





# Mapping Indigenous Realities

Data-Driven Approaches to Rights and Self-determination

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Cover photo: Jacob Balzani Lööv

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## Introduction

This special edition of *Debates Indígenas* focuses on the Indigenous Navigator and brings together voices from Kenya, Nepal, Chile, Bangladesh, and Colombia to showcase how Indigenous communities are using data to assert their rights, shape their futures, and strengthen their self-determination.

The Indigenous Navigator is a tool and framework created by and for Indigenous Peoples that enables communities to document their realities, monitor the implementation of their rights, and design projects that reflect their priorities.

Whether as a means for Indigenous Peoples to strengthen governance and development, preserve culture and identity, secure access to basic needs, ensure the self-management of data and knowledge, or bolster advocacy and political activism, data becomes a catalyst for collective empowerment. Each story in this edition illustrates this.

In Kenya, Maasai women in Kajiado County used Indigenous Navigator data to combat food insecurity caused by climate change and migration through a community-led irrigation system. Meanwhile, in Narok County, Maasai and Ogiek communities leveraged data to improve access to water, healthcare, and rights advocacy. In Nepal, a Magar community developed a culturally sensitive survey methodology to assess the erosion of their cultural heritage, leading to community-driven initiatives in language preservation and traditional governance. In Colombia, Misak communities used participatory surveys to recover ancestral lands and reaffirm their cultural identity by integrating their language and worldview into the data collection process, thus exercising autonomy over their knowledge production. Similarly, in Chile, the Txawün of Temuco used self-managed data to strengthen their advocacy and visibility, ensuring their realities are accurately represented and used to support their political and cultural claims. And in Bangladesh, the Santal community documented land dispossession and social exclusion using Indigenous Navigator surveys that revealed systemic gaps in legal protection, education, and gender equality. This has informed advocacy efforts, contributed to census inclusion, and unified community demands for territorial rights and justice.

This edition invites readers to reflect on the transformative potential of community-driven data. Across continents and cultures, these experiences affirm that true empowerment arises when communities define their own futures. The Indigenous Navigator is not just a tool—it is a compass pointing toward justice, dignity, and the right to be heard.



## The Indigenous Navigator: from Data Collection to Self-Determination

*The Indigenous Navigator is an initiative created to support Indigenous Peoples through data. Established more than 10 years ago, the programme has generated information from communities in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The survey process generates awareness of their rights in the communities and acts as a catalyst for collective reflection. This tool therefore provides people and their support organizations with access to systematized data that strengthens their capacity to claim their rights. True empowerment thus does not come through imposing solutions but through providing communities with the tools with which to define their own future.*

■ **Tora Jensen**

When you enter the Indigenous Navigator, the image of a compass appears and, at the top “Data by and for Indigenous Peoples” can be seen. This sentence sums up the essence of the Indigenous Navigator. Launched in 2014, the initiative focuses on empowering Indigenous Peoples through data and seeks to respond to their historical underrepresentation in statistics.

One key component of the Indigenous Navigator is its online portal, which offers tools for collecting and analysing data. True to its motto, Indigenous Peoples and their organizations have played a central role in its development. The Indigenous Navigator is firmly based on the principle that the data collected should serve the causes of Indigenous Peoples and assist them in asserting their rights.

Indigenous communities around the world are currently actively participating in the collection and analysis of information on the extent of recognition of their collective rights, using the tools provided by the Indigenous Navigator.

The results are then used to hold States and other duty bearers to account for their commitments, as well as to highlight the gaps between the promises enshrined in international human rights instruments and the realities on the ground. In addition, the Indigenous Navigator supports Indigenous Peoples to exercise their right to self-determination by providing the necessary basis for implementing self-defined projects that are aligned with their aspirations and priorities.

## Mapping Indigenous Rights through Surveys

Surveys are one of the main tools of the Indigenous Navigator and are available on its portal. More specifically, the initiative offers two types of survey: a national-level and a community-level one. Both serve to monitor the implementation of Indigenous Peoples' civil, political, economic and cultural rights and fundamental freedoms as agreed upon in international conventions and instruments: the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), ILO Convention 169, the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples

(WCIP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

While the national survey assesses the extent to which a country's laws and policies align with these commitments, the community survey is designed to record the actual level of implementation of Indigenous rights on the ground, as reported by communities. In addition, three new national and community surveys, focusing on biodiversity, climate change, and due diligence in human and environmental rights, are being developed and are expected to be implemented in 2025 and 2026.



■ *Training workshop in Cameroon. The initiative offers a highly relevant space in which to train community members to learn to collect data efficiently. Photo: FPP / Adrienne Surprenant*



Mauricio Martínez is the coordinator of the Colombian organization Arte+, which facilitated community surveys in the Misak Ovejas Kaltun Chak Tarau and Guambía Indigenous Reserve territories, both in the department of Cauca. Martínez explains that, after presenting the Indigenous Navigator, its methodology and objectives to the community authorities, the community embarked on an internal discussion and subsequently expressed an interest in participating in the initiative. Misak representatives were then trained to facilitate

the survey process in the communities through two-day workshops.

