

October 30, 2015

John H. Knox

UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment

**Re: Input on methods to promote the implementation of human rights obligations relating to the environment**

Dear Professor Knox,

Conservation International (CI) promotes a human rights-based approach to conservation and environmental research. In response to your call for input, we offer the following lessons from our work as suggested methods for improving respect for human rights within environmental initiatives.

**Mainstreaming a human rights-based approach in international agencies**

**Bringing together organizations to advance a common approach**

**1. Shared principles**

In order to mainstream a human rights perspective in international agencies, it is important for large organizations to work together to form a common approach. The Conservation Initiative on Human Rights (CIHR) provides an example of the benefits of these collaborations. The eight CIHR members are Birdlife International, Conservation International, Flora & Fauna International, International Union for Conservation of Nature, The Nature Conservancy, Wetlands International, Wildlife Conservation Society, and World Wide Fund for Nature. Together, the organizations agreed on four common principles to advance the idea that human rights are integral to conservation work.

The four CIHR principles are:

- Respect human rights
- Promote human rights within conservation programs
- Protect the vulnerable
- Encourage good governance

Each of the CIHR organizations follows these principles to guide their internal efforts to improve human rights practices.

**2. Forming a united front**

By establishing internal policies from common principles, the CHIR partner organizations form a united front on human rights issues. This unified stance strengthens the collective

message and ensures that the CIHR organizations hold their government and corporate partners to equally high human rights standards. Because the work of the different CIHR members spans many geographies, diverse partners, and investments large and small, we are able to have a positive influence at many different levels. Having a diverse set of partners whose work spans many geographies and sectors is an essential component of ensuring that human rights are respected across the environmental movement.

### **3. Shared learning**

The CIHR is also an effective model for sharing information and experiences across diverse actors. One example of this is a symposium on climate change and indigenous rights that was held in Peru in January of 2012 that drew together staff from the CIHR organizations as well as indigenous representatives. Another example is a white paper titled “Human Rights in Conservation: Progress Since Durban” that was recently submitted for IUCN’s World Parks Congress in 2014. Because the CIHR is a large and diverse consortium, the paper was able to draw on a wide body of experiences and lessons learned about incorporating human rights into the environmental sector.

## **Creating unique Rights-based Approach (RBA) frameworks**

### **1. RBA frameworks need to be grounded on principles yet maintain flexibility**

Since the creation of the CIHR, the eight organizations have strengthened the understanding of human rights in their internal policies and developed frameworks for upholding these rights in their work. Each of the CIHR organizations has created its own RBA that fits the organizations unique needs while upholding the group’s collective principles. If instruments will be created at the national or international level in order to mainstream human rights into the environmental sector, these instruments should be equally founded on common principles, while having some flexibility in how different actors can implement them. For example, within the CIHR, each of the organizations has a different set of policies and tools for implementation, though there is a great deal of overlap. Similarly, regional or national actors should have the freedom to set their own policies, as long as the entire set of shared principles is addressed.

### **2. Institutional policies as the building blocks of the RBA**

In conjunction with the other CIHR organizations, CI has developed an RBA that respects human rights principles, and has created policies to integrate these principles into all

areas of work. These policies address rights obligations relating to gender, indigenous peoples, involuntary resettlement, partnerships, protection of vulnerable peoples, and research ethics. Staff attend workshops at headquarters and field offices to learn how to incorporate the RBA into all aspect of their work. Additionally, an RBA e-course is in development to provide an easy and cost-effective method of training more global staff, with the understanding that awareness raising is an important component of mainstreaming.

### Building the internal structures to move beyond policies towards behavior changes

#### 1. Institutional Review Committee and research ethics review process

CI created the Institutional Review Committee (IRC) to uphold the Research Ethics Policy of the RBA. The IRC independently reviews all projects involving human subjects to ensure that their welfare, rights, and dignity will be respected. The IRC reviews projects for potential risks to participants and researchers and takes projects involving vulnerable populations into special consideration. Additionally, the IRC ensures that the study will gain consent from subjects, protect personally identifiable information, and resolve any conflicts of interest before research commences.

#### 2. Incorporating RBAs into internal audits of CI's work

CI has been working over the last year to incorporate our human rights policies into the internal audit system. Over the coming years, each program and country office will be assessed on how well they are incorporating the policies and using the available tools. This audit will allow CI to understand how to better ensure that all staff receive the proper trainings and resources to effectively incorporate human rights into their work.

## Efforts to provide technical assistance

### Guidelines and tools

#### 1. FPIC guidelines

In order to help staff understand how the policies should improve the practice of their work, CI created guidelines<sup>1</sup> for the implementation of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) with indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples are a large group of stakeholders and rights holders within the environmental field, and ensuring that their rights, especially their right to give or withhold consent to projects that will affect their lands, livelihoods or territories, are

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.conservation.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/CI\\_FPIC-Guidelines-English.pdf](http://www.conservation.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/CI_FPIC-Guidelines-English.pdf)

respected is an important part of all work that CI conducts. The guidelines present a three-stage FPIC process with additional clarifying steps within each stage. The three stages advise researchers to gather information, collaborate on design and implementation, and ensure accountability.

