees overnight. Divorced from the land and livelihoods that sustained them, they are typically reduced to dependence on handouts. This plunges the community into poverty and all that it entails - poor health, poor nutrition, alcoholism and mental illness.³⁵ Relocated to the margins of "mainstream" society, their presence is often resented by their new neighbors, with resulting conflicts and tensions.

Tribal communities are not the only ones evicted from protected areas, but they suffer the loss of their land and livelihood disproportionately by comparison. This is because they rely absolutely on their land to sustain all aspects of their livelihood, and they are separate from the income generating local economy. Their land means everything to them and is irreplaceable due to the spiritual and historical depth of their connection to it.

Tribal families rarely receive adequate - if any - compensation for evictions, for three main reasons:

1. As non-state societies, governments often ignore the customary or informal rights of tribal peoples, which makes it difficult for tribal communities to get legal redress for evictions.
2. There is widespread racist prejudice against the hunting and gathering lifestyles and nomadic pastoralism that many tribal peoples practice, which are viewed as "backward" in comparison with settled agriculture. Farmers are considered to have "improved" their land and are compensated for their loss if they are evicted. In contrast, tribes who have not built permanent structures or farmed crops on their land are considered not to have physical "property" for which they can be compensated. (The irony, of course, is that it is precisely because they have not "improved" their land that conservationists are keen to get possession of it.)
3. Any compensation that is awarded can never replace the connection that tribal peoples have with their lands.

**Heaven is miles and miles
of forests without any forest
guards.³⁴**

Gond elder
India

**It's us Baka who take care
of traditions. We want to
continue what our ancestors
were doing. That will never
end. All the natural things
need to be taken care of,
because it was our ancestors
that started them.**

Lessa Romain, Baka
Cameroon

What does the law say?

Some national laws refer to the creation of “inviolable” protected areas. However, international law is clear that governments and other organizations cannot violate peoples’ rights in the name of conservation.

Most protected areas are on land to which tribal peoples hold customary rights or informal titles, rather than officially registered paper titles. Significantly, their ties to the land often date back countless generations and the cultural, spiritual and economic bonds they have to it run deep. Of central importance to their survival is the respect for their land rights – all their human rights derive from this. Violating tribal peoples’ land rights makes it impossible for their human rights to be realized.

Human rights that are frequently violated by the creation of parks include tribal peoples’ rights: to internal self-determination under Article 1 (1) of the Civil and Political Rights Covenant; not to be deprived of their own means of subsistence under Article 1 (2); not to be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with their homes under Article 17 (1); to freedom of religion under Article 18 (1); and to enjoy their own culture in community with other members of their group under Article 27.

As indigenous peoples, they have further individual and collective rights under international law, the International Labour Organization Convention 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These include land ownership rights and right to give or withhold consent for projects affecting their lands.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (ratified by 196 parties) states that “states must respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.”

So why do parks need people?

We, the Indigenous Peoples, have been an integral part of the Amazon Biosphere for millennia. We have used and cared for the resources of that biosphere with a great deal of respect, because it is our home, and because we know that our survival and that of our future generations depends on it. Our accumulated knowledge about the ecology of our home, our models for living with the peculiarities of the Amazon Biosphere, our reverence and respect for the tropical forest and its inhabitants, both plant and animal, are the keys to guaranteeing the future of the Amazon Basin, not only for our people, but also for all humanity.³⁷

COICA (Confederation of indigenous organizations of the Amazon Basin)

Statement, 1989

Tribal peoples are the best conservationists

Tribal communities are dependent both practically and psychologically on the ecosystem they live in and are therefore highly motivated and effective at protecting it. Critically, the concept of using natural resources is central to indigenous land management: over centuries, tribal peoples have developed complex social systems to govern the harvesting of the wide range of species on which they depend to ensure a sustainable, plentiful yield.³⁸ In contrast, under a strict protected area approach, using land and resources in this way is seen as impossible to reconcile with conservation.

