

Survival



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

Survival International Report

PARKS NEEDED PEOPLES

**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, 2013. Now evicted from Kanha Tiger Reserve.

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Image: Baka children playing in their forest. Across Central Africa, forest peoples are made to live in unhealthy roadside settlements. Divorced from their forests, they cannot teach their children the skills and knowledge they need to thrive.

1. Introduction

There is no such thing as wilderness

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

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 habitation.

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.

Tribal peoples are the key to conservation

It is no coincidence that 80% of the world's biodiversity is found on the lands of tribal peoples¹ and that the vast majority of the 200 most biodiverse places on Earth are tribal peoples' territories.² 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.³

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."⁴

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 deforestation⁵ and forest fires⁶ and are the most important barrier to deforestation there.⁷

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).⁸

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 Initiative⁹

2. Why parks evict people

Protected areas

Protected areas are created to preserve 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. Worldwide, there are now over 120,000 protected areas, which cover approximately 13%¹⁰ of the land on Earth.^{11 12}

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. 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.

Over 70% of parks in tropical areas are inhabited.¹³ An even higher percentage area of parks is depended upon by the communities that surround them.

However, when people are thrown out of their territories that have been demarcated as parks, it is because they have become, in Maasai elder Mr Kariongi's words, "the enemies of conservation."

1 COMPAS, Sacred Natural Sites: Conservation of Biological and Cultural Diversity (n.d.). http://www.compasnet.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Policy%20brief_17_A4.pdf

2 G. Oviedo & L. Maffi, Indigenous and Traditional Peoples of the World and Ecoregion Conservation: An Integrated Approach to Conserving the World's Biological and Cultural Diversity (WWF & Terralingua, 2000). <http://www.terralingua.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/01/EGinG200rep.pdf>.

The WWF reports that 95% of the 200 most important global sites for biodiversity have "ethnolinguistic groups" present; the majority of these groups are tribal and/or indigenous.

3 G. Prance, "The Ethnobotany of the Amazon Indians as a Tool for the Conservation of Biology," *Monograf. Jard. Bot. Cordoba* 5 (1997): 135-143.

4 M. Dowie, "Conservation Refugees," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2010).

5 C. Nolte et al., "Governance regime and location influence avoided deforestation success of protected areas in the Brazilian Amazon," *PNAS* 110, no. 13 (2013): 4956-4961.

6 D. Nepstad et al., "Inhibition of Amazon Deforestation and Fire by Parks and Indigenous Lands." *Conservation Biology* 20, no. 1 (2006): 65-73.

7 G. Oviedo, "Community Conserved Areas in South America," *Parks: The International Journal for Protected Area Management* 14, no. 1 (2006).

8 Figures from Rights and Resources Initiative, cited in I. Quaille, "Community forestry helps save the climate," *DW magazine* July 23, 2014. <http://www.dw.de/community-forestry-helps-save-the-climate/a-17799920>.

9 Ibid.

10 O. Venter et al. "Targeting Global Protected Area Expansion for Imperiled Biodiversity," *PLoS Biology* 12, no. 6 (2014). doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.1001891

11 Marine conservation areas are also increasing, although mostly in territorial waters rather than ocean areas beyond any single country's sovereign domain.

12 IUCN & UNEP-WCMC, *The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA)* (Cambridge, UK: UNEP-WCMC, 2012).

13 D. Brockington & J. Igoe, "Eviction for Conservation: A Global Overview," *Conservation and Society* 4, no. 1 (2006): 424-470.



Image: While millions of tribal people in India are being evicted from their lands in the name of conservation, tourists are flooding tiger reserves.

The dark history of conservation

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.¹⁴

It was President Theodore Roosevelt who promoted the exclusionary model of national parks. It fitted his vision.

“The most ultimately righteous of all wars is a war with savages, though it is apt to be also the most terrible and inhuman. The rude, fierce settler who drives the savage from the land lays all civilized mankind under a debt to him. ...[I]t is of incalculable importance that America, Australia, and Siberia should pass out of the hands of their red, black, and yellow aboriginal owners, and become the heritage of the dominant world races.”¹⁵

Yellowstone National Park in the United States was the world’s first national park. 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.¹⁶

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 around the world, with devastating impacts – not just for the tribes, but for nature too.

Organizations behind evictions

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

14 R. Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (New York: Longman, 2000).

15 T. Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West: Book IV* (New York: Putnam, 1896:57).

16 M. Dowie, *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict Between Global Conservation and Native Peoples* (MIT Press, 2009); M. Colchester, “Conservation Policy and Indigenous Peoples,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2004).

“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.”¹⁷

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:

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.”¹⁸

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.

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.

