

Policy pointers

Indigenous landscapes are key to sustaining the world's biodiversity. A new global brand is needed to promote biocultural goods and services and generate much-needed income for indigenous communities.

Policymakers and donors should support the development and use of the global biocultural label. It will help to implement international policies and treaties relating to biodiversity, genetic resources, cultural heritage and climate change.

The scheme could be embedded in existing initiatives such as the International Network of Mountain Indigenous Peoples (INMIP) and piloted by indigenous communities.

To scale up, partnerships should be established with other indigenous organisations and initiatives or with like-minded institutions working with indigenous peoples (such as UNESCO or the Satoyama Initiative).

Building a global biocultural brand to support indigenous landscapes

Indigenous lands and territories are crucial to sustaining much of the world's biodiversity and agrobiodiversity, and many of its ecosystem services. They are also key to climate change adaptation. Yet these agrobiodiversity-rich landscapes — and the communities who sustain them — receive very little support. To be sustainable, socioecological production landscapes such as biocultural heritage territories, cultural landscapes and indigenous conserved areas must also become economically viable. This requires developing culturally appropriate sources of income that protect interlinked biodiversity and cultural (biocultural) heritage. One solution is to develop a global brand for biocultural products and services, supported by indigenous labelling and certification. The labelling system should be designed and managed by indigenous peoples and easily accessible to them, with some independent verification to provide a guarantee of quality and authenticity for consumers.

For centuries, indigenous peoples have used their traditional knowledge and holistic worldviews and values to conserve and develop precious biodiversity. Their landscapes often sustain high levels of genetic diversity, including linked wild and domesticated populations. This provides evolving gene banks for agricultural resilience. Yet the world's 370–500 million indigenous peoples are amongst the poorest and most marginalised. Although only 5% of the global population, indigenous peoples make up 15% of the world's poor. They often suffer racial discrimination and dispossession of land and resources.¹ Erosion of their culture and biodiversity (biocultural heritage) is often exacerbated by economic pressures and youth out-migration.

Many indigenous groups want to revive their traditional cultures by developing alternative ways to engage with market economies that support indigenous values and environmental stewardship. One approach is to develop a global brand for biocultural heritage-based products. Designed and managed by indigenous peoples, the scheme would promote 'baskets' of biocultural products and services supported by indigenous labelling and certification. Production and delivery processes would strengthen cultural and spiritual values, traditional knowledge and biodiversity management at farm and landscape level. This could provide a sustainable and culturally appropriate source of finance to support indigenous landscapes and ecosystem services,

Indigenous labelling experiences show that the participation of indigenous communities is key

while contributing to several global policies and treaties for sustainable development (Box 1).

In 2015, IIED, ANDES and the University of Leeds began exploring how to develop a global labelling system for biocultural heritage-based products. The team first conducted a scoping study and consultation,^{2,3} followed by a review of experiences with indigenous labelling. They also explored objectives and guiding principles, and how the scheme could be managed and funded.

Why is a new biocultural label needed?

Consumers such as tourists and urban residents are often willing to pay a premium for quality local products with ecological and cultural value — provided they carry a guarantee of origin and authenticity. But such guarantees are often lacking.² Existing labelling and certification schemes can pose challenges for indigenous producers. It can be difficult for communities to comply with strict specifications, particularly when each product/service has to be registered separately. Third-party certification schemes — such as Fairtrade or eco-labelling — do not specifically aim to safeguard biocultural heritage or support indigenous peoples (for example, Fairtrade only applies to commodities). They can also lead to standardisation of biocultural products and processes.

Schemes such as geographical indications (GIs) and collective or certification trademarks aim to protect intellectual property. They allow communities or their representative organisations

to take legal action in the event of false claims or misuse of labels. However, they are designed for businesses and can be very difficult for indigenous peoples to register and enforce due to bureaucratic hurdles and costs.^{4,5}

For indigenous peoples, a more easily and widely accessible system is needed — one that they themselves design and manage. Third-party certification schemes tend to be managed by organisations that are separate from producers, and are often costly to manage.⁶ Alternatively, self-certification labelling would give producers more responsibility, helping to build indigenous leadership — but would not offer consumers a guarantee. A new global biocultural label could combine the best of both. Indigenous peoples would take the lead in setting standards and managing the scheme. And independent verification would provide a firm guarantee to consumers.

