



Foundational Element 1

Equitable Benefits, Impacts, and Inclusion



Knowledge, Evidence, and Practice

KEY POINTS

- Supporting human rights and equity is both a moral imperative and an essential precondition for sustainable conservation outcomes. For Indigenous Peoples, this includes the right to self-determination and the standard of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent.
- Equity should be examined at both the scale of the community (e.g., community to community, company, and government) as well as the scale of the individual (e.g., across social identities). In consideration of context, reflect on whether some are benefiting more than others, being impacted more than others, and being included more than others—and take actions to avoid/address as appropriate.
- Participatory situation analysis with gender and power analysis is critical for foundational understanding of what equity means in any given context, and the power dynamics that underlie and impact partnerships with communities. Any activities should be based on sound understanding of the context and rooted in support of the specific social identities' leadership, priorities, and vision for their participation and their future.
- Rights can vary within communities and across resources, and some social identities (e.g., women, youth, new migrants) may not be afforded the same rights as others, hence the need for an equity lens. Careful consideration of who the rightsholders are within a community and how secure any given rights are is needed, as this has implications for who has a say in use and management decisions, and who receives benefits.
- In participatory processes such as leadership and management capacity-building workshops and MSD, it is particularly important to ensure equitable participation and leadership opportunities across social identities, pay attention to micro and macro power dynamics and provide capacity-building on all sides to address power imbalances, and understand and mitigate potential unintended consequences of participation for community members.
- When supporting sustainable livelihoods, the same emphasis should be placed on ensuring equity in opportunities and benefits across social identities and avoiding unintended consequences—particularly elite capture, widening existing wealth gaps, and increase of gender-based violence.



KEY TERMS

Elite Capture—implies several related, yet distinctly different situations, including domination and control of decision making processes, monopolization of public benefits and resources, and a combination of both. The concept is also used to describe situations in which political and economic elites misappropriate resources and public funds or commit acts of malfeasance.¹⁰⁸

Equity—a multi-dimensional concept of ethical concerns and social justice based on the distribution of costs and benefits, process and participation, and recognition, underpinned by the context under consideration. Sometimes used synonymously with fairness or justice.¹⁰⁹

Human Rights—rights inherent to all people, whatever the nationality, place of residence, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, race, religion, language, age, ability, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to human rights without discrimination.¹¹⁰

Intersectionality—first coined in 1989 by professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes the concept that socially constructed traits do not exist in isolation from each other, but rather are interconnected and influence each other in overt and covert ways.¹¹¹

Social Identity—those aspects of a person that are defined in terms of his or her group memberships (e.g., Indigenous identity, race, ethnicity, religion or belief system affiliation, nationality, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, education level, socioeconomic status or class, geographic location, migration or visa status).¹¹²

See [“Tool 12: Conducting a Power Analysis”](#) for a tool that explains the multi-dimensional aspects of power, and provides guidance and templates for conducting power analysis.

See [“Tool 13: Human Rights Guide”](#) for detailed guidance on implementing a human rights-based approach.

See [“Tool 14: Gender Guidelines”](#) for detailed guidance on gender equity integration in conservation projects and strategies.

In the conservation sphere, social equity can be described as having four dimensions—1) distribution of costs, responsibilities, rights, and benefits, 2) the procedure by which decisions are made and who has a voice, 3) acknowledgement and respect for the equal status of distinct identities, histories, values, and interests, and 4) the underlying social, economic, environmental, and political history and circumstances.¹⁰⁹ At a bare minimum, conservation organizations should be committed to “first, do no harm” in the communities with whom we partner and ensure that local people do not unjustly shoulder the costs of conservation while society benefits.¹¹³⁻¹¹⁴ TNC is committed to fulfilling this baseline social safeguard requirement and to going beyond: through supporting and advancing Indigenous Peoples’ and local communities’ visions and self-determination.

