

# STRONG VOICES, ACTIVE CHOICES

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A Global Strategy for Conservation in Partnership  
with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

The Nature  
Conservancy   
Protecting nature. Preserving life.

Hamesi Hasani a Hadza hunter admires the sunset in the Central Rift Valley of Tanzania. ©Nick Hall

## Local Leaders Global Impact

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Indigenous peoples and local communities are vital leaders in the pursuit of lasting solutions to the world's most pressing conservation and development challenges. Their rights to and relationship with lands and waters, and longstanding knowledge of natural systems and resources, make them critical and inspirational allies for building a healthy and sustainable future.

Twenty-five percent of the world's land is managed by or designated for indigenous peoples and local communities. With their territories harboring more than 17 percent of the world's forest carbon, and much of global biodiversity, indigenous peoples and local communities are among the Earth's most important stewards. Their leadership is key to conservation and sustainable development in their own lands, in the territories surrounding them, and globally.



Growing evidence shows that conservation and development initiatives are more likely to be successful and sustainable if they have the active engagement and leadership of the people with the greatest stake in their outcome, and are guided by their traditional knowledge and values. But, throughout the world, there are many cases of indigenous peoples and local communities being denied the opportunity to participate effectively in the decisions and interventions that impact their lands, waters and livelihoods. They face exclusion and dispossession, and are confronted by development prospects that undermine their cultural and environmental heritage and priorities. This poses a significant threat to people and nature, both locally and globally, that will become only more acute as pressures on land and resources continue to grow.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is working to remedy this power imbalance by creating and supporting opportunities for indigenous peoples and local communities to play a stronger role in natural resource decision-making and management.



Otgonbaatar Tsog, a Mongolian herder (wearing his traditional herdsman dress), spots wildlife at the Carrizo Plain National Monument during a learning exchange trip to California, US, hosted by TNC. ©Mark Godfrey/TNC.

Over a 10-year period from 2005-2015, TNC's partnerships with indigenous peoples and local communities spanned 27 countries, led to the conservation or improved management of more than 235 million acres, and had positive impacts on the well-being of 925,000 people through wealth creation, enhanced security and greater empowerment.

These results were achieved by dozens of local and regional projects working in partnership with indigenous peoples and local communities. Building on this solid foundation, the Conservancy is implementing a Global Strategy for Conservation in Partnership with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities that will amplify, innovate and collaborate to achieve broader, more ambitious outcomes for conservation and sustainable development.



A Lewa herder watches over cattle at Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in Northern Kenya, part of an innovative economic development strategy to increase sustainability-linked market access. ©Ami Vitale

## Stronger Voice, Choice and Action for Healthy Communities, Lands and Waters

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Indigenous peoples and local communities face complex challenges to transforming their visions for conservation and healthy communities into reality due to entrenched power imbalances at local, national and global scales. Strengthening these communities' leadership in environment and development decisions and actions is crucial for forging a vibrant, sustainable future, and is a key objective of TNC.

For the purposes of this program, "indigenous peoples and local communities" refers to peoples and communities that possess a profound relationship with their natural landscapes and depend on them for their cultural, religious,

health and economic needs. TNC recognizes the collective rights of indigenous peoples as recognized under international law.

### OUR GOAL

**The Nature Conservancy will help transform the way land and waters decisions are made by strengthening the voice, choice and action of indigenous peoples and local communities to shape and manage natural territory in ways that improve lives and drive conservation.**

A stronger **voice** leads to the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and local priorities and values in plans and solutions; the ability to exercise and influence **choice**



The Centennial Pole was carved by local Haida carvers to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Hydaburg in Alaska, US. © Erika Nortemann/TNC

builds leadership and engagement; **action** means the opportunity for communities to initiate and participate in the implementation of programs and the management of resources that impact their well-being both now and in the future.