Clearly, those who rely on their land to survive are more motivated to protect their environment than poorly paid park guards, posted far from their families, who are often unable, or unwilling, to apprehend major offenders and therefore focus their energies on the easier targets: local people.³⁹

Evicting them harms conservation

Contrary to received wisdom, evicting tribal peoples from their homes when they become protected areas rarely contributes to the conservation effort. In fact, it is often counterproductive because it surrounds the area with resentful people who - usually - remain totally dependent on the resources within the park. It also denies the growing body of evidence that shows how ecosystems suffer when those who have managed the land sustainably are forced to leave.

These recent findings are turning established preservationist logic on its head. Wildfires, poaching and invasive species often increase following evictions of tribal communities. A study in Chitwan National Park in Nepal even showed lower tiger density in the human-free “core zone” of the park, seemingly because the way communities were managing the outer areas of the park created better habitat for the tigers.⁴⁰

Parks need people: to increase biodiversity

The question is this: Do Bushmen have land rights? Did not God make Bushmen have land rights? I know how to take care of the game. That's why I was born with it, and lived with it, and it's still there. If you go to my area, you'll find animals, which shows that I know how to take care of them. In other areas, there are no animals.

Kaingota Kanyo, Bushman
New Xade, Botswana

Shifting cultivation, also called “swidden agriculture”, refers to a technique of rotational farming in which land is cleared for cultivation (normally by fire) and then left to regenerate after a few years. Governments and conservationists worldwide have long sought to eradicate swidden agriculture, often pejoratively calling it “slash-and-burn.”

Scientists now realize that shifting cultivation systems can “harbor astounding levels of biodiversity.”⁴¹ Communities that practice this form of agriculture, such as the Kayapo of Brazil, actively manage the plant species found in forest areas, which positively affects biodiversity and creates important habitats.⁴² Shifting cultivation systems also contribute towards a greater diversity of species by providing a “mosaic” of different habitats.⁴³

Research into the subsistence activities of hunter-gatherers in the Congo basin, for example, has demonstrated that they lead to significant improvements in the forest environment as a habitat for wildlife, including forest elephants.⁴⁴

Yet in spite of the increasingly recognized ecological benefits of shifting cultivation, in most cases either the practice has been banned or the communities who rely on it removed. This has also had serious impacts on the communities affected, including their nutritional health.⁴⁵

In India's tiger reserves, villages inside the reserves create special grassland habitat for grazing animals that are important prey species for tigers. When these villages are removed, the Forest Department has to find ways to maintain these grasslands or face a decrease in biodiversity. Although forest villagers lose some crops and cattle to wildlife, most have lived with wildlife for countless generations and would far rather be on their lands in the forests than outside. Forest Department officials often claim that relocations are “protecting” people from wildlife, but this masks the fact that people are forced to move rather than voluntarily relocating.⁴⁶

Parks need people: to control fire and stop overgrazing

The kind of [devastating wildfire] damage we are looking at today could be lessened if we employed Aborigines to do something they spent tens of thousands of years perfecting.⁴⁷

Professor Bill Gammage
Australian National University

In my childhood, there was no mistletoe attack as the smoke from annual forest fire kept it in check. Now, no amount of removal by hand or lopping of affected branches ends it.

C Madegowda, Soliga
India

In both Australia and North America, early colonialists noted the “park like” appearance of the forests: trees dotted across open plains with no brushwood beneath.⁴⁸ But their inbuilt prejudice prevented them from realizing that this was due to sophisticated and extensive land care. As Bill Gammage, an expert in Aboriginal land management, has proven, Aborigines developed systems of using fire to manage the land in order to provide them with all that they need.

In Australia, there is increasing awareness that the ways in which Aboriginal peoples managed their land decreased the risk of large, devastating fires.⁴⁹ Over the last 90 years, wildfires have cost Australia almost US\$7 billion.⁵⁰ Similarly, in Amazonia the incidence of wildfires is lower in indigenous territories.⁵¹

Yet, as with shifting cultivation, controlled burning has also been outlawed, even criminalized.

