



# **AKTION AMAZONAS**

## **INDIGENOUS PEOPLES POLICY**

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# ABBREVIATIONS

AKAM	Aktion Amazonas
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CERD	International Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
ICESCR	International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
UN	United Nations
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
WRI	World Resources Institute
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

## 1. Background and concepts

Around the world, there are, according to the World Bank, at least 475 million individuals belonging to approximately 5.000 distinct groups who identify as indigenous. Many of these communities are located in remote regions and are characterized by unique languages, cultures, and social and political structures that often differ significantly from those of mainstream societies. Unfortunately, indigenous peoples frequently face exclusion from broader society and are denied equal rights as citizens. Their survival as distinct peoples is deeply tied to their ability to shape their own future and continue living on their ancestral lands, following their cultural traditions, social practices, and legal systems. Indigenous peoples only make up 6 percent of the global population, but account for about 19 percent of the extreme poor.

The Amazon rainforest is home to more than 1.5 million indigenous people distributed among almost 400 ethnic groups, including, according to some estimates, more than 60 groups largely in isolation and initial contact (some in full isolation). Indigenous communities often reside on lands rich in natural resources. Despite their customary rights to these territories and resources, they frequently encounter threats such as land encroachment, resource exploitation, cultural and legal discrimination, and a lack of recognition for their institutions, which threaten their ability to exercise self-determination.

Indigenous peoples are essential to the conservation of the Amazon rainforest because they possess deep ancestral knowledge, offering an unparalleled understanding of its ecosystems. Their sustainable practices and traditions have preserved biodiversity for centuries, showcasing their effectiveness as stewards of the land. Protecting indigenous rights is vital, as their territories often coincide with the most biodiverse and undisturbed areas of the forest. Moreover, they are frontline defenders against illegal logging, mining, and deforestation, frequently risking their lives to protect the Amazon. Conservation cannot be separated from their protection, as safeguarding their autonomy directly supports the ecological balance of the rainforest.

Indigenous peoples are therefore naturally an integral part of the work of AKAM and its partners. Our goal is to strengthen our and our partners' attention to the rights of local indigenous communities. Our emphasis will be on the full involvement and participation of these communities, on integrating their knowledge and traditional natural resource management systems in the program and on supporting the process of Free, Prior and Informed Consent.

This policy paper addresses the concept of Indigenous Peoples. It should be noted, however, that other relatively similar concepts exist such as “Tribal People” and “Nations”/“First Nations”. These terms often overlap, but their use varies depending on legal frameworks, cultural contexts, and the self-identification of the groups in question. Many communities prefer self-determined names, rejecting externally imposed labels. In policy, advocacy, and development contexts, understanding these differences ensures respectful engagement and appropriate support for the groups concerned.

Indigenous Peoples is a broad, global term often used in international law. It may or may not emphasize sovereignty. Tribal People is a bit more specific to cultural and kinship systems and not always tied to colonization. It generally does not emphasize sovereignty. Nations/First Nations is quite specific to Canada and the U.S: it emphasizes self-determination and has a strong emphasis on sovereignty and treaties. However, In Bolivia, the term "nation" also exists and refers to indigenous groups within the country's plurinational framework, formally recognized in the 2009 Constitution.

Bolivia acknowledges 36 indigenous nations, each with distinct cultural, linguistic, territorial, and historical identities. In the Amazon, the terms Indigenous Peoples and Tribal Peoples are often used interchangeably, but most of the groups are considered Indigenous Peoples due to their strong historical, cultural, and ancestral ties to the land predating colonization.

Moving on with the concept of "Indigenous Peoples", it lacks a universally agreed-upon definition. However, several organizations and scholars have proposed criteria to identify these groups:

- **International Labour Organization (ILO):** According to ILO Convention No. 169, Indigenous peoples are: Descendants of populations inhabiting a country or region at the time of conquest, colonization, or state boundary establishment. Individuals who retain some or all of their social, economic, cultural, and political institutions, irrespective of their legal status. Self-identification as indigenous is considered a fundamental criterion.
- **United Nations (UN):** The UN emphasizes self-identification as a key criterion. Indigenous communities are those with historical continuity to pre-colonial societies, distinct from dominant societal sectors, and determined to preserve their ancestral territories and cultural identity.
- **World Bank:** This institution describes Indigenous Peoples as distinct social and cultural groups with collective ancestral ties to lands and natural resources, which are integral to their identities, cultures, livelihoods, and well-being.

**DANIDA:** DANIDA has addressed Indigenous Peoples in several documents. For instance, in DANIDA's "Strategy for Danish Support to Indigenous Peoples" that was adopted in May 1994 and reviewed in 2012. More recently in Denmark's Development Cooperation Strategy from 2021, titled "The World We Share".