Two examples:

An agreement with the Ethiopian government gave complete responsibility for the policing of the Omo National Park to an NGO, African Parks, including the power to make Mursi livelihoods illegal. African Parks subsequently withdrew from the agreement, to the delight of the Mursi.¹⁹

“Now that African Parks are leaving, everything is well. Our cattle will graze along with the Dik-Diks, Zebra and Warthogs. If our land is taken, it is like taking our lives.”

Ulijarholi, Mursi

“Now I am very happy. We don’t worry about them stealing our land anymore.”

Uligidangit, Mursi

And in 1995, NGO WWF-India petitioned the Indian government to enforce its Wildlife Protection Act – stopping all human activity in national parks.²⁰ The Supreme Court agreed and ordered the state governments to remove all residents from national parks within a year – a ludicrously unrealistic demand. No mention was made of the rights and needs of the almost four million people who lived in India’s vast network of protected areas, the majority of whom are Adivasi (tribal).²¹ Today these communities live with the threat of eviction hanging over them, continually harassed, threatened and cajoled to move out of the parks.

¹⁷ Mike Fay, conservationist and explorer, credits himself with having personally convinced the then president of Gabon to create 13 new parks. See M. Dowie, “Conservation: Indigenous Peoples’ Enemy No. 1?” Mother Jones November 25, 2009, <http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2009/11/conservation-indigenous-peoples-enemy-no-1>

¹⁸ It was also because of the rich diamond deposits that lie beneath the reserve. See Survival’s Bushmen information page: <http://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/bushmen>

¹⁹ See <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/2885> and <http://www.mursi.org/change-and-development/national-parks>

²⁰ ELDF & WWF India, *Conserving Protected Areas and Wildlife: A Judicial Journey* (New Delhi, 2009). http://awsassets.wwfindia.org/downloads/conserving_protected_areas_and_wildlife_1.pdf

²¹ Dowie, *Conservation Refugees*, 2009 (see note 16).

Conservation evictions are a global problem

“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.”

*Indigenous delegates’ statement, World Parks Congress, 2003.*²²

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,

22 Statement by Indigenous Delegates at the closing plenary of the Fifth World Parks Congress, September 17, 2003.

23 It is impossible to provide an accurate figure for the number of people displaced for conservation. Many evictions occurred in the 1960s and 70s, with few records kept. Even where attempts are made to record numbers, it can be hard to assess how many people are affected, especially among nomadic and hunter-gatherer peoples who are not included in official census data. Brockington and Igoe (2006, see note 13) make an attempt to quantify worldwide evictions, and detail how hard a challenge it is. See also C. Geisler and R. de Sousa, *From Refugee to Refugee: The African Case*, (University of Wisconsin, 2000).

24 M. Cernea & K. Schmidt-Soltau, “Poverty Risks & National Parks: Policy Issues in Conservation and Resettlement,” *World Development* 34, no. 10 (2006): 1808-1830. Geisler estimates that as many as 14 million people have been evicted from parks in Africa, many during colonial years: C. Geisler & R. de Sousa, *From Refugee to Refugee*, 2000 (see above note).

25 A. Lasgorceix & A. Kothari, “Displacement and Relocation of Protected Areas: A Synthesis and Analysis of Case Studies,” *Economic & Political Weekly* XLIV, no. 49 (2009).

26 T. Dash & A. Kothari, “Chapter 8: Forest Rights and Conservation in India,” in *The Right to Responsibility: Resisting and Engaging Development, Conservation, and the Law in Asia*, ed. H. Jonas et al. (Malaysia: Natural Justice and United Nations University – Institute of Advanced Studies, 2013), 150-175.

27 A. Agrawal & K. Redford, “Conservation and Displacement: An Overview,” *Conservation & Society* 7, no. 1 (2009): 1-10; Dowie, *Conservation Refugees*, 2009; D. Brockington et al., “Conservation, Human Rights, and Poverty Reduction,” *Conservation Biology* 20, no. 1 (2006): 250-252; D. Brockington & J. Igoe, “Eviction for Conservation,” 2006 (see note 13); V. Saberwal et al., *People, Parks and Wildlife: Towards Coexistence* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 2000)

28 P. McElwee, “Displacement and Relocation Redux: Stories from Southeast Asia,” *Conservation & Society* 4, no. 1 (2006): 396-403.

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 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 forestry,³¹ mining and dam building.

“The fate of people living inside protected areas [in India] has remained unresolved for over two decades. Living with constant uncertainty, not knowing whether and for how long they will be allowed to stay in the area, and constant harassment over the collection of forest produce, has led to a serious dislike for protected areas among local communities.”