There is compelling historical evidence that people have hunted limited numbers of grazing animals to keep their populations under control and prevent overgrazing. Studies from Yellowstone, for example, show that humans were very effective at controlling elk and bison herds. After tribespeople had been evicted from the park, park guards shot over 13,000 elk in an attempt to control their numbers.⁵² The culling of bison in Yellowstone is ongoing.⁵³

Parks need people: to stop deforestation

We, who have protected forests for thousands of years are now hunted like wild animals. But everyday, huge trees are being cut down on the sly and smuggled out. The forest officers have decided to drive us out, so that such activities can continue unhindered.⁵⁴

Iruliga Adivasi spokesperson
India

If this is a wildlife sanctuary, there should be a forest. Where is the forest? Where have all the trees gone? And, are we not a part of the environment? Do only the wild animals need a habitat? How long can we remain without our own habitat?

C.K. Janu, Adivasi activist
India

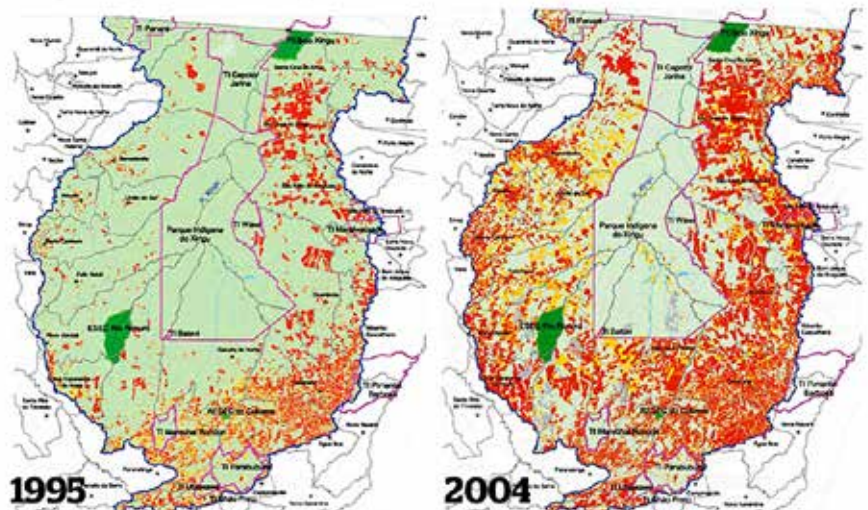
Satellite images provide clear evidence for the role of indigenous territories in preventing deforestation. When they are living on their own land with their land rights recognized and enforced and are certain that the land will remain theirs, tribal people use forests far more sustainably than incoming ranchers, loggers and farmers, who clear-fell swathes of trees at a time.

In Amazonia, satellite images show indigenous territories as islands of green (forest) in a sea of red (deforestation).

Image: The Xingu indigenous territory (outlined in pink) is home to several tribes. It provides a vital barrier to deforestation (in red) in the Brazilian Amazon. © ISA (Instituto Socioambiental)

A large-scale analysis of protected areas and community-managed forests found that the latter were more effective at reducing deforestation than the former.⁵⁵ This is unsurprising when you consider that communities have ample reason to protect and effectively manage the forests that they rely upon for survival, whereas many protected areas exist only on paper or are poorly managed by an often under-funded, unmotivated, and at times corrupt, staff.

Xingu indigenous territory, Brazil



Parks need people: to stop poachers

Our slogan is “Baiga, Tiger, Jungle, Mountain: all are united.” The current perspective of seeing people different from the tiger is that of the government and not ours. We have lived with the tigers for centuries and know how to co-exist.

Mahuamacha villager, Baiga
India

[To ecoguards] You’re letting the elephants die out in the forest at the same time as you prevent people from feeding themselves.

Akpakoua Valere, Baka
Cameroon

Tribal people know their land intimately and over generations have built up unequalled knowledge of the resident flora and fauna and the connections between them, making the people effective and efficient managers of their lands.

