

In brief

Biocultural heritage territories are made up of a mosaic of land uses, deeply linked to knowledge systems embedded in cultural traditions. Born of indigenous peoples' memories and experiences, they embody and protect their world views, spiritual values, customary laws, institutions and stewardship practices. They form the backbone of local economies, and are home to critical genetic resources for food and agriculture. Across the world, years of local adaptation and traditional knowledge have shaped them into highly diverse, productive and resilient management systems that integrate sustainable development with biodiversity conservation.

Why now?

Today's unprecedented erosion of genetic and cultural diversity is making it ever harder for communities across the world to cope with the adverse impacts of climate change and food and water shortages. Biocultural heritage territories, which use integrated landscape management, offer a clear model for adapting to change.

Agrobiodiversity. Gene banks conserve many food crops, but they cannot safeguard them all. Nor can they protect the evolution, gene flow and farmer selection and breeding practices that enhance genetic resources. In comparison, biocultural heritage territories create locally adapted habitats that sustain far more genetically diverse and resilient crop varieties that continuously adapt to change.

Cultural diversity. Cultural and spiritual values often drive communities to conserve crop diversity. Each culture and language has its own 'library' of traditional knowledge for protecting and using biodiversity sustainably, which include many of the agroecological and 'climate-smart' farming practices used today.

Poverty and inequality. Current development models perpetuate infinite growth and over-reliance on markets as a route to wellbeing. But poverty and inequality are better addressed through local ideas of social reciprocity and ecological equilibrium that support local food sovereignty, biological diversity and economies, based on solidarity.

Our ambitions

Through farmer to farmer learning exchanges and participatory action-research, this project aims to scale up the Potato Park, an emblematic biocultural heritage territory in Peru, to:

Conserve agrobiodiversity. Communities will sustain biodiverse food systems and related ecosystem services through collective resource management, efficient use of labour, repatriation of native crops from gene banks, women's empowerment and strong local seed systems.

Promote food sovereignty. By combining locally controlled farming, genetic resource conservation and participatory plant breeding, communities will be able to access resilient landraces and improve their food and nutrition security.

Improve livelihoods. By giving an economic value to the links between cultural and biological diversity and the landscapes themselves, communities will be able to create new revenue streams, such as ecotourism and natural products.

Protect biocultural heritage. By protecting indigenous culture and its intergenerational transmission, and strengthening collective institutions and custodianship, communities will improve their social cohesion, reinvigorate local knowledge and innovation, and strengthen their land and resource rights.



Biocultural heritage territories in action

Many regions of the world are home to communities and landscapes that maintain ecosystems through indigenous and traditional social organisation, and protect the indivisibility and interconnectedness of culture and biodiversity with the territory. The Potato Park in Cusco, Peru is one of the best known examples of a biocultural heritage territory — one that is now providing inspiration and learning for others in China, India and Kenya.

The Potato Park, Cusco, Peru

Brought together by a symbol of shared cultural identity, the potato, six Quechua communities near Cusco registered the Association of Potato Park Communities in 2002. Spanning more than 9,000 hectares, the Potato Park Biocultural Heritage Territory is collectively owned by its 6,000 Quechua inhabitants, who uphold an Andean concept of wellbeing, *sumaq kausay*, and abide by three customary laws: reciprocity, equilibrium and solidarity

Together, these people conserve more than 1,400 native varieties of potato, including 778 that came from the communities themselves, 400 that were repatriated from the International Potato Centre and more than 200 donated by neighbouring communities and Cusco University for safekeeping. The park also protects water ecosystem services for the population of Cusco, important wildlife such as condors and the Andean fox, and a wealth of medicinal plants.

All conservation and development within the park is guided by the indigenous-derived concept of biocultural heritage. This has served to preserve and promote indigenous knowledge and practices — from oral history and artistic expressions to customary laws

and institutions — that effectively combine food production with sustainable development, biodiversity conservation and the protection of key ecosystem services.

The framework of biocultural heritage has also enabled the communities to develop territorial management plans, community biocultural registers and protocols, and a variety of products and services that boost incomes and the capacity to deal with unpredictable change.

For example, ecotourism — including a Culinary Sanctuary linking the landscape to a potato restaurant — is the park's biggest and fastest-growing source of revenue. Other economic collectives include the potato guardians, crafts/textiles, herbal teas and potato-based natural products. All these products and services carry the Potato Park's collective trademark, and 10 per cent of revenues are reinvested in sustaining the park's biocultural heritage. An inter-community agreement on benefit-sharing, based on customary laws, ensures that funds are redistributed fairly — first to those who have contributed most to conserving the biocultural heritage, and then to those in most need, such as widows and orphans.