## 2022 Outcomes

**An additional 1 million people have measurably improved well-being and 250 million acres are conserved or in improved management as a result of the stronger voice, choice and action of indigenous peoples and local communities.**

**Indigenous peoples and local communities are driving sustainable solutions for land and waters management through their engagement and partnership with governments, corporations, and other actors in planning and decision-making processes.**



Nyikina Mangala rangers perform an early-season controlled burn in Australia's Kimberley Region, Australia. ©David Hinchley

## **MAIN STRATEGIES**

To achieve these outcomes and build pathways to sustainable development, TNC partners with indigenous peoples, local communities and other organizations at the local and global level to pursue four interdependent strategies:

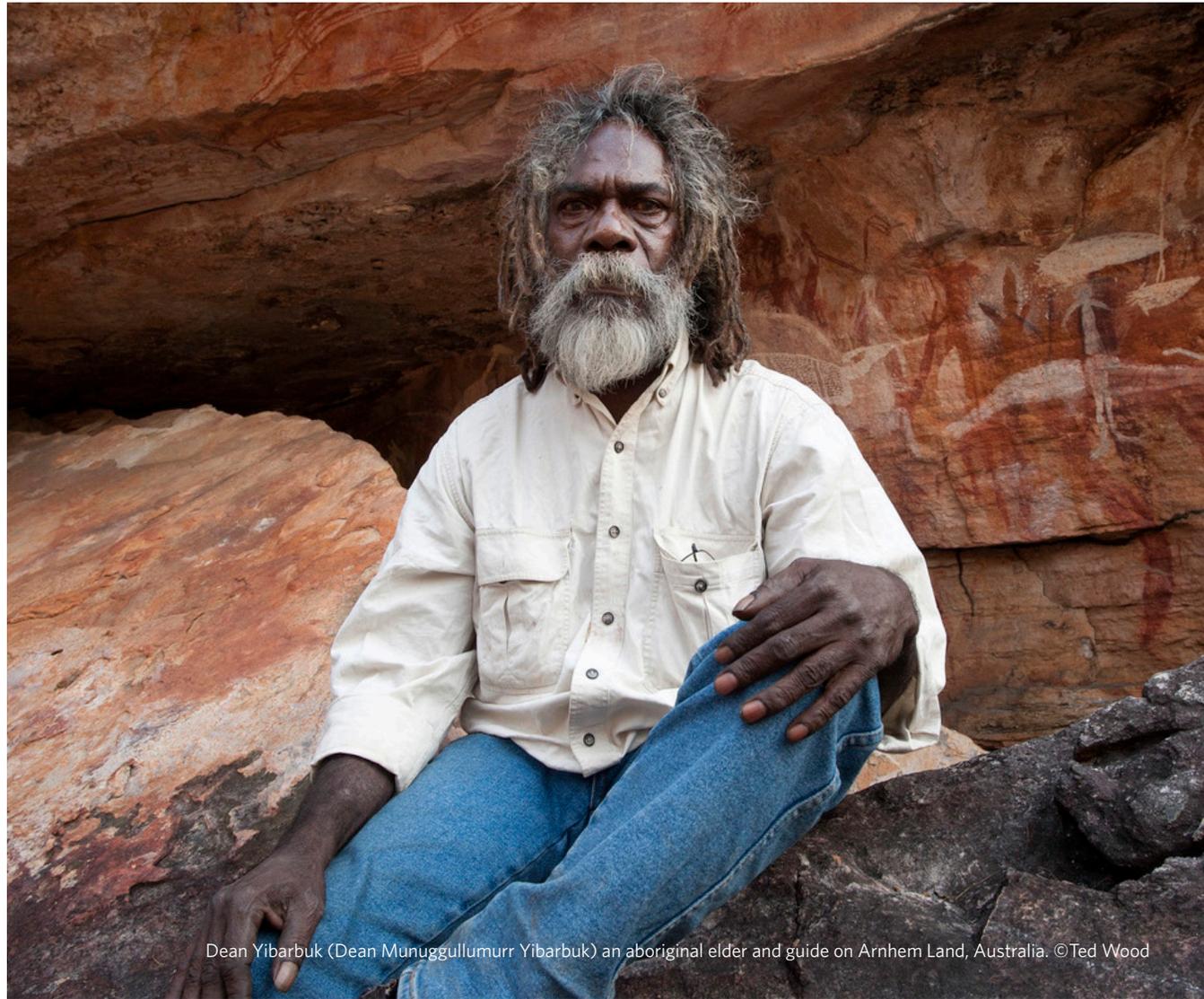
### **SECURING ACCESS TO RESOURCES:**

When indigenous peoples and local communities lack rights to their territories and natural resources, they are unable to assert their interests in conservation and sustainable natural resource use. This strategy focuses on securing resource rights for indigenous peoples and local communities.

### **STRENGTHENING LEADERSHIP:**

In addition to legal rights, indigenous peoples and local communities need to have the capacity and effective institutions to exercise their rights over their territory and natural resources. This strategy focuses on strengthening community capacity and leadership

in the planning and management of natural resources by championing the effective local institutions, leaders and planning processes that are key to exercising authority over territory and resources.



Dean Yibarbuk (Dean Munuggullumurr Yibarbuk) an aboriginal elder and guide on Arnhem Land, Australia. ©Ted Wood

## **SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PLATFORMS:**

When indigenous peoples and local communities are actively engaged in processes to determine how natural resources will be managed, outcomes for conservation and local well-being will be improved. This strategy focuses on facilitating the engagement of communities in the decision-making processes that impact their natural resources.