This document adopts a human rights-based approach, emphasizing the rights of indigenous peoples. It seeks to ensure that indigenous communities are included in decision-making processes and have their voices heard, particularly regarding land rights, natural resource management, and biodiversity conservation.

The strategy supports initiatives that recognize and secure indigenous land tenure, integrate indigenous knowledge in climate change adaptation, and promote gender equality within these communities. Denmark collaborates with indigenous peoples and their organizations to build capacity, advocate for their rights, and push for legal reforms that safeguard their cultural and environmental contributions.

AKAM's Indigenous Peoples Policy aligns with DANIDA's approach to indigenous peoples and adheres to international instruments for the rights of indigenous peoples, as outlined in Chapter 2. The overarching organizational principal AKAM is to consistently apply the principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in conservation projects involving indigenous communities. This ensures that development projects are culturally sensitive and respectful of indigenous sovereignty.

## 2. Indigenous peoples and rights

Indigenous peoples often face systemic challenges in having their rights acknowledged due to historical marginalization, discriminatory policies, and lack of political representation. Many states fail to recognize their unique cultural, social, and legal systems, treating indigenous communities as minorities rather than distinct peoples with collective rights.

Land rights are a critical issue, as governments often prioritize resource extraction or development projects over indigenous claims to ancestral lands. Additionally, weak legal frameworks, corruption, and inadequate enforcement further undermine their rights. Social discrimination and economic exclusion compound the problem, leaving many indigenous communities without access to education, healthcare, or political platforms to advocate for their rights.

The most important international instruments for the rights of indigenous peoples include the following:

- **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) – 2007**  
A landmark document that established a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of indigenous peoples. It was approved by the UN General Assembly in 2007. Key Features include the i) Recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination, culture, land, and resources and the ii) Promotion of Free, Prior, and Informed consent (FPIC) regarding activities affecting their lands or livelihoods.
- **International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 – 1989**  
A legally binding international treaty focusing specifically on the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples. Binding only on countries that have ratified it. Key Features include the i) Protection of the rights of indigenous peoples to land and natural resources and ii) The emphasis on their right to consultation and participation in decision-making processes.

Other international instruments that address indigenous peoples' rights include the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

Besides this and related to biodiversity, **The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (1992)** emphasizes the protection of traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and the sustainable use of biodiversity crucial to their livelihoods. It encourages states to respect and preserve this knowledge, highlighting the integral role of indigenous communities in conservation. Similarly,

**The Paris Agreement (2015)** recognizes the vital role indigenous peoples play in climate change mitigation and adaptation. It includes the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform to enhance their participation in climate actions, ensuring their voices are central to global environmental efforts.

**The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted under the CBD in 2022**, further highlights the importance of indigenous leadership in achieving conservation goals.

At **The 2024 United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP16)** in Cali, Colombia, a significant milestone was achieved for Indigenous peoples. Delegates from 196 countries agreed to establish a permanent subsidiary body under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to ensure Indigenous representation in future biodiversity policy decisions. This decision acknowledges the vital role of Indigenous communities in conserving biodiversity and integrates their traditional knowledge into global conservation efforts.

Additionally, a new program of work on Article 8(j) was adopted, further embedding the rights, contributions, and traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples and local communities in the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework.

These developments mark a transformative shift towards inclusive decision-making in biodiversity conservation, recognizing Indigenous peoples as key stakeholders in safeguarding the planet's natural heritage.

### **3. Indigenous Peoples, biodiversity protection and natural resource management**

#### **3.1. Indigenous Knowledge and Conservation**

Indigenous peoples' deep ecological knowledge stems from generations of living closely with their environments. This knowledge is increasingly recognized as an essential asset in global conservation efforts. Several manuals and guidelines emphasize the integration of indigenous perspectives into conservation programs. These resources are created by international organizations, NGOs, and research institutions, focusing on ensuring indigenous peoples' rights, knowledge, and contributions are recognized and respected in conservation efforts. Some key documents include:

- **The Local Biodiversity Outlooks (LBO-2) (2020)**  
Published by the Forest Peoples Programme and other collaborators, it showcases indigenous peoples' contributions to global biodiversity goals and provides practical examples of their involvement in conservation.
- **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) Manual by FAO (2016)**  
This manual explains how to operationalize FPIC in conservation programs, ensuring indigenous peoples' rights are upheld during project implementation.
- **The Conservation Initiative on Human Rights (CIHR) Guidelines (2011)**  
Developed by a coalition of conservation organizations, this document outlines principles for respecting human rights, including those of indigenous peoples, in conservation work.
- **Understanding Community-Based REDD+ by IWGIA (2011)**  
This manual provides insights into integrating indigenous peoples' rights and traditional knowledge into REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and



Forest Degradation) initiatives, ensuring their participation not just as beneficiaries but as active decision-makers.