Neema Patak Broome³²

Four examples, out of many:

Sariska Tiger Reserve, Rajasthan

There was alarm in 2005 when no tigers were found at all in the park. Villagers in the core area were promptly identified as “the” problem. The solution therefore was to remove the villagers rather than to address the huge pressures on the park and tigers from surrounding towns, forestry, mining and tourism.³³

The Ogiek of the Mau Forest, Kenya

Another case of evictions in the name of conservation and “watershed protection”, while vast swathes of land have gone to industrial-scale farms.³⁴

The Bushmen of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, Botswana

The Bushmen were told in 2002 that they were to be removed for “conservation,” but testing for mining happened before the evictions and a diamond mine went on stream in the wake of their eviction.

The Maasai of Loliondo, northern Tanzania

They were threatened with removal from their lands in Loliondo and told it was for a “corridor” between the Serengeti and Maasai Mara National Parks. Then the land was leased to a safari hunting company.

Thus it is clear that conservation is often only an excuse for evictions that are in fact pursued in the interest of far less honorable aims.

The following section picks a few cases of conservation-induced evictions taking place in several countries, but is by no means exhaustive. As detailed above, such evictions have been occurring since colonial times and across much of the world, at the expense of millions of people.

29 For example, Tanzanian president, Jakaya Kikwete, told a group of pastoralists in 2013, “You must realize that living a nomadic life is not productive...” and urged them to take up “modern ways of animal farming”. See <http://archive.dailynews.co.tz/index.php/local-news/15226-jk-challenges-pastoralists-to-acquire-land-for-grazingjku>

30 See Survival’s film “There You Go” for an exploration of this issue: <http://www.survivalinternational.org/thereyougo>

31 For example, in Kenya, local people suffer heavy penalties for cutting trees, but the three largest timber companies are exempt from a ban on logging. See <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/voices/12/kenyas-ogiek-face-displacement-mau-forest>

32 Neema Patak Broome, “India’s Culture of Conservation.” Infochange India December, 2011. <http://infochangeindia.org/environment/backgroundunder/india-s-culture-of-conservation.html>

33 M. Ragarajan & G. Sahabuddin, “Displacement and Relocation from Protected Areas: Towards a Biological and Historical Synthesis,” *Conservation and Society* 4, no. 3 (2006): 359-378.

34 C. Purvis, “Displacement and Resistance: The Ogiek of Kenya,” Think Africa Press. (March 22, 2013) <http://thinkafricapress.com/kenya/mau-ogiek-displacement>

Case studies

“I looked through the door of our house and saw people in uniforms with guns. Then suddenly one of them forced the door 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.”

Batwa mother and widow, Kahuzi-Biega National Park, DRC³⁵

“They told us that if anybody goes in the forest to carry out any activities they would be killed.”³⁶

Barnard, a Batwa elder evicted from Bwindi Forest in Uganda in 2008

“One day, we were in the forest when we saw people coming with machine guns and they told us to get out of the forest. We were very scared so we started to run not knowing where to go and some of us disappeared. They either died or went somewhere we didn’t know. As a result of the eviction, everybody is now scattered.”

Sembagare Francis, evicted from Bwindi³⁷

Central Africa – guns and guards

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. The term refers to several different but sometimes closely related peoples living in and around the Congo Basin, such as the Baka in Cameroon, the Baluma in Congo, and Batwa in the Great Lakes region. 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.³⁸

This type of land theft is not confined to the past. Nor are we talking about a handful of isolated cases. Throughout Central Africa, tribal peoples have been forced from their lands in the forest and made to stay along roads or in villages.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰

Uganda – conservation refugees

The forest-based 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.⁴¹

The evictions were carried out by the park authorities which have little sympathy for the Batwa’s situation. A typical comment:

“Their conditions of living are not our responsibility. Questions of poverty are not our responsibility. [It is] better to manage [the Batwa] when they are outside the forest.”⁴²
John Makombo, Uganda Wildlife Authority

35 IRIN, “Minorities Under Siege: Pygmies Today in Africa,” IRIN In-Depth Report April 2006. <http://www.irinnews.org/pdf/in-depth/pygmies-today-in-africa-irin-in-depth.pdf>

36 T. Fessey, “Batwa face uncertain future,” BBC World Service “One Planet” Report May 9, 2008. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/7390917.stm>

37 Fessey, “Batwa face uncertain future,” 2008 (see note 36).

38 O. Woodburne, Securing Indigenous Peoples’ Rights in Conservation: Review of policy and implementation in the Dzanga-Sangha Protected Area Complex, Central African Republic (Moreton-in-Marsh: Forest Peoples Programme, 2009); J. Lewis, The Batwa Pygmies of the Great Lakes Region (London: Minority Rights Group, 2000)

39 J. Lewis, “Technological Leap-Frogging in the Congo Basin, Pygmies and Global Positioning Systems in Central Africa: What Has Happened and Where Is It Going?” African Study Monographs Suppl. 43 (March 2012): 15-44

40 A. Barume, Heading Towards Extinction? Indigenous Rights in Africa: The Case of the Twa of the Kahuzi-Biega National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo (IWGIA & Forest Peoples Programme, 2000).