This two-fold commitment—not only to do no harm, but also to build a true partnership approach centered on equity and self-determination—requires a strong understanding of the specific context. To do so, it is important to recognize communities as a diverse mix of groups and

identities. Different social groups or identities (e.g., based on gender, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, religion, etc.) often use natural resources in different ways, depending on their knowledge and skills, that are directly linked with their socially defined roles and responsibilities, and are impacted in different ways. For example, certain activities may shift time allocations and increase the burden of work on more vulnerable household members, such as women and children. If these potential costs and differences are not fully understood, the success of any activity is likely to be limited, and possibly with unintended consequences for some community members. In contrast, when equity considerations are incorporated into program design, implementation, and monitoring, it will ultimately result in better outcomes for both people and nature and increase the longevity of community decisions and actions. This is supported by studies that found increased women's participation in forest and fisheries management resulted in improved resource-use rules, increased compliance, and better protected ecosystems.¹¹⁵⁻¹¹⁶

Co-creating respectful, equitable relationships with Indigenous Peoples and local communities takes time. Although TNC's engagement will look different in different situations, the responsibility to center Indigenous and local community visions for the future, and honor the diversity of social identities within these groups, remains constant. Across all activities, a robust, participatory situation analysis that includes intra-community gender and power analysis is important to understanding culturally responsive ways to support community authority and capacity. For instance, assessing the distribution of benefits—both tangible (e.g., income, technology) and intangible (e.g., education, status, participation, inclusion, safety, agency)—from conservation strategies is important, as some groups may benefit more than others. This analysis can guide how to provide that support in ways that avoid backlash and the potential for identity-based discrimination or violence. The analysis must recognize and respond to power dynamics, including different realities for different social identities, and move beyond treating any social identity as a homogenous group; rather, it is imperative to recognize that one's full identity is made up of numerous intersectionalities across different social identities.¹¹⁷ Facilitating targeted and effective community participation across social identities in situation analysis is important for ensuring that subsequent activities are collaboratively developed and culturally responsive, and that they do not cause unintended negative consequences, such as backlash, identity-based violence, or imposition of outside assumptions—including assumptions about what equity looks like—that may perpetuate colonial frameworks or impacts (personal correspondence, Janine Mohamed, Lowitja Institute).

⑤ Equity in Rights and Tenure

Indigenous Peoples' fundamental right to self-determination rests on their secure rights over lands, waters, and resources. This is affirmed in the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). For example, Article 25 asserts Indigenous Peoples' right to maintain and strengthen a spiritual relationship with their lands, waters, and territories; Article 29 outlines Indigenous Peoples' right to conservation, protection, and productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources; and Article 32 articulates Indigenous Peoples' right to determine priorities for lands, territories, and resources use and development.³

An equitable approach to securing Indigenous and local community rights over lands, waters, and resources may include supporting policy implementation or changes that contribute to more favorable rights and equity conditions. This approach also may involve supporting equitable tenure, use, and inheritance rights across social identities within a community. Historically, efforts to increase tenure security have often focused predominantly on resources used by men, despite there being different uses and knowledge held by women. Further,

in some contexts women may not be able to own land, and if they are able to own land together with their husband, land is oftentimes inherited by male relatives if the husband passes away. This backdrop of structural inequality undermines women's well-being and security, as well as that of their communities and the ecosystems they protect. When women have more secure rights, they improve their resilience, their incomes, food supplies for their families, and the health of the lands, waters, and natural resources they manage.¹¹⁸⁻¹¹⁹

Geographic location can also impact power dynamics and rights regimes. For example, in freshwater contexts, being located upstream provides certain advantages over being located downstream, and power imbalances act to either counter or reinforce these dynamics. Notably, efforts to secure tenure may also increase the risk of conflict or discontent, as assigning and clarifying rights can have a zero-sum outcome. When someone is granted property rights another person or entity may lose those rights (e.g., moving from open access small-scale fisheries to rights-based management approaches).