## **CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WEALTH CREATION:**

Limited economic development opportunities constrain the ability of indigenous peoples and local communities to advance their interests in conservation. This strategy focuses on building sustainable economic development trajectories that align with and reinforce conservation and community values by helping create opportunities based on local sustainable resource management, stewardship, entrepreneurship, payments for ecosystem services, and appropriate development.



North America: Fishing guide and Yurok tribal member, Pergish Carlson, Klamath River, northern California, US. ©Kevin Arnold

## Innovating. Collaborating. Amplifying.

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The Global Strategy is being implemented by a network of TNC centralized and field staff, and partners including indigenous peoples, local communities and other stakeholders. It includes a small number of cross-cutting initiatives and geographically-rooted priority projects in Africa, Asia Pacific, North America and Latin America that have the greatest potential to demonstrate a new generation of conservation driven by the voice, choice and action of indigenous peoples and local communities.

TNC's decades of experience partnering with indigenous peoples and local communities has demonstrated the huge potential for strengthening both conservation and local well-being by changing the distribution of power that in many



Youth from the Wardeken and Djelk lands assist government ecologists with animal traps during a wildlife survey of the indigenous Arnhem Land in Australia's Northern Territory. The Nature Conservancy, working with indigenous groups as well as local government and non-government organizations, is supporting the work of the traditional aboriginal landowners in the preservation and management of their homelands, Australia. ©Ted Wood

cases disadvantages indigenous peoples and local communities in decisions that shape the future of lands and waters.

Learning from these experiences — both positive and negative — and augmented by the growing body of literature on socio-ecological systems and social change, this strategy seeks to scale up the

impact of TNC's current work in partnership with indigenous peoples and local communities.

This will be accomplished by intentionally creating greater connectivity, catalyzing more innovation, creating opportunities for promising solutions to scale and spread, amplifying successes, and achieving lasting conservation

and sustainable development outcomes through more durable and creative collaboration.