Complex systems governing hunting and harvesting help maintain a tribe’s social order – at the same time they protect the resources on which the community depends. Many tribes have proscriptions against killing young, pregnant or “totem” animals, and over-harvesting species, and only allow hunting and fishing in certain seasons. The result of these taboos and practices is the effective rationing of resources in the tribe’s territory, so contributing to rich biodiversity and giving plants and animals the time and space to flourish.⁵⁶

Bushmen of the Kalahari are being beaten, tortured and arrested for hunting to feed their families. Although government brands them as “poachers”, there is no evidence that the Bushmen’s subsistence hunting is unsustainable. It is, in fact, absolutely compatible with conservation: the Bushmen, more than anyone, are motivated to protect the wildlife on which they depend.⁵⁷

By contrast, when tribal peoples’ control over their land and resources is wrested from them by conservation initiatives, their ability to sustain themselves from the land is compromised. When this happens, tribespeople risk becoming allies of poachers – as experienced trackers and hunters – rather than of the conservationists they have come to resent.⁵⁸

As the “eyes and ears” of the forest, tribal people are best placed to prevent, catch and report poachers. But if removed from their forests, they are less able, and less motivated, to do so. Extensive funds then need to be invested into “guns and guards” preservation programs to control poaching. This is often ineffective and leads to a growing “arms race” between poachers and guards. Everyone loses, including the wildlife.

A report into the eviction of Maasai from the Ngorongoro landscape concluded, “The removal of these natural (and low-cost) guardians resulted in an increase of poaching and the subsequent near extinction of the rhinoceros population.” United Nations Environment Program, 2009⁵⁹

Conservationists should fight for tribal peoples' rights

From Yaka ["Pygmy"] perspectives conservation, like logging, makes abundant forest scarce.

By sealing off areas to all except the privileged (Euro-American scientists and tourists, important officials and project workers), conservationists claim to protect wildlife.

This enforced preservation of forest in some areas serves to justify the forest's destruction elsewhere.

The Yaka's conflation of loggers and conservationists is more perceptive than most people realise.

Jerome Lewis
Anthropologist

Tribal peoples inhabit some of the most biodiverse places on Earth. No one has more incentive to conserve habitats than the communities who live in, love and depend upon them.

Conservationists must therefore ally with tribal peoples: learn from them, respect them and help defend them and their lands. There are many places where tribal peoples desperately need that support, but they rarely get it from conservationists. Tribal people can often conclude that this is because of the close ties, including financial, between the oil, mining, and plantation industries and many conservation bodies.⁶⁰

Parks can only protect a fraction of our land and seas. Outside their boundaries (and within them too)⁶¹, mines, roads, dams, industrial projects, urbanization, ranching or agri-business and monoculture plantations threaten both natural habitats and the people that depend on them.

Recognizing indigenous land rights is the best way to protect nature from the threats that would destroy it - indigenous territories form a vital barrier against habitat loss.

In addition to their land rights, conservationists should recognize and support methods that tribal communities have developed over countless generations enabling them to live well on their land. Shifting cultivation is one example. Rather than stigmatize and criminalize complex forest farming systems, conservationists should recognize that these forest farms harbor immense biodiversity while also feeding families with diverse, nutritionally good food, without agrochemicals.

The conservation industry has considerable financial and political clout within many governments worldwide. They could use this to advocate for tribal rights to be better protected, or to campaign against threats to biodiverse tribal lands. But as long as they fail to do this, and continue to portray tribal peoples as "encroachers," "poachers" and as "damaging" to biodiversity, then they alienate these allies, with devastating results for biodiversity and tribal peoples alike.

A call to action: A new conservation that respects tribal peoples' rights

If they come, they need to know that we are the owners of the forest and that we are the ones who know the whole forest. If they want to work in our forest, they need to consult us.

Enock Semou, Bayaka
Central African Republic

Conservation, clearly, needs tribal peoples, but it has to be a partnership. For too long the power held by conservationists has been much greater than that of local communities, so that “partnerships” have been a case of “you people will participate in our project.”⁶²

A radically different approach is needed, and that must be based on recognizing tribal peoples as the rightful owners of their land, to whom conservationists should address any ideas that they have.

Towards the future

Evidence proves that tribal peoples are better at looking after their environment than anyone else. They are the best conservationists and guardians of the natural world. They should be at the forefront of the environmental movement.