41 Lewis, The Batwa Pygmies, 2000 (see note 34).

42 Ibid.

“The government of Kenya is forcing us into extinction.”⁴³

Sengwer elder, Yator Kiptum David

“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.”

County Commissioner Arthur Osiya, who is the overseer of the Sengwer eviction⁴⁴

“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

Kenya – violent evictions of Sengwer

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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷

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.”⁴⁸

Tanzania – Maasai evictions

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,⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰

In 1974, Maasai were evicted from the Crater floor.⁵¹ This caused severe problems and crowded the Maasai and their animals into a

45 See Survival’s press releases: <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/9932> and <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/9877>

46 For further information and links see <http://www.forestpeoples.org/topics/rights-land-natural-resources/news/2014/02/kenyan-government-s-forced-evictions-threaten-cult>

47 Vidal, J. 2014. “World Bank chief steps in over evictions of Kenya’s indigenous people.” *The Guardian*, October 6, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/oct/06/world-bank-chief-kenya-indigenous-people>

48 A copy of the letter, dated October 4, 2014, is available online at: <http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/news/2014/10/Letter%20from%20Sengwer%20Ethnic%20Minority%20Forest%20Indigenous%20Community.pdf>

49 Reid, R. 2012. “Savannas of Our Birth: People, Wildlife, and Change in East Africa” California, California University Press.

50 Arhem, K 1986. “Pastoralism under Pressure: The Ngorongoro Maasai”, in Boesen, J. (ed). Tanzania: Crisis and Struggle for Survival. Motala Grafiska, Sweden.

51 Homewood, KM, and WA Rodgers. 1991. ‘Maasailand ecology: pastoralist development and wildlife conservation in Ngorongoro, Tanzania.’ Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

43 Curtis Kline, “Sengwer of Kenya Forcibly Evicted from Ancestral Forest,” *IC Magazine* February 1, 2014. <http://intercontinentalcry.org/sengwer-kenya-forcibly-evicted-21865/>

44 <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/politics/houses-go-up-in-flames/-/1064/2160528/-/okmsvi/-/index.html>

“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?”⁵⁷

Dayamani Barla, Munda Adivasi spokeswoman

“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 from Nagarhole Tiger Reserve

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.”⁵²

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.⁵³

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 2010.⁵⁴

There have been ongoing problems for Maasai. A plan in 2013 for further Maasai evictions was finally stopped after local and international pressure.⁵⁵ 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.”⁵⁶

India – false promises and degradation in tiger reserves

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.

52 Arhem, K 1986. “Pastoralism under Pressure: The Ngorongoro Maasai”, in Boesen, J. (ed). Tanzania: Crisis and Struggle for Survival. Motala Grafiska, Sweden. p250.

53 For details see discussion on Just Conservation: <http://www.justconservation.org/the-tanzanian-government-insists-on-grabbing-maasai-land-in-loliondo>

54 W. Thome, “Ngorongoro success raises sustainability questions” eTN Global Travel Industry News (March 4, 2010). <http://www.eturbonews.com/14719/ngorongoro-success-raises-sustainability-questions>

55 See Survival updates on the case: <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/9091> and <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/9589>

56 Quoted in Nkamwe, M. “Tanzania: PM Ends Loliondo Long-Running Land Conflict.” Tanzania Daily News. September 25, 2013. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201309250290.html>

57 Transcript from THiNK 2011 in Tehelka magazine 8, no. 1, December 24, 2011. http://www.tehelka.com/story_main51.asp?filename=hub241211Think.asp

“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 from Jamunagarh village in the core of Similipal Tiger Reserve

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 Adivasi 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.



Image: The plastic-sheeting camp of Asan Kudar, “home” for over hundred Khadia tribals, who were thrown out of Similipal Tiger Reserve in 2013. © Survival International

“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

The impact of conservation evictions on tribal peoples

Evictions destroy lives

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.⁵⁸ Relocated to the margins of “mainstream” society, their presence is often resented by their new neighbors, with resulting conflicts and tensions.

Tribal peoples fare worst

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.

In the words of anthropologist Jerome Lewis, “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.”⁵⁹

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

1. Tribal peoples, as non-state societies, are often absent from official census data. Where population statistics do exist, they can be patchy, at best. Governments often ignore their customary or informal rights, 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.