Experiences with indigenous labelling and certification

Already, many indigenous labelling and certification initiatives have achieved multiple economic, social, cultural and environmental goals, including agrobiodiversity conservation and enhanced gender equality.⁴ They have proven the economic viability of traditional production systems, which sustain cultural values, biodiversity and ecosystem services, while promoting resilience to climate change and providing nutrition for the poorest groups.^{7,8}

Indigenous labelling experiences show that the participation of indigenous communities is key. Successful examples include an informal trademark developed by the Potato Park biocultural heritage territory in Peru (Box 2),⁴ the Hua Parakore Māori Organics label in New Zealand³ and the Karen people's branding in Thailand (Box 3). By developing 'baskets' of farm and landscape-based goods and services, supported by labelling, indigenous communities have generated good revenues from quite small volumes. Communal funds mean that revenues are shared equitably, helping to reduce poverty. This has encouraged young people to return to their communities, ensuring that traditional knowledge is once again handed on.⁹ And both women and youth play a key role in local microenterprises. For example, in the Potato Park, Quechua women have been empowered through microenterprises that specialise in products involving their particular expertise.¹⁰

Building a global biocultural brand

The new biocultural label will be a graphic or logo representing the global biocultural brand:

Box 1. Biocultural labelling and sustainable development policies

A global biocultural label or indication could contribute to implementing several international policies and treaties:

- Sustainable Development Goals (including SDGs 2 and 15)
- Convention on Biological Diversity (traditional knowledge, customary use, indigenous conserved areas)
- International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) conventions on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and world heritage (cultural landscapes)
- World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) policies on traditional knowledge, and
- Paris Agreement on climate change.

conserving biodiversity and ecosystem services, safeguarding cultural heritage and supporting equity and poverty alleviation. It could be used alone or alongside indigenous peoples' existing local labelling and branding. The brand would emphasise the links between biodiversity and culture. Indigenous communities around the world could communicate the added value of their biocultural products to consumers and retailers. And certification would enable them to access new niche markets.

Ultimately, a global biocultural label should support the fundamental goals of indigenous peoples to secure rights to their traditional lands and resources and to self-determination by:

- Increasing revenues for indigenous and local communities who manage biocultural landscapes
- Sustaining biocultural landscapes and their interlinked biodiversity and cultural heritage
- Enhancing the financial sustainability of biocultural landscapes and the economic viability of non-monetary indigenous economies (eg subsistence or barter systems) and their ecological context.

A biocultural label could also build on the benefits offered by GIs and trademarks, such as protecting intellectual property and collective rights. It could be trademark protected to enhance legal protection and consumer confidence. However, this would increase costs as trademarks would need to be acquired in each country using the label and for every class of product or service, and renewed at least every seven years.²

Guiding principles

A new global biocultural labelling scheme could be based on the following principles:

- **Sustaining biocultural heritage:** applies to indigenous communities or landscapes that are rich in biocultural heritage and sustainably managed according to indigenous values and worldviews
- **Promoting biocultural products and services:** applies to products and services based on traditional knowledge and biodiversity, which sustain biocultural heritage and promote creativity and innovation
- **Landscape certification:** applies to all products and services from a particular landscape or ecosystem to avoid burdening producers with the need to register each product separately, and to foster ecosystem-based strategic alliances

Box 2. The Potato Park trademark

The Potato Park in Peru is a biocultural heritage territory that conserves over 1,000 potato cultivars and four potato wild-relative species. Thanks to the revenues generated using its informal trademark, it is now financially self-sustaining, employing a full-time community administrator to manage the Potato Park Association and its economic collectives. Benefit sharing and use of the trademark are guided by Quechua customary laws and values that promote conservation and equity.⁴

- **Accessibility and flexibility:** the scheme should use a simple set of standards rooted in the interests, hearts and minds of indigenous peoples, which can be adapted to any biocultural system
- **Fair trade:** communities should charge a premium that reflects the costs of sustaining biodiversity, ecosystem services and cultural heritage. Benefits should be shared equitably to empower the poor and marginalised
- **Local benefit capture:** indigenous producers should capture maximum market value through direct sale to consumers or short value chains (eg local or national markets)
- **Gender sensitivity:** the scheme should promote gender and intergenerational equity and equality
- **Transparency and participation:** decisions about implementation in particular landscapes should be made by communities, and all community members should participate in decision making

Box 3. The Karen people's 'story brand'

Young people from seven Karen communities in northern Thailand have developed branding for their local products such as raw honey, coffee, chilli powder and natural tea. The communities work together as an informal network for knowledge exchange and support.