Survival is advocating for a radical shake up of conservation: for the “dark side” to be exposed and for new, innovative solutions to be explored, based on tribal peoples' rights, especially recognition of their collective land ownership rights, encompassing their right to protect and nurture their lands, and respect for their knowledge and own natural resource management systems.

Tribal peoples deserve to be acknowledged, and helped to continue to be the best guardians of their lands and, therefore, of the natural world we all depend upon.

Case study 1

“Voluntary” evictions in India carried out with threat of force

Give us something poisonous to eat, finish us off right here. That's fine. But don't uproot us from here. That's how I feel. What will I do setting up a home out there? Won't we die? How will we raise our children? We need our fields and homes. If we go from here, then it will be difficult for the jungle to survive. The jungle is here only because of us, water is here because of us. If we go from here, you will see – after some time there will be nothing left.

Sukdev Dhurwey, Baiga
Before his eviction from Kanha Tiger Reserve, India

We appeal to you that we should be allowed to stay in the same village where we are now. We will protect the wildlife and get benefit of all government programs. We should stay there and protect – we promise. Don't displace us! We have been there [to Asan Kudar resettlement village]. Seeing their condition made my heart cry. Please don't displace us.

Telenga Hassa, Munda elder
Jamunagarh village, in the core of Similipal Tiger Reserve, India

In 2013, the authorities announced that Khadia families from inside the Similipal Tiger Reserve had “decided” to come out of the park. This was heralded as “success” for both the reserve and the community. However, claims that the relocations were truly voluntary are dubious – officials made liberal use of the carrot (through promising land, livestock and money) and the stick (through harassment and denial of services).

Villagers were moved to a makeshift camp, and given plastic sheeting for their only covering. The Forest Department provided food for just one week.

Promises of land and livestock have not been upheld and community members have seen little more than a tenth of the compensation they were assured they would receive for “agreeing” to leave. The remaining money, authorities say, is being held in bank accounts for the “beneficiaries,” but villagers do not know how to access these accounts. A once self-sufficient community now has no secure livelihood.

Some of the Munda tribespeople threatened with eviction, were taken to visit the Khadia's resettlement “village” of Asan Kudar, which the authorities are heralding as a “model” relocation project. They were appalled by what they saw and are determined not to share the same fate (see quote, left).

The policy of creating “inviolable” core zones for tiger conservation continues unabated and the situation in Similipal is typical of tiger reserves across India. In June 2014, all the Baiga and Gond Adivavesi families living in the core zone of Kanha Tiger Reserve were evicted, in violation of the laws of India and international commitments to human and indigenous peoples' rights.

The Forest Department and many conservation organizations claim that evictions of Indian tribal villages from protected areas are “voluntary relocations.” However, according to India's Forest Rights Act and its Wildlife Protection Act, in many cases the removals constitute illegal eviction.⁶³

Tribal peoples across India are being illegally evicted from their ancestral homelands in the name of tiger conservation. Forest guards routinely arrest, fine, beat and threaten them until they leave. This is illegal - the law says they are allowed to stay.

They beat me until I fell... I split my hip bone

Baiga Kanha Tiger Reserve



A park guard shot a seven year-old boy in both legs in Kaziranga Tiger Reserve. Extrajudicial killings are common in Kaziranga, where guards are encouraged to execute suspected poachers on sight and given legal immunity for killings.



Case study 2

Sengwer forest “guardians” see homes and food stores burned

The government of Kenya is forcing us into extinction.⁶⁴

Sengwer elder, Yator Kiptum David
Kenya

It may seem wrong and primitive to burn houses, but gentlemen, look, we have to face the reality in this one and tell our people that the forest is out of bounds henceforth.⁶⁵

County Commissioner Arthur Osiya,
overseer of the Sengwer eviction
Kenya

Sengwer, Kenya

In January 2014, the Kenyan government violated international law, the country’s constitution and several court orders, when it evicted Sengwer communities from their ancestral home in the Cherangany Hills.⁶⁶ The government claimed its actions were preventing deforestation and protecting water supplies. It denounced as “squatters” the very people who had cared for the forest for generations. Over a thousand homes were burned, together with food stores, blankets and school materials.⁶⁷