After review by Arte+ and the Misak team, the results of the surveys were presented once more, in the form of a report, to the Misak representatives. Once final comments and observations had been incorporated, the information was uploaded to the Indigenous Navigator portal. These surveys were then integrated into the platform's datasets, which offers tools that enable data visualization, analysis and comparison.



■ Responding to a community survey. Photo: Pablo Lasansky

### A Partnership to Improve Global Data

In principle, anyone can apply for an account on the Indigenous Navigator portal, complete surveys, submit data and use its analysis tools. However, only reliable applications for the purpose of uploading surveys are approved. In most cases, the data on the portal have been submitted by organizations, such as Arte+, that receive direct support from one of the members of the initiative's coordinating consortium.

The consortium currently comprises the Asia Indigenous Peoples' Pact (AIPP), the Forest Peoples' Programme (FPP), the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), the Tebtebba Foundation – Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR). The Indigenous Navigator initiative receives funding from the European Commission, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).

To date, the Indigenous Navigator tools have been used to collect data in 30 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Arctic, with both national and community surveys conducted in most of them. By comparing the results, it is possible to identify implementation gaps between the Indigenous rights that a State has undertaken to respect and the actual effectiveness with which they are fulfilled. As comparable data is collected across countries and regions, the global situation of Indigenous Peoples can be documented.

### A Tool for Affirming Identity and Rights

The Indigenous Navigator is an initiative created to support Indigenous Peoples through data. Didier Chirimuscay, a Misak community leader who served as coordinator of the surveys conducted in the Ovejas Kaltun Chak Tarau territory, highlights how the initiative reaffirms the identity of his people: "The Indigenous Navigator shows that we are here, that we exist with our own realities, our own dynamics and our own challenges."

In the municipality of Caldono, where the Misak people represent less than 6 percent of the population, their needs are often ignored. "Basically, we don't exist on the map for the institutions," explains Chirimuscay. The leader sees the initiative as a tool to counteract this invisibility, since this creates a way of including them: their presence is recorded in documents and, through the information generated, the Misak people now have greater possibilities of influencing other actors and larger institutions.

James Twala, programme coordinator for Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA) in Narok County, Kenya, explains that the initiative helps communities "speak the language that government understands". Twala notes that, thanks to the initiative, ILEPA has been able to systematically report on the situation and problems facing the Indigenous communities with which they work. This had a direct impact on access to justice in one Maa community: the documentation generated was used as evidence in a court case on the sale of community land, a dispute they eventually won.



As the case of ILEPA demonstrates, the Indigenous Navigator initiative provides peoples and their support organizations with access to systematized data that strengthens their capacity to claim their rights. These data document the extent to which Indigenous rights are being implemented and can be used in a variety of contexts, from negotiations with local authorities to interactions with UN agencies.

### From Reflection to Action

The Indigenous Navigator survey process generates awareness of their rights among Indigenous communities and acts as a significant catalyst for reflection. Alfredo Vitery, director of the Sacha Supai Quichua Biotechnology Institute (IQBSS), an Indigenous organization that supports the Kichwa people of Pastaza, in the Ecuadorian Amazon, stresses that the survey workshops help communities better understand their constitutional and international rights.

The IQBSS facilitated surveys with the Kiwcha Kawsak Sacha and Kiwcha Rio Anzu peoples. In these territories, the results revealed critical gaps between recognized rights and their implementation. “It took us years to achieve such recognition and yet most of these rights are on paper only,” says Vitery. The rights of the Kawsak Sacha people are frequently violated, as they are rarely adequately consulted and are excluded from public programmes and projects that directly affect their territories.

The analysis process is not necessarily the final step for the communities involved in data collection. The initiative offers a small grant fund, which allows the consortium organizations to redistribute resources from the European Commission to community-driven projects such as a continuation of the survey process. These projects are designed in collaboration with the organizations that facilitated the surveys.

In follow-up workshops, community representatives use the survey findings to identify the most pressing issues affecting their communities and develop tailored solutions. These solutions are then transformed into project proposals for small grants. As of December 2024, the review committee had approved 98 such proposals. In addition, more than 200 Indigenous communities from across Asia, Africa and the Americas had participated in workshops to develop grant projects.

### Supporting the Right to Self-Determination

Once the surveys had been completed, the Kichwa Kawsak Sacha implemented a project with small grant funding. Based on an analysis of the survey process, they identified that the autonomous management of their territory was essential to the exercise of their rights. To advance this objective, the communities considered it necessary to develop an autonomous statute for their territory that would incorporate their rights into their own territorial agenda, embodied in a legal instrument for internal governance. They therefore

focused the grant proposal on achieving this purpose.

Vitery thus emphasizes: “The communities themselves, families, women, youth, elders, wise men and women and leaders are the main actors promoting their agenda for autonomy, their vision of life, their realities, their initiatives”. In this way, the project is marking a step towards achieving the Kichwa people’s vision of autonomy, based on their ancestral heritage. Their leader emphasizes the importance of the small grants fund in supporting the self-determined development of the Kichwa people, guided entirely by their own priorities and visions rather than external decisions.