“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 man evicted from Kahuzi-Biega National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo⁶⁰

58 See Survival’s “Progress Can Kill” report for an analysis of these impacts. Full text: http://assets.survival-international.org/static/lib/downloads/source/progresscankill/full_report.pdf

59 Lewis, *The Batwa Pygmies*, 2000 (see note 32).

60 Barume, *Heading Towards Extinction?*, 2000 (see note 35).

Case studies

“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

“Only because the Wanniyala-Aetto protected the land was there land there to make into a park. After 1983 [when the Maduru Oya National Park was created], the feeling of ownership faded – the land belonged to the government. So people damaged it. Their love for the jungle ceased. Before, people killed and cut down only what they needed, and shared it.”

Wanniyala-Aetto spokesperson, Sri Lanka

“If the next generation waits here, they will learn drinking, smoking and gambling. All the wrong things. They must go back to the jungle while they are still young, and go back to the traditional system. Before, we had no schools, hospitals etc, but we had our own system of medicine, of education. It is all being lost.”

Tapal Bandialetto, Wanniyala-Aetto

Eviction destroys lives of Bushmen of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve

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 Central Kalahari Game 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.⁶¹

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.⁶² 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.

A people lost: the forest people of Sri Lanka

In 1983, the Wanniyala-Aetto, or “forest people”, of Sri Lanka were evicted from their former homelands in what is now the Maduru Oya National Park. The tribe had already lost much land to dams, settlers and logging, and Maduru Oya was their last refuge.

On the outside of their forests they have been made to change everything from how they dress to how they live, and to conform to the “mainstream” while being treated as “demons” and “primitives” by their new neighbors and the authorities.⁶³ Their self-sufficiency within their forests has been destroyed and they struggle with desperate poverty and all that comes with it.

61 K. Ikeya, “Some Changes among the San under the Influence of Relocation Plan in Botswana. Parks, Property, and Power: Managing Hunting Practice and Identity within State Policy Regimes,” *Senri Ethnological Studies* 59 (2001): 183–198. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology.

62 See Survival’s Bushmen campaign webpage for more information: <http://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/bushmen>

63 Wiveca Stegeborn, personal communication.

3. Why parks violate rights

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.

Findings of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2009.⁶⁴

“A case in point is the Royal Chitwan National Park [Nepal] ... The park was established in 1971 in areas traditionally used and inhabited by the Tharu, Majhi, Bote, Darai and other communities who were displaced to the park’s buffer zone.

“Of particular concern are the reports received by the Special Rapporteur of mistreatment, arbitrary detention and sexual abuse of indigenous villagers, in particular indigenous women, by Chitwan National Park rangers and military officials designated to patrol the park’s premises.”

64 J. Anaya, “Report on the situation of the indigenous peoples in Nepal,” UN Human Rights Council 12th Session Agenda item 3, document number A/HRC/12/34/Add.3 (July 20, 2009).

Fences, fines and intimidation

“Heaven is miles and miles of forests without any forest guards.”⁶⁵
Gond elder, India

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.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷

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.

65 Panda Baba, Gond elder, quoted in V. Elwin, *Leaves from the Jungle: Life in a Gond Village* (Oxford University Press, 1992)

66 See for example the punishment of honey gatherers in Sri Lanka: <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/2491>

67 J. Woodman, “Between Bureaucrats and Beneficiaries: The Implementation of Ecotourism in Pench Tiger Reserves, India” (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge: Department of Geography, 2004).

Case studies

Anti-poaching schemes violate rights

Anti-poaching schemes across the world tend to rely on park rangers, or “ecoguards” – an expensive and ineffective system. The lack of accountability of these guards undermines both human rights as well as the priorities of the conservationists themselves.

“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 man, 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 woman, Cameroon

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

Baka man, Cameroon⁶⁸

Abuse of Baka and Mbendjele “Pygmies” by WWF-funded ecoguards in 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 park wardens, partially funded by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the German Development Cooperation, prevent them from hunting and gathering in – or even entering – the forests that were once their homes.⁶⁹

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 and Mbendjele individuals have been tortured and have even reportedly died as a result.

In May 2013, 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 units are generally able to act with impunity.⁷⁰

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.⁷¹ 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 and Mbendjele communities, as the least powerful, are hardest hit.

WWF provides critical support for ecoguards working in Cameroon’s Boumba Bek, Nki and Lobéké National Parks, including vehicles, equipment and a bonus system for trophies confiscated, which incentivizes raids 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.

⁶⁸ These three quotes were collected between 2013 and 2014 by a Survival fieldworker.

⁶⁹ B. Ndameu, “Protected areas and indigenous peoples: the paradox of conservation and survival of the Baka in Moloundou region (South-East Cameroon),” in *Indigenous Peoples and Protected Areas in Africa: From Principles to Practice*, ed. J. Nelson & L. Hossack (Forest Peoples Programme, 2001), 215-241. <http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2010/08/cameroonbbekeng.pdf>

⁷⁰ Survival field visit, 2013.

⁷¹ Bushmeat is meat from wild, rather than domestic, animals.