As the World Bank provides funds to the agency that evicted the Sengwer, it has investigated and its President has appealed directly to the Kenyan President, Uhuru Kenyatta, to ensure that the Sengwer’s rights are protected.⁶⁸

The majority of the Sengwer community have now gone back to their land, despite the terrors of the eviction and ongoing threats and harassment. They have written to President Kenyatta, requesting that the country “adopt new conservation paradigm in which Forest Indigenous Communities are made the custodians of their forests.”⁶⁹

Case study 3

Maasai villages razed to be replaced by safari hunting and tourism

This is our homeland, this is where we belong...even if we starve and suffer, this is where we want to stay.

Maasai elder

Ngorongoro, Tanzania

The dramatic landscape of Ngorongoro in Tanzania has been the home to pastoralist peoples for an estimated 2,500 years. The Maasai have lived there for over 250 years,⁷⁰ tending cattle and trading with local farmers, but over the last 40 years they have suffered waves of evictions.

In the 1950s, the area was divided into the Serengeti National Park - where no human settlement was allowed - and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, where the Maasai could continue to live and graze their animals.

But then the Maasai were continuously squeezed into smaller and smaller areas and forbidden from grazing their animals in many places, including the famous Ngorongoro Crater, of which the rich grasses and water sources were vital resources for the Maasai of the wider area.

They were also forbidden from burning to encourage new grazing for their animals, leading to a decline in good grasses and a proliferation of coarse species.⁷¹

In 1974, Maasai were evicted from the Crater floor.⁷² This caused severe problems and crowded the Maasai and their animals into a smaller area. They had no warning - paramilitary personnel simply arrived one morning and evicted the families from the Crater, dumping their belongings on a roadside.

By the 1980s, "for the Ngorongoro Maasai, twenty years of conservation rule has brought falling living standards and increasing poverty. For the majority of pastoralists food and health standards have declined."⁷³

In 2009, Maasai villages were razed to remove them from an area for one safari hunting company, and another company has been accused by the Maasai of abuse, intimidation and harassment.⁷⁴

Meanwhile the famous Crater has now become so severely degraded that UNESCO threatened to remove its World Heritage

status. In early 2010, the government responded by calling for the removal of the thousands of Maasai who were still grazing their animals in the Crater. “And this [relocation] should be done immediately after the general election scheduled later this year. I know they will scream a lot but, there is no way we can continue accommodating them at the cost of the ecosystem,” declared Dr Raphael Chegeni, MP.

While the Maasai have been squeezed into smaller and smaller areas of land, safari hunting companies and other tourism ventures have been given land and governmental support, often at the direct expense of Maasai families. Over half a million tourists visited the Crater in 2010.⁷⁵

There have been ongoing problems for Maasai. A plan in 2013 for further Maasai evictions was finally stopped after local and international pressure.⁷⁶ The evictions were halted by Prime Minister Mizengo Pinda who announced in September 2013, “We have come to the conclusion that the Maasai pastoralists who have inhabited the area since time immemorial are good conservationists themselves.”⁷⁷

The plains of the Serengeti are no wilderness. Tribal peoples had cared for and managed this iconic landscape for millennia before Maasai were evicted in the name of “conservation” and mass-scale tourism and big game were encouraged.



**We are the original
conservationists**

Martin Saning'o Kariongi, Maasai Tanzania

Case study 4

Widespread evictions of Batwa “Pygmy” peoples across Central Africa

The ill-fated died and the lucky ones survived.

Batwa
Uganda

It was so violent. A brother of my father’s was killed by the soldiers evicting us. Everybody was running, and falling, and taking whatever we could carry. It was the government using guns against us, who were unarmed.

Batwa
Uganda

We did not know they were coming. Then suddenly one of them forced the door of our house and started shouting that we had to leave immediately because the park is not our land. I first did not understand what he was talking about because all my ancestors have lived on these lands. They were so violent that I left with my children.⁷⁸

Batwa mother and widow
Kahuzi Biega National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo

Up to now there is no Batwa allowed in the forest. If you try to get in you are captured and arrested for reasons we do not know.