- **Rights-Based Approaches to Conservation: A Training Manual by IUCN (2009)**  
This training manual highlights how to integrate rights-based approaches, focusing on indigenous and local communities, into conservation planning and practice.
- **Integrating Indigenous and Gender Aspects in Natural Resource Management by WWF (2005)**  
This guide emphasizes the importance of incorporating indigenous perspectives and gender considerations into conservation and natural resource management programs, highlights the intersectionality of indigenous rights, conservation, and gender equity, providing tools for equitable program design.

These resources collectively emphasize collaboration, respect for indigenous knowledge systems, participatory approaches, and the legal frameworks supporting indigenous rights. They serve as a valuable foundation for practitioners seeking to effectively integrate indigenous perspectives into conservation initiatives. Similarly, they form a core value base for AKAM in designing conservation interventions.

### 3.2. Living in Harmony with Nature

Indigenous peoples very often have a harmonious relationship with nature due to their deep cultural, spiritual, and practical connection to their lands and ecosystems. Their traditional knowledge, developed over generations, emphasizes sustainable practices that prioritize balance and resource renewal. Living closely with nature, they depend on its biodiversity for food, medicine, and livelihoods, promoting stewardship rather than exploitation. Many indigenous worldviews regard humans as part of a larger ecological system, encouraging practices that respect and maintain environmental health. Their communal land management often prevents overuse and degradation. Furthermore, rituals, traditions, and stories embed ecological principles, promoting conservation. This sustainable coexistence contrasts with external pressures for resource extraction, highlighting their critical role in preserving global biodiversity and combating climate change.

Indigenous peoples inhabit more than 20% of the Earth's surface, yet their territories overlap with areas that contain approximately 80% of the planet's remaining biodiversity. This extraordinary alignment underscores their pivotal role as custodians of global biodiversity. The Amazon rainforest, a region of unparalleled ecological and cultural

significance, contains 10% of the world's known species, and indigenous peoples play a central role in its stewardship. Their indigenous-managed lands have been shown to have lower deforestation rates than adjacent non-indigenous lands. A 2021 study by the World Resources Institute (WRI) revealed that deforestation rates were 2-3 times lower in legally recognized indigenous territories in the Amazon, emphasizing the importance of securing their land rights to protect both biodiversity and the global climate.

Indigenous peoples rely on forests and natural resources for their daily needs - food, building materials, medicine, and trade - and for spiritual and cultural purposes. Many also engage in sustainable income-generating activities, such as harvesting Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), including for instance Brazil nuts and medicinal plants, which support both conservation and livelihoods.

However, despite their invaluable contributions, indigenous peoples face systemic challenges, including land tenure insecurity, resource extraction pressures, and marginalization. A frequent oversight by development practitioners is equating indigenous peoples with "vulnerable populations" while failing to acknowledge their unique identities, rights, and capacities.

Indigenous communities are distinct, often defined by communal land ownership, cultural and spiritual traditions, and governance systems. Moreover, it is a mistake to treat indigenous communities as homogenous entities. Variations in gender roles, power dynamics, and access to resources must be considered when designing interventions.

For example, women in many Amazonian indigenous groups play a vital role in managing biodiversity but are often excluded from decision-making processes.

Addressing these internal dynamics is key to equitable and effective natural resource management and form a core value base for AKAM in designing conservation interventions. Furthermore, recognizing and promoting sustainable nature- and forest-based practices is essential for achieving biodiversity protection while simultaneously addressing poverty and inequality, making it a cornerstone of AKAM's conservation strategy.

### **3.3 Conflict and Cooperation**

The protection of ecosystems often leads to conflicts, particularly when development or conservation initiatives limit indigenous peoples' access to traditional livelihoods. For example, indigenous groups in the Amazon have frequently faced displacement or restricted access to forests due to large-scale conservation projects or illegal activities such as logging and mining. Conflicts can also arise over unequal benefit distribution among affected communities or between stakeholders. However, conservation and

ecosystem restoration can also serve as platforms for conflict resolution and collaboration. Participatory processes, such as Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), provide a framework for inclusive decision-making.