“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

Torture of Bushmen hunters in 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 (CKGR) 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 many reports of Bushmen being tortured since the 1990s. In 2012, two Bushmen were 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.



Image: Survival recently released a report into the scale of torture of the Bushmen of Botswana’s Central Kalahari Game Reserve by anti-poaching squads. <http://assets.survivalinternational.org/documents/1287/they-have-killed-me-bushman-report.pdf>

“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

“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 Tshiamo

4. Why parks need people

“The government and the conservationists have messed up our forest. When we looked after the forest there was always plenty. Now that we are forbidden to enter our forest when we put out traps they remain empty. Before if we put out traps and nothing walked on them we would take them elsewhere to let the forest rest. We know how to look after the forest.”⁷²

Lambombo Etienne, Baka elder, Cameroon

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.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴

“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.”

Statement by COICA, confederation of indigenous organizations of the Amazon Basin, 1989⁷⁵

Problems for parks when people are removed

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.⁷⁶

72 Miatta village, Dja Reserve, Cameroon, 2002. Quoted in J. Lewis, “Technological Leap-Frogging in the Congo Basin, Pygmies and Global Positioning Systems in Central Africa: What Has Happened and Where Is It Going?” *African Study Monographs Suppl.* 43 (March 2012), p. 22.

73 S. Wells, *Pandora’s Seed: The Unforeseen Cost of Civilization* (London: Allen Lane, 2010); H. Poinar et al. “A molecular analysis of dietary diversity for three archaic Native Americans,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 98, no. 8 (2001):4317-4322.

74 Woodman, “Between Bureaucrats and Beneficiaries,” 2004 (see note 51).

75 COICA, “Two agendas for Amazon Development,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (Winter 1989).

76 N. Carter et al., “Assessing spatiotemporal changes in tiger habitat across different land management regimes,” *Ecosphere* 4, no. 10 (March 2013). <http://www.esajournals.org/doi/abs/10.1890/ES13-00191.1>

Key ways in which healthy parks need tribal peoples

Parks need people to increase biodiversity

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.”⁷⁷ 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.⁷⁸ Shifting cultivation systems also contribute towards a greater diversity of species by providing a “mosaic” of different habitats.⁷⁹

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.⁸⁰

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.⁸¹

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.⁸²

Parks need people to control fire

“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.” Professor Bill Gammage, Australian National University⁸³

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.⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵ Over the last 90 years, wildfires have cost Australia almost US\$7 billion.⁸⁶ Similarly, in Amazonia the incidence of wildfires is lower in indigenous territories.⁸⁷

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

77 C. Padoch & M. Pinedo-Vasquez, “Saving Slash-and-Burn to Save Biodiversity,” *Biotropica* 42, no. 5 (2010): 550-552

78 D. Posey ed., *Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity* (London: UNEP/ Intermediate Technology Publications, 1999). Extract available online: <http://agroforestry.org/the-overstory/160-overstory-109-cultural-landscapes>

79 W. Denevan, “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, no. 3 (1992): 369-385.

80 M. Ichikawa, “The Forest World as a Circulation System: The Impacts of Mbuti Habitation and Subsistence Activities on the Forest Environment,” *African Study Monographs Suppl.* 26 (2001): 157-168;

E. Dounias, “The Management of Wild Yam Tubers by the Baka Pygmies in Southern Cameroon,” *African Study Monographs Suppl.* 26 (2001): 135-156.

81 There is an important distinction between pioneers coming into new forest areas, slashing and burning a patch and then moving on when it is exhausted, and the sustainable, complex swidden agriculture that many tribal peoples have developed. But it is a distinction that is often lost or ignored.

82 M. Ragarajan & G. Sahabuddin, “Displacement and Relocation from Protected Areas: Towards a Biological and Historical Synthesis,” *Conservation and Society* 4, no. 3 (2006): 359–378.

83 B. Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Allen & Unwin, 2012).

84 S. Budiansky, *Nature’s Keepers: The New Science of Nature Management* (London: Phoenix, 1996).

85 R. Bird et al., “Aboriginal hunting buffers climate-driven fire-size variability in Australia’s spinifex grasslands,” *PNAS* 109, no. 26 (2012): 10287–10292.

86 See: <http://www.news.com.au/technology/environment/bushfires-in-australia-deadlier-more-destructive-and-worse-to-come/story-e6frfp0-1226815740178>

87 Nolte et al., “Governance regime and location,” 2013 (see note 5); Nepstad et al., “Inhibition of Amazon Deforestation,” 2006 (see note 6).

Parks need people to control poaching

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.⁹²

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.⁹³

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.⁹⁴

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, 2009⁹⁵

Why conservationists should fight for indigenous rights

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.⁹⁶

Parks can only protect a fraction of our land and seas. Outside their boundaries (and within them too),⁹⁷ mines, roads, dams, industrial projects, urbanization, ranching or agri-business and monoculture plantations threaten both natural habitats and the people that depend on them.