Batwa
Uganda

There is a long history of persecution of the tribal peoples of Central Africa, sometimes referred to as “Pygmies,” a name many of them dislike. As mostly forest dwellers, reliant on their land for survival, they have borne the brunt of the conservation movement, with hundreds of communities forcibly evicted from their ancestral land when parks and forest reserves have been created.⁷⁹

We are not talking about a handful of isolated cases. Throughout Central Africa, tribal peoples are being forced from their lands in the forest and made to stay along roads or in villages.⁸⁰ Their access to the forest is heavily, often violently, controlled.

Once a community is evicted, their vital connection with their land is severed. The older generation cannot teach their grandchildren the knowledge they need to live well on their lands, and the community’s health often plummets. Batwa evictions include:

Democratic Republic of Congo - extreme violence

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, authorities violently evicted almost 6000 Batwa from Kahuzi-Biega National Park. According to one report, half of those evicted later died and the remaining people are in poor health.⁸¹

Uganda - conservation refugees

Lives of Batwa families in Uganda were destroyed with the creation of protected areas, such as the famous Bwindi and Mgahinga reserves. Ousted from their ancestral land, many Batwa became “conservation refugees.” They live in appalling conditions as squatters on the edges of the parks, liable to be removed at any moment. Ironically, one rationale for removing the Batwa was to stop gorilla hunting. But for the Batwa, the gorilla is taboo and is not hunted.⁸²

The evictions were carried out by the park authorities which have little sympathy for the Batwa’s situation. As John Makombo of the Uganda Wildlife Authority said, “Their conditions of living are not our responsibility.”⁸³

Case study 5

WWF-funded wildlife officials arrest, beat and torture Baka “Pygmies” for hunting to feed their families. WWF Trustee takes forest elephant as trophy.

The ecoguards beat us from sunrise to sunset. All over my body. It was at the WWF base and we nearly died from their beatings. Afterwards we couldn't walk. It took all our strength not to die there on the road.

Baka
Cameroon

When the guards see us in the forest they just want to kill us. The long trips our grandparents took in the forest are over. We aren't allowed to do that.

Baka
Cameroon

They handcuffed me, made me lie on the floor and kicked me again and again.⁸⁴

Baka
Cameroon

In southeast Cameroon, protected areas - national parks and sports hunting concessions - were created on the land of Baka communities without their consent. The ecoguards, or wildlife officers, partially funded by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the German government, prevent them from hunting and gathering in - or even entering - the forests that were once their homes.⁸⁵

Ecoguards, sometimes accompanied by military personnel, intimidate, arrest and beat Baka men, women and even children for “poaching.” Entire villages have been razed to the ground and Baka individuals have been tortured and have even reportedly died as a result. While Baka face arrest and beatings, torture and death for hunting to feed their families, big game trophy hunters are encouraged. In 2013, WWF Trustee Peter Flack shot an endangered forest elephant.⁸⁶ In May that year, the Cameroonian National Commission for Human Rights and the NGO Fusion-Nature released a report on an anti-poaching raid in which ten Baka men and women were tortured. With no effective means of redress for the Baka, anti-poaching squads are generally able to act with impunity.⁸⁷

As well as alienating local people from the concept of conservation, militarized management regimes fail to address the political causes of the bushmeat trade and the corruption that often lies behind it.⁸⁸ Most intensive commercial poaching is organized by networks comprising the elite, who use their influence and power to establish trafficking circuits immune from prosecution. Although organizations that address such “white-collar” poaching do exist, the ecoguards’ main targets are local people. Baka communities, as the least powerful, are hardest hit.

WWF provides critical support for ecoguards working in and around Cameroon’s Boumba Bek, Nki and Lobéké National Parks, including vehicles, equipment and a bonus system for trophies confiscated. This support makes possible the raids carried out on Baka families. Survival is calling on WWF to ensure that the support it provides does not contribute to the abuse of Baka by ecoguards.

Cameroon's forest peoples are beaten and tortured by anti-poaching squads funded by big conservation organizations including the World Wide Fund for Nature, WWF. This elderly woman was attacked with pepper spray and her cooking pots destroyed.