➤ **Equity in Leadership, Governance, and Management Capacity**

Indigenous self-determination must be at the heart of efforts to support the leadership, governance, and management capacity of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.¹²⁰ This includes respecting and working with community leaders and institutions, traditional and contemporary governance structures, and decision making processes, as well as honoring and applying Indigenous and local knowledge alongside and on par with Western science,¹²¹ and taking measures to protect Indigenous and local community intellectual property. No activities should take place without Indigenous Peoples' Free, Prior and Informed Consent, which is an ongoing process that should be undertaken throughout the entire life cycle of an initiative.¹²² Building capacity goes both ways—staff and partner capacity also needs to be built for advancing an equitable and human rights-based approach to this work. Conservation practitioners should be open and willing to gain new insights, skills, and knowledge the more they engage, partner, and work alongside Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

When capacity-building strategies are designed and implemented, attention to inclusion, the equity of impacts and benefits, and the possibility of elite capture are important to their success. Successful capacity-building initiatives must advance equitable access (to information, tools, and opportunities), equitable participation (in trainings, meetings, and decision making processes), and equitable leadership (in planning, implementation, and monitoring). Different rightsholders and stakeholders have different experiences, preferences, and backgrounds, and informed action is required to ensure their inclusion. For example, women often steward different natural resources than men, which is important in programming around natural resource governance and management.

We support a gender equity approach. A bounty of evidence confirms that people and nature benefit when women have stronger rights, voices, and choices in natural resource management.¹¹⁵⁻¹¹⁶ By including all voices, we can better support the protection of the entire suite of resources that people rely on and care for. This entails including men and boys in gender analysis and gender equity-focused activities, so that together with women and girls, similarities and differences can be recognized, and solutions proposed to favor understanding, accountability, equity, and sustainability.

Examples of actions that may further equity in efforts to support strong community leadership, capacity, and governance are listed in Table 6. Please note there may be intersectionality between many of the identities listed.

Table 6: Examples of actions that can be taken to promote equity in leadership, governance, and management capacity-building for different social identities.

Example Social Identities	Example Equity Actions
Gender	Training and financial support for women's networks and groups; holding additional, women-facilitated trainings for women community members; providing childcare at meetings or offering accommodations or stipends for women to bring their children and/or care providers; scheduling trainings and meetings for times and places that are safe and accessible for women and do not increase their time burden, risk exposure, and workload; ^h facilitating learning exchanges among women from different communities; supporting women's capacity and confidence in areas such as public speaking, negotiations, financial management, and project leadership
Age	Training and financial support for youth networks and groups; fostering youth participation in decision making and leadership roles; developing sustainable livelihoods opportunities with youth; supporting Elders' participation; supporting intergenerational connections; supporting healthy leadership transitions, mentorship, and succession planning
Ethnicity	Conducting workshops in local language and/or providing translation services and advertising in advance; ensuring training materials are available in accessible formats and languages; ⁱ creating methods and processes to learn and share local and ethnic knowledge surfaced and revealed; providing a neutral party peacemaker or mediator if needed
Socio-economic status/class	Compensating community members for their participation; ensuring meetings and trainings are not held at times of day when livelihood work is required or during harvest season; supporting and sourcing local vendors and service providers for place-based gatherings or events; avoiding preferential engagement with the wealthiest and most educated community members

h. This is also important for avoiding the unintended consequence of children missing school to help with household duties.

i. Consider literacy levels, as well as the possibility that women or ethnic minorities may speak an Indigenous or local language but not the national language.

➤ Equity in MSD

Many of the equity considerations related to designing effective multi-stakeholder dialogue and decision making processes overlap with those relevant to the leadership, governance, and management capacity pillar of the VCA Framework. The historic and current context of colonization and power imbalances necessitates capacity-building of all rightsholders and stakeholders involved. Otherwise, there is a risk of the same macro power dynamics playing out within the space of the initiative. This may involve building government or private company capacity in Indigenous rights and engagement, as well as support for Indigenous and local community capacity in engaging in policy or corporate spaces. It is important to remember that while conservation organizations can be a trusted convener in these spaces, we are not without bias, and the same principles that apply to our own capacity-building in the leadership pillar apply to our capacity-building for engagement in good faith as an actor within a multi-stakeholder environment.