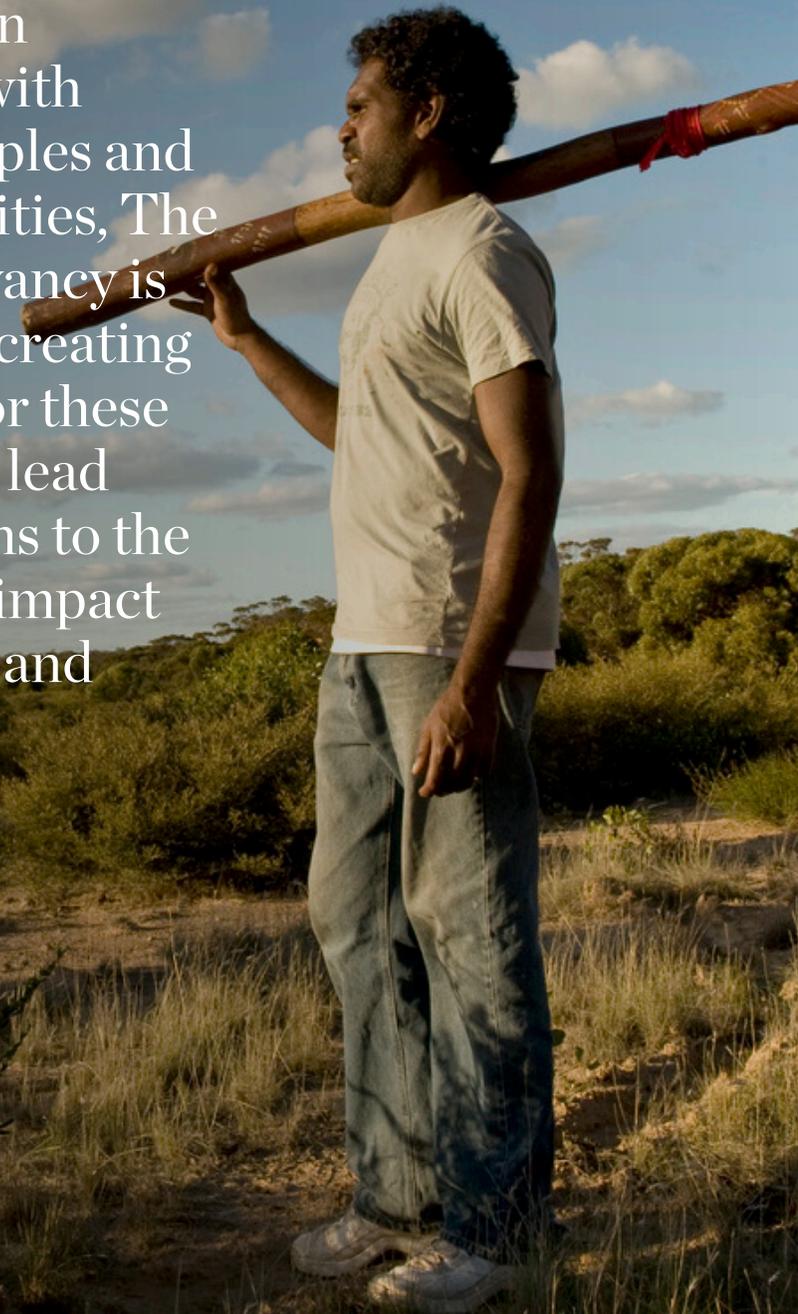


Samuel Brown looks for lions that have been collared at Loisaba Conservancy in Laikipia, northern Kenya, Africa. ©2015 Ami Vitale