The Seed Park, Stone Village, Yunnan, Southwest China

Sitting on a rocky mountain overlooking Yangtze river in Lijiang County, the Stone Village is rich in both indigenous culture and biological diversity. It is the spiritual homeland of the Naxi people, and 2,700 members of this ethnic minority still live here. It is also home to about 180 native varieties of key food crops — including Tibetan barley, wheat, rice, maize, potato, millet, buckwheat, sorghum, soybeans, peas, vegetables — alongside a wide range of medicinal plants and wildlife.

The Naxi people have been farming this land for 1,400 years, where seed represents both life and continuity. Seed underpins Naxi landscapes, livelihoods and cultures. But in

recent years, this rich resource has entered decline, posing a direct threat to the Naxi people's ecological and spiritual wellbeing.

In April 2014, three Naxi community leaders visited the Peruvian Potato Park to learn about its governance system and explore opportunities for setting up a similar biocultural heritage territory — in this case, a Seed Park — back home. Inspired by what they saw, the Naxi leaders have decided to register a collective farmers' organisation to maintain and manage the seed park. They are strengthening the customary laws that have guided their communities for generations to secure food and adapt to climatic changes. They are also adopting ecological farming practices, participatory plant breeding and the direct sale of organic food to urban consumers.





The Bean Park, Eastern Himalayas, India

On the other side of the Himalayas, in North Bengal, India, lies another area of exceptional biocultural diversity. The forest landscape on the borders of Sikkim and Bhutan is home to a rich mix of wildlife, flowering plants and food crops. Some 5,000 ethnic people — Lepchas, Limbus, Sherpas, Rais, Bhujels and others — live here. They are ruled by traditional institutions and each community has tales that connect their ancestors with the landscape and show how different cultural traditions and customs have evolved.

The communities have decided to establish a Biocultural Heritage Territory, with the bean as its flagship, and in December 2014, two local leaders will visit the Peruvian Potato Park for a learning exchange. The Indian Bean Park already sustains more than 60 food crops and 200 traditional crop varieties, including 20 varieties of bean. Their deep-rooted relationship with the landscape is reflected in sacred ceremonies around hills, caves, lakes, rivers, fields and forests.



The Cassava Park, Rabai Community, Coastal Kenya

Mijikenda farmers from coastal Kenya will also join the December 2014 learning exchange in the Peruvian Potato Park, with a view to establishing a biocultural heritage territory in their homeland. Their traditional Kaya elder institutions for collective resource management conserve a rich diversity of forest plants and indigenous crops, particularly cassava and maize, but these Kaya forests are increasingly under threat.

The Rabai community has established a Cultural Village in Kaya Mudzi Muvya, which showcases cultural ceremonies, rituals and agrobiodiversity conservation, and generates income from ecotourism. It also allows the community of over 105,000 people to network and exchange traditional crops, which are grown in the village. The visit to the Potato Park is expected to inspire the Rabai community to expand the cultural village into a Cassava Park covering more areas, given the importance of this crop for coping with drought.

Who's who in BCHTs

The biocultural heritage territories initiative is part of the SIFOR project (Smallholder Innovation for Resilience). It is coordinated by Asociacion ANDES (Peru) and IIED.

In country lead organisations:

Peru: Asociacion Andes and the Association of Potato Park Communities

India: Lok Chetna Manch (LCM)

China: Centre for Chinese Agricultural Policy (CCAP)

Kenya: Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI)

Get involved

View our photo film on biocultural heritage territories:
www.iied.org/BCHTphotofilm

Visit our website www.bioculturalheritage.org to look deeper into the concept of biocultural heritage, learn about the tools that can be used to protect it, and get the latest findings of research on biocultural heritage-based innovations for food security in the face of climate change.

Get in touch with a member of our team to find out more about the project:

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Find out more

Collective trademarks and biocultural heritage:

Towards new indications of distinction for indigenous peoples in the Potato Park, Peru

<http://pubs.iied.org/16528IIED>

Community biocultural protocols: Building mechanisms for access and benefit-sharing among the communities of the Potato Park based on Quechua customary norms

<http://pubs.iied.org/G03168>

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Project Materials

Food and agriculture

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P3 Adam Kerby, the Potato Park, Peru
P4 top: Simon Lim, the Seed Park, Southwest China; bottom: Praveen Chettri, the Bean Park, India
P5 left: Praveen Chettri, Lepcha traditional ceremony; right: Stella Mutta, Rabai traditional dance group



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