Power dynamics are a key consideration in the design and success of MSD, both within the communities themselves and in relation to other stakeholder groups. In many cases, lack of formal rights, lack of capacity, and lack of economic alternatives can put local communities at a comparable disadvantage when it comes to power and influence in decision making. In the case of environmental degradation, those who benefit from environmentally degrading activities are often more powerful in the current systemic context than those who are harmed by degradation, thus forcing the less powerful actors to bear the costs.¹²³ Differences in access, influence, resources, and information are not always easily overcome, and those in power can be reluctant to relinquish control, many times using this power to dictate the form (e.g., time of day, time of year, location) and function (e.g., process) of dialogue. Insensitivity to the needs of Indigenous Peoples and local communities can further reduce their opportunities to meaningfully engage.⁹¹ In these cases, local communities could experience “token” or meaningless participation that does not lead to significant shifts in decision making authority. It is important, too, to acknowledge the rise of anti-Indigenous governments and other actors that promote violence against environmental defenders and undermine the security of lands, waters, and resources. Some actors and spaces will be unsafe for Indigenous and local community engagement, and it is critical to understand from the partners themselves in which to support their engagement and which they prefer to avoid. In all areas where multiple actors are engaged, it is important to collaboratively develop a culturally responsive, dialogue-focused conflict resolution plan.¹²⁴

MSDs should support access, participation, and leadership of all stakeholders (including vulnerable or underrepresented social identities) in all discussions and decision making.¹²⁵ Communities themselves have internal diversity that must be acknowledged to ensure adequate representation and participation—for example, women, Elders, and other groups who have unique perspectives and knowledge to add to the conversation. Regarding gender equity specifically, supporting connections and exchange across women's networks and organizations may provide an important opportunity for learning, sharing, and advancement of women's priorities.

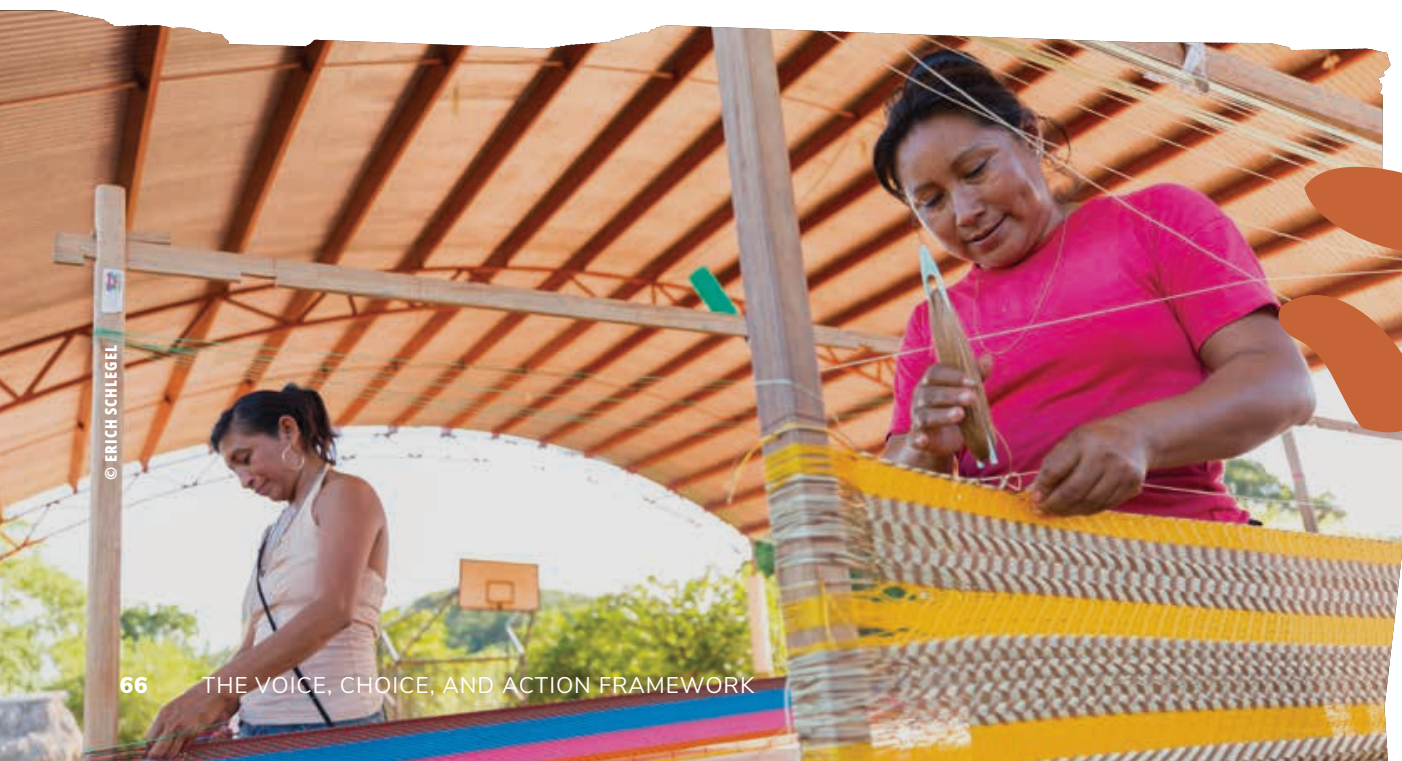
Please refer to Table 6 for examples of actions that can be taken to promote equity in MSD spaces. In general, attention should be paid to hidden/unintended costs of participation in the MSD (e.g., lost wages, shifts in time burden), accommodating for local languages (e.g., conducting in the local language or providing simultaneous translation), the time of day and year that the MSD takes place (e.g., not during harvest or fishing season), the format of the dialogue (e.g., aligned with traditional approaches to discussion and decision making), and that the right people are included (e.g., not just wealthy elite and with respect for chosen/traditional leaders).