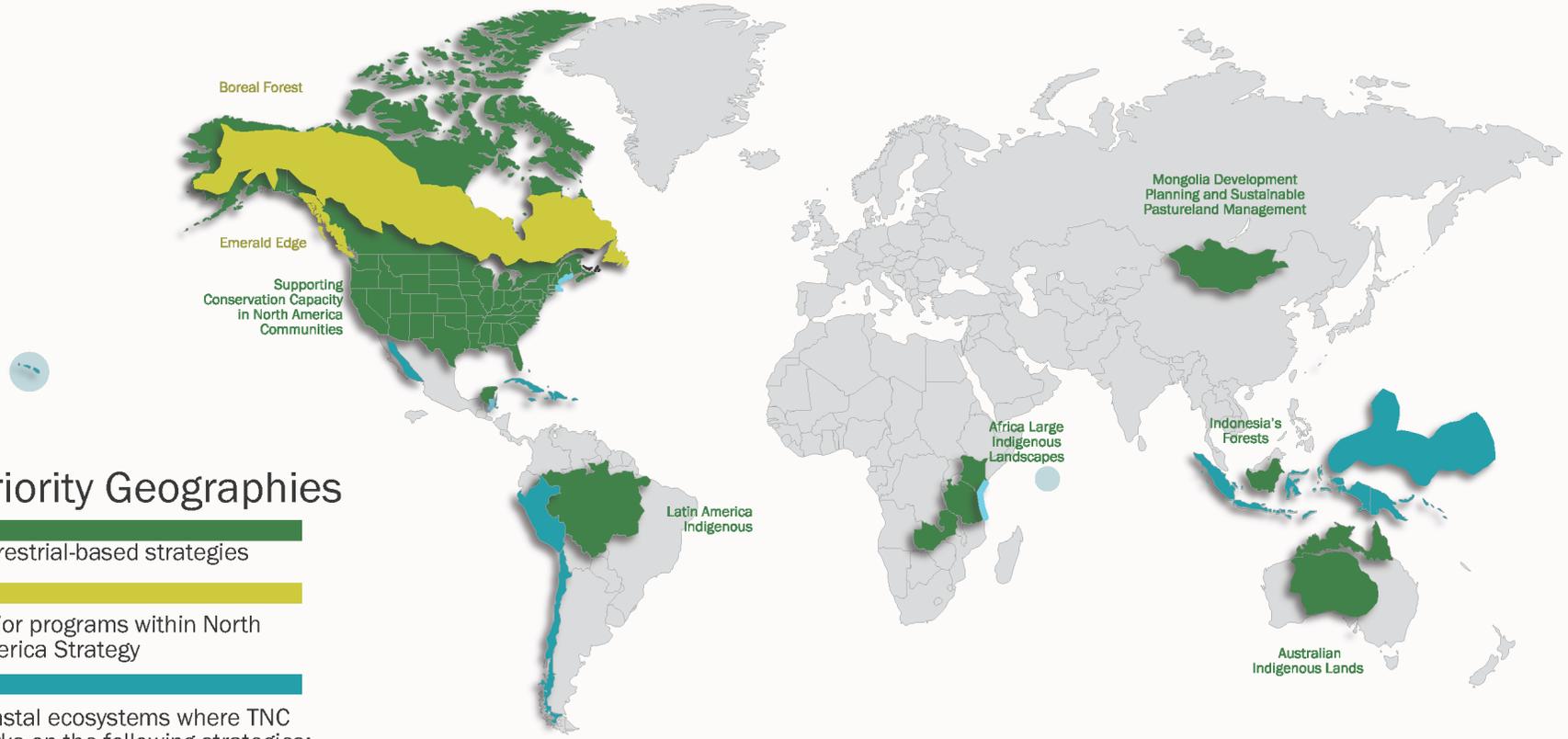
The world is facing unprecedented threats to lands, waters and natural resources from development and climate change. It is more urgent than ever that indigenous peoples and local communities' knowledge and unique natural systems perspectives play a lead role in shaping a future in which nature and people thrive.

With this Strategy for Conservation in Partnership with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, The Nature Conservancy is supporting and creating opportunities for these communities to lead positive solutions to the challenges that impact their territories and well beyond.

Australian Noongar Aboriginal man holding a didgeridoo (The didgeridoo is the unique and ancient instrument of the Australian aborigine) photographed on aboriginal lands in the Gondwana Link project area of Western Australia. ©Ami Vitale



# Priority geographies for the strategy



## Priority Geographies

Terrestrial-based strategies

Major programs within North America Strategy

Coastal ecosystems where TNC works on the following strategies:

- Ocean Protection & Resilience;
- Indo-Pacific Tuna; FishPath;
- Coastal Fisheries; and
- Aquaculture