(<http://earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/2014/02/22/yellowstone-begins-wild-bison-slaughter/>); Indian Country Today (<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2014/03/14/yellowstone-bison-slaughter-over-controversy-remains-154018>); Daily Mail (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2576053/Yellowstone-Bison-slaughters-season.html>); Huismann, W. (2014) *Pandaleaks: the Dark Side of WWF*; Klein, N. (2014) *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. Allen Lane: London; Dowie, M. *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict Between Global Conservation and Native Peoples* (MIT Press, 2009); Chapin, M (2004) *A Challenge to Conservationists*. *WorldWatch* November/December 2004.

92 Terralingua, “Indigenous Sacred Sites and Biocultural Diversity: A Case Study from Southwestern Ethiopia,” *Terralingua* 2010. <http://www.terralingua.org/bcdconservation/?p=62>; J. Colding & C. Folke, “Social Taboos: ‘Invisible’ Systems of Local Resource Management and Biological Conservation,” *Ecological Applications* 11, no. 2 (2001): 584-600.

93 A major reason for the decline in some species was the introduction of veterinary fences to separate wildlife from domestic cattle that were used for beef. In times of drought, these fences prevented the migration of wildlife to water sources that could have sustained them.

94 C. Fabricius & C. de Wit, “The Influence of Forced Removals and Land Restitution on Conservation in South Africa,” in *Conservation and Mobile Indigenous Peoples: Displacement, Forced Settlement & Sustainable Development* eds. D. Chatty & M. Colchester (Oxford: Bergahn Books, 2002).

95 UNEP-WCMC, “Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania,” (2009). Available online at: <http://www.eoearth.org/view/article/154845/>

96 A. Choudry, “Conservation International: Privatizing Nature, Plundering Biodiversity,” *Seedling* 1st October (2003). <http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=272>

97 The Nature Conservancy (TNC), one of the world's biggest conservation NGOs with assets of US\$6 billion, provides a key example: within one of their reserves in Texas – on land gifted by ExxonMobil – TNC has its own oil and gas extraction operation. The area, nominally demarcated to save an endangered bird species no longer has any of these birds left. Source: Klein, N (2014).

“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

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: towards a new conservation through partnership

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.”⁹⁸

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. There are a few helpful signs:

Joint Management in Australia

In New South Wales, the parks service has signed up to a “statement of reconciliation” which acknowledges that Aborigines are the indigenous custodians of the land. The government aims to “hand back” some land to indigenous communities to then be “jointly managed” with the government. The parks service recognizes that “joint management” will potentially lead to “improved protection and management of biodiversity values through application of Aboriginal knowledge and practices.”⁹⁹

Over one third of the parks in Australia are “indigenous protected areas” where the land is indigenous-owned and is jointly managed by the community and the parks service. However, the extent to which the management is truly “joint” is debatable, as power and control still lie largely with the state, not the community.¹⁰⁰

The recognition and support for ICCAs – Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas – is a vital new approach. Global awareness and appreciation of ICCAs is growing, but these areas will continue to be threatened locally and nationally until the conservation industry supports such grounded approaches rather than externally-imposed conservation projects.

Kaa-lyá, Bolivia – the first official indigenous co-managers of a national park

In the 1990s, a deal was struck between a council representing thousands of Isoseño Guarani and Ayoreo people and the Bolivian government.¹⁰¹ The tribal communities agreed to give up land titles

98 See D. Turton, “The Mursi and the Elephant Question,” in Conservation and Mobile Indigenous Peoples: Displacement, Forced Settlement & Sustainable Development eds. D. Chatty & M. Colchester (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002) for an example of how a “top-down” project totally failed to meaningfully involve local communities and the inevitable fall out from this lack of true participation, based, fundamentally, on a lack of respect for the local people.

99 National Parks and Wildlife Service, “Potential benefits of Aboriginal joint management,” <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/jointmanagement/jointmanagementbenefits.htm>

100 S. Wearing and M. Huyskens, “Moving on from Joint Management Policy Regimes in Australian National Parks,” *Current Issues in Tourism* 4 (2001) 182-209.

101 J. Beltran (ed.), “Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Protected Areas: Principles, Guidelines and Case Studies: Case Study 1

to an area in order for it to become a national park and became the managers and owners of a community-owned indigenous territory alongside it. In the process they entered the history books as the first official indigenous co-managers of a national park – the Parque Nacional de Kaa-lyá del Gran Chaco.

The area had been heavily encroached by ranchers and settlers growing soya and cotton. These settlers are now banished and only certain areas of the National Park are open to certain uses by the local indigenous communities. A key aim of the project is to get the indigenous communities official titles to their land.