➤ Equity in Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities

This pillar, perhaps more than any other, has the potential to exacerbate existing equity disparities, and thus great care should be taken to ensure a culturally responsive approach to equitable participation and benefit. On the other hand, sustainable livelihood opportunities have the potential to make systems more equitable, but only if these initiatives are coupled with or contribute to the transformation of current structures, which rely on inherent power imbalance. To make sustainable livelihood opportunities equitable, we must continually support the participation and leadership of different social identities in defining the “what” and the “how,” and support equitable benefit sharing within households and across social identities. Equitable distribution of benefits is also key to prevent deepening existing or creating new inequities within communities, as well as creating important co-benefits. For example, women and children may not experience benefits that are controlled by a male head-of-household. Further, if only select community members—usually the wealthiest—participate in the livelihood opportunity, income might not filter out to the rest of the community.¹²⁶ Finally, it is important to identify risks and safeguard against potential unintended negative consequences, such as backlash, gender-based violence or discrimination (for example, rooted in envy, fear, or anger at the disruption of power dynamics or wealth distribution), increased time burden and workload, or exacerbation of existing wealth gaps or disparities.¹²⁷⁻¹²⁹

Examples of gender equitable initiatives focused on sustainable livelihoods include supporting women’s access to technology, assets, savings, and credits; supporting women in the production and marketing of sustainable products that come from resources that women have traditionally managed; increasing the recognition and compensation for roles that women have traditionally performed; or supporting women in new endeavors that they choose. Fundamentally, gender equity improves lives, including health outcomes,¹³⁰ economic development,¹³¹ social policies, environmental sustainability, and opportunities for future generations.

Sustainable livelihood initiatives can also be critically important opportunities for youth leadership and compensation, enabling them to stay in their communities, receive knowledge passed down from their Elders, and take on roles in lands, waters, and resources stewardship. Based on an understanding of the context, targeting certain initiatives for youth participation (including both young women and young men) and intergenerational collaboration can be key for lasting positive change and a sustainable future.