## **2. Gender guidelines**

Men and women interact with the environment in different ways and therefore have separate knowledge, needs, priorities and interests in environmental conservation. Integrating gender into CI's work is an institutional priority that falls under CI's RBA, and CI's field programs are working to effectively understand and respond to gendered differences within conservation projects. CI has produced guidelines on how to integrate gender throughout all elements of the project cycle. Additionally, CI has internal guidelines<sup>2</sup> on how to conduct a gender analysis, engage men to support gender equitable conservation, and respond to gender-based violence while undertaking conservation projects. In 2015, CI inducted regional gender focal points to provide additional assistance to ensure gender integration throughout CI's field projects.

## **3. ToT climate change manuals**

Community capacity building manuals such as CI's Training of Trainers (ToT) increase public participation in environmental decision-making, planning, and action through increased knowledge of relevant topics. The ToTs provide workshops to regional leaders and give them the climate knowledge and training expertise to conduct their own training sessions at the community level. Currently, there are two ToT courses: "Climate Change and the Role of Forests" and "Adapting to a Changing Climate." Since 2009, thousands of people have attended ToT workshops in over 15 countries in Latin America, Africa, and the Asia-Pacific region. These manuals provide a practical method of broadly improving public participation, as the materials are designed to facilitate the continued dissemination of information.

### **Case studies and lessons**

#### **1. FPIC Case studies**

Members of CI's Indigenous Advisory Group conduct case studies<sup>3</sup> to analyze how FPIC is upheld in conservation projects on indigenous peoples' lands. These case studies helped CI to develop our internal FPIC guidelines. The analyzed topics include indigenous

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.conservation.org/publications/Documents/CI\\_Gender-Integration-Guidelines-EN.pdf](http://www.conservation.org/publications/Documents/CI_Gender-Integration-Guidelines-EN.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> CI case studies are found in featured publications at the bottom of the page: <http://www.conservation.org/FPIC>

consultation processes in Brazil and the roles of indigenous peoples in REDD+ projects in Guatemala and Kenya.

## **2. Gender case studies**

Through Gender Integration Grants, CI supports the capacity of field programs to integrate gender into existing projects and programs. These projects span geographies and environmental sectors. Recent and ongoing activities include projects to better ensure women's participation in coastal fisheries management, understand indigenous women's inputs into conservation projects in Suriname, and to conduct an analysis of gender in conservation agreements in South Africa.

## **3. Sharing Experiences**

CI shares human rights lessons acquired through work so that both staff and the public can benefit from the experiences. The "Gender + Conservation" blog series presents findings on gender roles in projects. For example, a recent post highlighted a project with the Awajún community in Peru and the women's unique traditional knowledge of the plants uses for medicine and food. The blog serves to illustrate how gender consideration is crucial to successful conservation projects by sharing engaging stories and staff's experiences from the field.

### **Capacity building**

#### **1. Indigenous fellows program**

CI's Indigenous Leaders Fellowship Program was established in 2010 in order to increase the opportunity of indigenous peoples to explore solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss. Strong leadership and technical skills are essential elements of land stewardship and community development, and critical to policy engagement. This fellowship provides opportunities for leaders and scholars from indigenous and traditional peoples communities to explore solutions to the impacts of climate change and the threats to ecosystems and biodiversity that are affecting their lands, communities and livelihoods.

It is essential to support indigenous peoples, local communities and their representative organizations in their efforts to build their capacity in these areas; increased capacity fosters the knowledge and skills required to engage in all aspects of ecosystem health and

development, as well as increasing their ability to defend their rights in the face of difficult local circumstances.

## **2. WISE REDD+**

Through the Widening Informed Stakeholder Engagement for REDD+ (WISE REDD+) program, CI and partner organizations provide technical assistance to national governments to implement the stakeholder engagement components of their FCPF Readiness Preparation Proposals and Emissions Reductions Programs, enabling project countries to access funding for REDD+. WISE REDD+ works in Costa Rica, Peru, Suriname, Kenya, and Vanuatu and particularly aims to improve the engagement of indigenous peoples, women, and other marginalized populations in REDD+ processes. Project activities include developing a grievance mechanism for REDD+ in Peru, conducting consultations to engage stakeholders in Strategic Environmental and Social Assessments (SESA) in Kenya, and creating a Project Steering Committee of indigenous and tribal leaders to guide WISE REDD+ in Suriname.

## **Summary**

CI presents this input based on our work supporting the human rights obligations to facilitate public participation in environmental decision making, protect vulnerable populations and respect human rights. Through the CIHR, CI has taken steps to mainstream a human rights approach throughout the member organizations, and influence our partners, including governments and corporations. Building on the principles adopted by the CIHR, CI has developed policies and tools for the protection of rights. Finally, CI's ToT and WISE REDD+ programs are tools that have successfully been implemented in over 15 countries to foster improved public participation. In order to mainstream rights, it is important to consider all of these factors- partnerships with other like-minded organizations and agencies, a common set of principles with adaptable policies and tools, education and outreach to ensure the message is being received, and capacity building that ensures participation of those most vulnerable to having their rights ignored.

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