The deal is certainly not perfect: the tribes have had to relinquish rights to certain areas and certain resources (including mineral resources) to the state; and the park is bisected by a massive gas pipeline over which the affected communities have no control and about which they were not consulted. But this project is an encouraging step in the right direction, which focuses on communities' rights and needs, not just the biodiversity of the park, and which the community largely considers "their" park.¹⁰²

Mbendjele approach, Congo Basin

In the Congo Basin, a new approach to conservation is taking shape. Mbendjele men and women are developing the tools they need to help protect their forests. In a project linked to University College London, handheld devices are used to map the forests and record and report poaching, logging, as well as assaults against local people by the guards who are tasked with protecting the forest.¹⁰³

The Mbendjele are at the forefront of how a new conservation could look: tribal communities coming to outside organizations with clear proposals for the help that they need to defend their lands – and, often, their lives.

Ogiek approach, Kenya

The Ogiek of Mount Elgon in Kenya have been removed from their lands repeatedly since colonial times and have continually returned.¹⁰⁴ Threatened with yet another eviction, they have developed a novel response: they have written down on paper the complex systems that they have developed over generations to live well and sustainably on their land and have shown the authorities that they can, and will, protect it.

Buoyed by the recognition of their ancestral rights in the 2010 Constitution, the community met with conservationists and government agencies to discuss this new approach. They have recorded their community "bylaws" that protect the land and have caught and handed over outsiders who are violating these laws, especially charcoal burners. The Kenya Forest Service has recognized that charcoal burning has since decreased and is helping to control incursions into the forest.

This is a positive approach, but the Ogiek's troubles are far from over as they continue to face harassment from the authorities, and Ogiek of the Mau Forest are still fighting for their land rights. The Kenyan government has since violently evicted another tribal people, the Sengwer, showing that substantial change is, as yet, a long way off.

Towards the future

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.

Kaa-lyá del Gran Chaco National Park and Integrated Management Natural Area, Bolivia," Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 4, IUCN (2000). https://portals.iucn.org/library/efiles/html/BP4%20-%20Indigenous_and_Traditional_Peoples_and_Protected_%20Areas/casestudy1.html

102 See video with interviews with the park management and the community on Just Conservation website: <http://www.justconservation.org/video-the-national-park-kaaiya-del-gran-chaco>

103 M. Vitos, M. Stevens, J. Lewis & M. Haklay, "Making local knowledge matter: supporting non-literate people to monitor poaching in Congo," DEV 2013, January 11-12, 2013, Bangalore, India

104 Just Conservation, "The customary bylaws of the Ogiek of Mount Elgon," Blog post on Just Conservation (December 4, 2013), <http://www.justconservation.org/the-customary-bylaws-of-the-ogiek-of-mount-elgon>.

Survival International

Survival International is the global movement for tribal peoples' rights. Since 1969, we have helped them defend their lives, protect their lands and determine their own futures.

We know tribal peoples are better at looking after their environment than anyone else. They are the best conservationists and guardians of the natural world.

Survival's campaigns in partnership with tribal peoples have resulted in the protection of millions of hectares of biodiverse lands. Demarcating tribal territories has never been more vital for their survival, and is a fundamental right enshrined in international law, as well as in the constitutions of many countries.

As this report demonstrates, the demarcation of tribal peoples' lands is also the best possible protection against deforestation, habitat loss and general environmental degradation.

Our successful campaigns have included:

Brazil

Survival's twenty-year campaign with the Yanomami and Brazilian NGO The Pro Yanomami Commission (CCPY) led to the demarcation of the Yanomami's land in Brazil in 1992, resulting in the protection of 9.4 million hectares of rainforest – an area the size of Hungary.

Colombia

Survival's joint campaign with Colombia's national Indian organization, ONIC, brought about the protection of one million hectares of rainforest for the Nukak tribe in 1997.

Paraguay

After a long Survival campaign, a group of Enxet Indians moved back to their homeland after waiting for 20 years by the side of a highway for their land to be returned to them.

India

Survival has campaigned for 21 years for the right of the nomadic Jarawa of the Andaman Islands to be able to continue to live in and protect their forests. Because of the tribe's management and protection of their forests, they live in what is believed to be the most biodiverse area in the Andamans. Following a campaign by Survival and Indian organizations, government plans to forcibly settle the Jarawa were abandoned. Such a plan would inevitably have led to the destruction of much of the 100,000 hectares of biodiverse, biologically unique forest that the tribe has safeguarded for generations. In Odisha, Survival successfully campaigned with local, national and international organizations for the protection of the Niyamgiri Hills – the richly biodiverse home of the Dongria Kondh tribe – officially protected by the government from mining in 2013.

See the website for Survival's on-going campaigns: www.survivalinternational.org