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Case Studies



Women's Leadership in the Xikrin Indigenous People of Brazil

The Xikrin Indigenous People of Bacajá, numbering approximately 1,300 people, live in 20 villages in the Trancheira Bacajá Indigenous Land, a territory spanning 4 million acres (1.65 million hectares) in Brazil's Pará state in the heart of the Amazon Rainforest. A massive natural carbon sink and haven for biodiversity, the Amazon is undoubtedly one of the most important ecosystems in the world—and Indigenous lands are critical to its protection, comprising over 27 percent of the land area in the Amazon Basin and holding 33 percent of its carbon reserves. TNC has partnered with the Xikrin People on forest protection and livelihood opportunities for several years, and recently those partnerships have included an intentional gender focus.

Observing that their responsibilities were often seen both inside and outside the village as secondary roles, the Xikrin women (known as *Menire*) set out to gain stronger recognition of their roles as natural resource managers, as well as opportunities to lead other types of projects in their communities. Their goal was to organize themselves and engage supportive partners, to grow their knowledge and skills and increase their visibility within their communities and in the world of the *kuben* (white people). With many of their roles and interests centered on sustainable natural resource management, supporting the *Menire*'s vision and leadership is a natural and long-term solution to improve environmental and human well-being.

The Xikrin women began this journey for external visibility in 2013, with a diverse portfolio of sustainable resource management and production projects in partnership with the Brazilian government's National Indigenous Peoples Foundation (FUNAI), The Nature Conservancy, the Plan for Regional Sustainable Development in Xingu (PDRS Xingu), and traditional *ribeirinho* communities in Rio Novo. These multi-stakeholder platforms for engagement have been key to driving and sustaining working partnerships in support of Indigenous Peoples' voice, choice, and action throughout the region.

ICON LEGEND
VCA Framework Biomes



TERRESTRIAL



FRESHWATER



COASTAL



These women-led projects—including dress-making, flour production, vegetable cultivation, and dye creation for body paint (and more recently for painting materials such as bags and shirts)—all have the goal of supporting the sustainable management, harvest, and production of non-timber forest products, in turn promoting and maintaining a vibrant living forest. Some of these projects continue today and serve as examples for other villages, encouraging the participation of more interested families.

One project that has expanded and now includes the participation of several Xikrin villages is babaçu oil production, from the nut of a palm tree. The project centers on strengthening the Menire's capacity to lead the management, production, and commercialization of the babaçu oil for subsistence use within the villages and for external commercialization. The oil is sold at fair prices and routed directly to consumers or stores in urban centers, cutting out intermediary buyers and adding significant economic value to an activity of cultural and environmental importance.

This project has also included the establishment of a new *nhô rōny kangō nhõ kikre* (babaçu oil processing house), a small oil extraction machine, and bottles and labels for packaging the oil. Processing babaçu oil for cooking, cosmetic, and ritual purposes is a traditional role and rich cultural heritage of the Menire that dates back generations; now it is providing the opportunity for greater leadership, income, and recognition for the Xikrin women and their villages. The project received recognition from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization for women's empowerment and autonomy in rural activities that promote healthy and traditional foods.

Indigenous women are the leaders of a promise to future generations. Mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers—all women in the community—share an important understanding of and responsibility for forest resources, which are critical for food security for the entire family, and for sustainable management of community resources. In the Xikrin People's Territorial and Environmental Management Plan (PGTA—developed in partnership with TNC), the Menire emphasized the importance of strengthening their traditional knowledge and the commercial management of non-timber forest products, such as the *piy* (Brazil nut). The entire family participates in the processing of the *piy*, including collection, washing, drying, transporting, and storing.



TNC also supports other Indigenous Peoples in managing and commercializing resources like the Brazil nut, including the Parakanã Indigenous People in the Apterewa Indigenous Land, neighboring the Xikrin. As with the babaçu oil project, the Xikrin and Parakanã Peoples' established organizations are managing and selling the Brazil nut directly to the industry, for example to a bread factory, removing intermediary buyers and thereby receiving higher prices. The Parakanã People are also developing a strong commercial supply chain for their traditional crafts, selling them for an added value and to a market with stable demand. This in turn provides a constant flow of income that goes directly to the women, who use it to improve the lives of their families and villages and ultimately to strengthen Parakanã autonomy on their land.