The Hin Lad Nai community use their social enterprise brand 'Host Beehive' for natural honeys, forest tea and coffee. They are proud of their brand and this pride promotes sustainable resource management practices. They use product labels to explain their forest stewardship and rotational farming methods — their 'story' — to consumers. They first started selling their honey in Bangkok four years ago and have a monthly stand at a farmers' market. They now have a strong customer base, including a French Michelin-starred restaurant, where the story behind their honey is explained as it is served.

Marketing is very important to increasing revenues and has strengthened the brand. They use Facebook and organise annual workshops for people to experience their 'honey journey', inviting the media, chefs, restaurants, organic shop keepers and universities. The Hin Lad Nai have also developed a community cooperative fund. Profits (30%) are reinvested to develop other brands, build community capacity, support forest management and strengthen their cultural base.

Source: based on an interview with Prasert Trakansuphakon (PASD) and Nutdanai Trakansuphakon (Host Beehive).

- **Indigenous leadership:** community representatives (including women and youth) from biocultural landscapes should participate in the design of the scheme and in its global management.

Costs and financial sustainability

To work, a new global biocultural labelling scheme would need to cover management, monitoring and verification, and marketing costs. For existing certification schemes (such as Fairtrade or the Rainforest Alliance), costs are covered by companies wanting to improve their supply chains. In this case, there are no such companies involved, and it would be unethical to impose these costs on poor indigenous communities (unless the scheme generates sufficient revenues in the longer term).

Instead, management and verification costs could be minimised by embedding the scheme into existing initiatives led by indigenous peoples, such as the International Network of Mountain Indigenous Peoples, which has 11 member countries.¹¹ INMIP holds annual horizontal learning exchanges in different countries, involving visits to indigenous communities. These exchanges would enable the INMIP Secretariat (ANDES), other INMIP members and supporting independent organisations to verify and monitor use of the label. They would also enable indigenous communities to participate in management of the scheme and share experience with biocultural products, branding and marketing.

The scheme could also be expanded to other communities. However, this would incur additional costs. To scale up, funds would need to be raised for INMIP or ANDES to manage the scheme. Alternatively, partnerships could be established with other indigenous organisations/initiatives or with like-minded institutions working with indigenous peoples (eg UNESCO or the Satoyama Initiative) to enable other indigenous communities to use the brand.¹²

Marketing and raising awareness of the brand

Biocultural heritage is a new concept. For consumers to be willing to pay a premium, they need to be aware of what the brand represents. The concept of biocultural heritage will need to be actively promoted in participating countries alongside the biocultural label. 'Story branding' of local biocultural products can help to build awareness of the concept (see Box 3).

Labelling and certification work best for products with established markets and reputations. Marketing biocultural products need not be costly. The Karen have created a strong market and brand through creative use of farmers' markets, online marketing, experiential workshops and engaging with the media. This has built awareness and trust amongst urban consumers, retailers and restaurants. No funds were spent on marketing, but a Karen youth provided marketing support for three years.

Next steps – piloting the scheme

The next step will be for indigenous peoples to define the type of labelling scheme, its objectives, principles and standards. They should decide how the scheme should be managed, and what the biocultural label or graphic should look like. This will be discussed at the next INMIP meeting. Funding will need to be secured so that the label can then be designed and pilot tested by interested communities, to assess the effectiveness and likely costs of the scheme and fine tune its design, before expanding to other communities.

Krystyna Swiderska, Alejandro Argumedo and Graham Dufield

Krystyna Swiderska is a principal researcher in IIED's Natural Resources Group. Alejandro Argumedo is director of programmes at Asociacion ANDES (Peru). Graham Dufield is a professor at the University of Leeds.



Knowledge Products

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges.

INMIP is an international network of indigenous mountain communities which aims to revitalise biocultural heritage for climate adaptation and sustainable mountain development.

The Association for Nature and Sustainable Development (ANDES), is an international NGO involved in poverty alleviation, biodiversity management and strengthening traditional resource rights.

The University of Leeds is one of the largest universities in the UK, and is ranked in the top 100 universities in the QS World University Rankings 2019.

Contact

Krystyna Swiderska
krystyna.swiderska@iied.org

80–86 Gray's Inn Road
London, WC1X 8NH
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399
www.iied.org

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Notes

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