To mitigate conflicts, it is essential for AKAM to integrate conflict sensitivity into planning and implementation. Tools such as community-based participatory monitoring, capacity-building workshops, and response systems have proven effective in supporting cooperation. Steps such as consultation, dialogue, negotiation, and mediation—sometimes involving independent third parties—can help identify solutions that respect both conservation goals and indigenous rights. Importantly, adaptive management ensures that programs remain responsive to social, political, and environmental changes.

By recognizing indigenous peoples as active stewards of biodiversity and ensuring their inclusion in decision-making processes, AKAM seeks to leverage its development cooperation to achieve sustainable natural resource management that benefits both local communities and global conservation efforts.

## **4. Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)**

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a collective right recognized under international law, enabling indigenous peoples to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lands, territories, resources, and rights. FPIC requires that consent be given voluntarily, obtained before any activity is initiated, and based on a comprehensive understanding of the activity's potential impacts. This principle underscores the right of indigenous communities to decide whether to permit an activity on their customary lands after receiving full and accurate information about its implications.

In the Amazon rainforest, where indigenous communities steward vast and biodiverse ecosystems, FPIC is critical for ensuring that interventions respect their rights and support their roles as environmental guardians. FPIC establishes that any party wishing to engage in activities on customary lands—such as infrastructure projects, conservation efforts, or resource extraction—must negotiate in good faith with the affected communities. This process helps ensure that interventions align with the values, priorities, and consent of indigenous peoples.

Although originally developed in the context of indigenous peoples, FPIC is now widely recognized as a broader social safeguard, protecting the rights of any local community affected by external initiatives.

The application of FPIC is central to AKAM program's interactions with indigenous and local communities in South America. Implementing FPIC is complex, particularly in contexts where indigenous peoples' rights to their ancestral territories are not legally recognized or are actively contested.

For example, in regions like Madre de Dios, Peru, and Pando, Bolivia, indigenous communities face pressures from illegal gold mining, expanding agriculture, deforestation, and land invasions. These challenges make the FPIC process both urgent and challenging, but also an opportunity to strengthen knowledge and capacity related to indigenous peoples' rights.

By embedding FPIC in its programs, AKAM aims to not only respect the rights of indigenous peoples but also enhance their capacity to lead sustainable and equitable development in the Amazon rainforest. Continuous communication, adaptive management, and a commitment to justice are essential for the success of this approach.

Recent developments in FPIC underscore its role in advancing climate justice and recognizing indigenous peoples' contributions to global sustainability.

## **4.1. Five key steps in implementing FPIC adopted by AKAM**

### **1. Training Stakeholders**

Training equips AKAM staff, partners, and other stakeholders with knowledge about relevant legal frameworks, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), ILO Convention 169, and national laws concerning indigenous peoples' rights. Training also builds understanding of how to integrate FPIC into program activities. It emphasizes the unique circumstances of Amazonian communities, including their reliance on ecosystems and traditional knowledge for cultural and physical survival.

### **2. Information Sharing and Consultations**

Indigenous communities in the Amazon receive clear, accurate, and accessible information about the program's goals, impacts, and their rights. This includes discussions of short- and long-term implications and the roles of all stakeholders. Information is shared in culturally appropriate ways, using local languages and formats that are inclusive of all community members, including women and marginalized groups. The consultation phase respects the communities' freedom to conduct internal decision-making and ensures their voices are central to the process.

### **3. Documenting Decisions and Evaluating the Process**

The FPIC process involves transparent documentation of community decisions, including divergent opinions or conflicts that may arise. This ensures that the process is

participatory, inclusive, and free from coercion. If consensus cannot be reached, independent mediators may be involved. Final agreements are signed, ensuring they are fair, voluntary, and mutually understood. Continuous evaluation of the process ensures that decisions remain aligned with community priorities and emerging challenges.

#### **4. Implementation of Agreements**

AKAM and its partners collaborate with communities to co-create program activities that address their needs and priorities. This may involve studies on traditional ecological knowledge, capacity-building initiatives, and advocacy for indigenous rights. Activities are designed to strengthen communities' resilience to external pressures, such as deforestation or illegal mining, while empowering them to maintain control over their territories.

#### **5. Monitoring and Evaluation**

Participatory monitoring is integral to ensuring that FPIC agreements are upheld. Regular reviews allow stakeholders to track progress, address unforeseen challenges, and make necessary adjustments.

### **5. Goals, Results, and Strategic Steps**

AKAM's programmatic approach to biodiversity conservation, sustainable natural resource management, improving local livelihoods, strengthening civil society, and promoting advocacy aligns closely with the needs and aspirations of indigenous communities in the Amazon and adjacent forest ecosystem systems. These communities, often stewards of some of the most biodiverse and ecologically vital regions, face significant challenges such as illegal resource extraction, land invasions, and systemic marginalization.