Wildlife officers fired pepper spray at me

Baka "Pygmy" Dja Reserve, Cameroon



Case study 6

Forced eviction destroys the lives of Botswana's Kalahari Bushmen

I sit and look at the country. Wherever there are Bushmen there is game. Why? Because we know how to take care of the animals. We know how to hunt – not every day, but by season.

Dauqoo Xukuri, Bushman
Botswana

The Bushmen of southern Africa have been squeezed off much of their ancestral land across the Kalahari and have been evicted in waves from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in Botswana, which was established, in part, for them.

When Bushman families were finally evicted from the reserve in 2002, some received cattle and cash. But the Bushmen are not cattle-herders and had little interest in, or experience with, cows. Shebeens (small bars selling alcohol) sprang up in the resettlement camp Bushmen called “the place of death”. There, much of the meager monetary compensation was spent on alcohol.⁸⁹

Bushman elders stated that, cut off from their lands, they felt disconnected from their ancestral spirits and therefore unable to perform healing ceremonies. The community was shattered by a toxic combination of losing all that is most precious to them - their land and their livelihoods - together with a dramatic increase in depression and alcoholism, and a sudden explosion of HIV/AIDS.

The Bushmen's determination to return to their ancestral territory and seek justice for their eviction has been the driving force that has kept the community alive.⁹⁰ In a landmark judgement in 2006, the rights of the community to return to and live in the reserve and to hunt there was recognized. But the ruling has been largely ignored in practice. Bushmen continue to be banned from hunting, and punished severely if found with game. Furthermore, only those few named in the court case have been allowed to return; their family members must apply for permits to visit, and their children cannot inherit the permits. If this situation does not change, there will be no Bushmen in the reserve when this generation dies.

Case study 7

Bushmen arrested beaten and tortured for hunting to feed their families

While they were assaulting me they told me that even the President was aware of what was happening; that they were busy beating me up. They told me that even if they kill me no charges would be laid against them because what they were doing to me was an order from the government. They told me that I was being made an example to dissuade others from attempting to return to the Central Kalahari Game Reserve or disrespecting government.

Mogolodi Moeti, Bushman
Botswana

They beat us up badly. I think they wanted to kill us. I am an old man but they didn't consider this when they handcuffed me, suspended me on a rope tied to some poles with my head dangling, my legs hanging in the air and my knuckles on the cement floor.

Letshwao Nagayame, Bushman
Botswana

They shackled my hands and ankles together before cuffing me to a land cruiser bullbar. They drove for a kilometer like that. I was in agony. They kicked me so badly around the kidneys, I couldn't urinate.

Tsuoo Tshiam, Bushman
Botswana

Historically, the Bushmen of southern Africa were hunter-gatherers. Most communities have now been forced to abandon this way of life, but Botswana's Central Kalahari Game Reserve is home to the last Bushmen to live largely by hunting. In 2006, after a lengthy legal battle against the government, the High Court upheld their right to live and hunt in the reserve.

Despite this High Court ruling, officials have refused to issue a single hunting permit. As a result, Bushman subsistence hunters are treated no differently from commercial poachers. Dozens have been arrested simply for trying to feed their families.

Survival has received over 200 reports of Bushmen being tortured since the 1990s.⁹¹ In 2012, two Bushmen survived being tortured by park guards for killing an eland. One of the men, Nkemetse Motsoko, reportedly passed out after police held his throat to suffocate him, and buried him alive. Another attack was carried out in 2014, against Mogolodi Moeti (see quote, left).

Survival is calling on the Botswana government to stop the violent abuse of Bushmen and to recognize their right to hunt in the Reserve.

The Bushmen are accused of “poaching” because they hunt for food. Despite the High Court upholding their right to subsistence hunt, they face arrests and beatings, torture and death at the hands of wildlife officers and paramilitary police.



**They pulled my genitals,
beat me, kicked me, and
smashed my knuckles**

Bushmen Central Kalahari Game Reserve, Botswana

Endnotes

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Tribal peoples are being illegally evicted from their ancestral homelands in the name of conservation.

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