An enabling condition that has contributed to success in these places has been the presence of secure demarcated land rights. Although far from fully secure of encroachment and illegal entry and extraction by outside actors, the fact that the Xikrin and Parakanã territories are demarcated makes for a more stable starting point for these efforts. Additionally, the support of long-term partnerships and strong multi-stakeholder platforms has been an important component of this work. For example, Indigenous Peoples from different lands are coming together in collaboration on sustainable livelihoods initiatives, to achieve greater scale and impact, and to connect with mechanisms such as the [selo Origens Brasil®](#) for sustainable certification. One of the ways TNC Brazil supports continued multi-stakeholder engagement is through maintaining a cooperative agreement with FUNAI, to ensure FUNAI and TNC objectives and actions are collaborative, complementary, and align behind shared goals in support of Indigenous leadership and self-determination throughout different ethno-regions.

The increasing visibility of Indigenous women's leadership in Indigenous associations and institutions at all levels across Brazil is leading to large-scale results: Today, the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB) and the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB), for example, are represented by strong women leaders who promote both Indigenous rights and environmental sustainability at national and regional scales.

When the connections among conservation activities, gender equity, and Indigenous rights are understood, acknowledged, and supported, conservation activities have a much higher potential for generating positive social impacts and contributing to more enduring conservation outcomes. And key to this success is centering the vision and leadership of the Indigenous women themselves, and valuing their process for involvement of the men, youth, and other members of the community, with TNC and other partners playing a supportive role. Supporting Indigenous women to thrive in ways they determine as culturally responsive and aligned with their vision for the future is critical for ensuring the conservation of millions of hectares of ecologically critical lands across Latin America and around the world.

Tools and Resources



TOOL 12: QUESTIONNAIRE—CONDUCTING A POWER ANALYSIS

Power can be defined as the degree of control over material, human, intellectual, and financial resources exercised by different sections of society. The extent of power of an individual or group is correlated to how many different kinds of resources they can access and control. This tool explains the multi-dimensional aspects of power, and provides guidance and templates for conducting power analysis. Power analysis should be conducted during situation analysis that is a part of the planning process for conservation in partnership with Indigenous Peoples and local communities. As such, conservation practitioners may find it helpful to consolidate various aspects of situation analysis that might otherwise be conducted separately into one overarching analysis, which can help save limited time, resources, and social capital. This includes general situation and stakeholder analysis, gender analysis, tenure rights holder and stakeholder mapping, and equity considerations in implementation and monitoring, evaluation, and learning.



TOOL 13: TOOLKIT—TNC'S HUMAN RIGHTS GUIDE FOR WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The audience for this guide is conservation practitioners, managers, and senior leaders. It applies to all work that may impact Indigenous Peoples and local communities, is relevant for all scales of work and strategic approaches, and is useful regardless of project role. The guide is informed by nine Principles and Safeguards that are drawn from TNC's commitments to international human rights law and standards. The main content of the guide is comprised of six modules and includes checklists, templates, tools, and case studies.

This guidance is also available in Chinese, French, Indonesian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swahili. More information can be obtained by visiting the [Human Rights Guide](#) website.



TOOL 14: GUIDE—TNC'S GUIDANCE FOR INTEGRATING GENDER EQUITY IN CONSERVATION

The purpose of the guidance is to help conservation practitioners integrate gender equity considerations in a conservation project or strategy. The guidance follows the [Conservation by Design \(CbD\) 2.0](#) cycle and includes important information, tools, and resources for conducting an evidence-based gender analysis, developing a gender action plan, building a gender-responsive results-based framework (CbD Phase 1); integrating gender-responsive approaches and activities in implementation (CbD Phase 2); and monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on gender related outcomes (CbD Phase 3).

This guidance is also available in Chinese, French, Indonesian, Mongolian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swahili.

Additionally, a [Gender Integration Workshop for Indigenous and Community-Based Conservation](#) based on the guide is available on conservationtraining.org, which covers gender analysis, gender action planning, gender equity in MEL, and gender based violence and safety. For access to the training curriculum, contact conservationtraining@tnc.org.