Our overarching goal is to empower indigenous peoples to control and govern their ancestral territories, including building sustainable forest livelihoods

By doing so, we aim to contribute to poverty reduction, combat discrimination, and strengthen their resilience against external pressures from stakeholders seeking to exploit land and resources within their territories. This approach is based on the assumption that higher household income, combined with increased knowledge of nature conservation, provides both economic and awareness-based incentives for forest protection. It also reduces the community's incentive to engage in unsustainable activities with extractive industries.

AKAM continuously focuses on achievable, measurable outcomes that reflect the priorities and needs of indigenous communities. At the same time AKAM supports the protection of non-contacted people, people in voluntary isolation or those in initial contact by establishing and protecting buffer zones adjacent to PIACI territories.

## 5.1 Objectives

AKAM seeks to ensure that indigenous communities:

- Are recognized by stakeholders, including governments, civil society, and private sector actors, as having distinct customary rights and identities, treated with equal respect and dignity.
- Fully benefit from AKAM and partner supported activities, ensuring equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.
- Are adequately represented in consultations, training, and decision-making processes at local, regional, and national levels.
- Receive capacity-building support for advocacy, networking, organizational development, and technical skills to enhance their self-determination.
- Contribute their traditional knowledge and practices to natural resource management, ensuring culturally grounded and sustainable solutions.
- Have the resources, skills, and platforms needed to advocate effectively for their rights and roles in the stewardship of natural resources.

## 5.2. Strategic Steps

To achieve these objectives, AKAM envisions a series of targeted actions:

### 1. Inclusion in Program Design

Indigenous peoples are explicitly considered in program planning and implementation. Budgets, outputs, and indicators reflect activities tailored to empower and involve indigenous communities.

### 2. Contextualized Baseline Studies

Analytical studies provide detailed insights into indigenous communities' traditional resource management practices and knowledge systems. In the Amazon, such studies could examine how indigenous practices contribute to preserving biodiversity and mitigating climate change impacts.

### **3. Capacity Building and Training**

Training programs equip AKAM staff, partners, and stakeholders with knowledge on Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), indigenous peoples' rights, and the specific social, cultural, and ecological contexts of Amazonian communities.

### **4. Development of Tools and Resources**

Lessons learned from interactions with Amazonian indigenous groups are continuously integrated into program activities, ensuring culturally appropriate and practical guidance for engaging with these communities.

### **5. Implementation of Targeted Activities**

Activities designed to strengthen indigenous communities include advocacy training, support for sustainable livelihoods, and initiatives to integrate traditional ecological knowledge into resource management plans.

### **6. Monitoring and Evaluation**

Indigenous peoples are explicitly included in monitoring and evaluation processes, ensuring that their voices and perspectives inform the assessment of program outcomes. Participatory approaches are employed to promote ownership and accountability.

## **5.3. Expected Results**

The strategic steps outlined above are designed to produce three major outcomes:

#### **1. Targeted Activities:**

A significant number of program activities directly address the needs and priorities of indigenous communities, contributing to tangible improvements in their livelihoods and resilience.

#### **2. Enhanced Stakeholder Capacity:**

Program partners and stakeholders acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to work effectively with FPIC and support indigenous peoples' rights.

#### **3. Empowered Indigenous Communities:**

Indigenous peoples gain a clearer understanding of their rights and the capacity to advocate for their recognition and inclusion in natural resource management and policy-making processes.

By integrating these steps into its work, AKAM aims to encourage equitable partnerships with indigenous communities, particularly in ecologically sensitive and economically

vulnerable regions of the Amazon. This approach not only enhances the sustainability and impact of program activities but also contributes to broader goals of justice, resilience, and environmental stewardship in one of the world's most critical ecosystems.

As a final note, it should be mentioned that while indigenous peoples often face unique historical and systemic challenges, it is also crucial to recognize and address the vulnerabilities of other local groups.

AKAM designs policies and programs based on comprehensive assessments of all affected communities, ensuring no group is inadvertently excluded. Transparent criteria for participation and benefits can help balance equity, while encouraging dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous communities leads to mutual understanding and collaboration, just as capacity-building initiatives includes marginalized non-indigenous groups, promoting shared learning and resource access.

This human-rights-based approach ensures all communities' voices are heard, promoting inclusive and fair development. Regular monitoring and adaptive management will identify and address unintended imbalances.

## 6. Conclusions

AKAM commits itself to share with partners and implement this policy. It will be reviewed and possibly revised based on new lessons learned and experiences from the program.