The small grants initiative demonstrates the power of supporting Indigenous Peoples to design and implement their own projects, in line with their own priorities. This approach differs from other forms of fund redistribution whereby external actors define the objectives. Quite the contrary, it recognizes that supporting Indigenous Peoples means supporting their rights to self-government and self-determination.

As the world grapples with the legacies of colonialism, the Indigenous Navigator offers a transformative model for collaboration. It shows that true empowerment does not come through imposing solutions but through equipping communities with the tools to define their own future.

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## From Data to Action: Community-Based Irrigation for Food Security among Maasai Women in Kenya

*Climate insecurity and drought are forcing Maasai men to migrate with their livestock, leaving women and their children alone. After conducting surveys, the Oltepesi community identified this problem and received support from the Indigenous Navigator to create an irrigation system through which to grow fruit and vegetables. As a result, the women are now producing food for the household and selling the surplus, which gives them economic stability. It allows them to send their children to school, laying the foundation for breaking the cycle of poverty.*

■ **Samante Anne**

Maasai Indigenous communities in Kajiado County are monitoring the implementation of their rights. Based on information gathered in a community data collection process, the Oltepesi community is promoting its autonomous development through the creation of an irrigation project. This initiative seeks to counteract the destructive effects of climate change, which have hit the community's food security hard. As a result, the project is fostering economic stability and improving educational opportunities for girls.

In recent years, Mainyoto Pastoralists Integrated Development Organization (MPI-DO) has facilitated data collection through surveys in Maasai communities in Kajiado County. MPIDO is an Indigenous organization based in Kenya that works with communities and other stakeholders to promote the rights of Indigenous Peoples and marginalized

communities. The data collection process took place within the framework of the Indigenous Navigator, an initiative that seeks to empower Indigenous Peoples by systematically monitoring the level of recognition and implementation of their rights.

### Building Trust through Community Data Collection

The data collection process began by identifying young people from the community itself, who were then trained by MPIDO as interviewers. During the training, they became familiar with the questionnaires and they shared strategies for approaching their communities. To facilitate the process, MPIDO translated the surveys into the Maa language, thus enabling the communities to better understand the consultation and provide more accurate responses. This was noted by Ole

Sirere, a community elder who valued the use of his own language: “Nena taa taata enkilikwanare ang” (“Now these are our questions, we can make them our own”).

The Indigenous Navigator community survey included all sectors: women, elders, youth and leaders. Information was collected through focus groups (women and youth), key informant interviews (opinion leaders, traditional and administrative chiefs) and community assemblies with representatives from different villages. The communities had already participated in many studies and so they were initially suspicious and spoke of “research fatigue”, feeling overburdened by

external questionnaires. However, they enthusiastically accepted the project because of its different nature: the involvement of local interviewers and the possibility of implementing small community projects.

Following analysis, the results were returned to the community for validation. The data revealed serious development gaps, human rights violations and clear political marginalization. Among the main shortcomings were a lack of community participation in development initiatives, the absence of basic services such as schools, health centres and drinking water, and land dispossession due to insecurity of tenure.



■ A Maasai woman next to her maize plantation. Photo: James Ntagusa



## Food Insecurity in the Face of Climate Change

The Indigenous Navigator Initiative offers small grants for communities to develop solutions to the most pressing problems identified in the surveys. One such initiative was the Oltepesi Women's Irrigation Project, implemented by MPIDO. Based on the data and community validation, food insecurity was determined to be the highest priority. The irrigation project was thus developed as a direct response to this need, reflecting a community-driven approach.

The Maasai community of Oltepesi lies 70 kilometres west of Nairobi, in the heart of the Great Rift Valley, and has a population of approximately 36,000. The arid landscape, with dormant volcanic formations, ashy soils and intermittent savannahs, is conducive to cattle ranching. Rising temperatures and erratic rainfall have, however, made this area extremely vulnerable to drought and famine, clear indicators of the climate crisis.

Recurrent droughts have been reducing the pastures and water sources, forcing men to migrate with their livestock. In the most severe cases, they may now migrate for nine months of the year. This leaves women and children without food and basic resources, forcing women to struggle to support their families. The project thus sought to support women in combatting food insecurity at the household level.

## Food Security and Opportunities for Women

Although the Oltepesi community already

had wells drilled thanks to a previous MPIDO project, the women did not have the means to utilize these beyond domestic consumption. During the surveys, they proposed incorporating simple irrigation systems that would channel water to their gardens, allowing them to grow food for their own consumption plus a surplus to sell. They would thus be able to feed their children, especially in dry periods when milk is scarce, and would have an alternative source of livelihood to livestock.

MPIDO established a partnership with Kajiado County Government and requested technical assistance from the Kenyan Ministry of Agriculture before starting the project. Agricultural experts conducted field visits to the community and provided guidance on proper irrigation methods, crop selection and sustainable agricultural practices adapted to the region. Analysis confirmed that the soil and climatic conditions were suitable for growing fruit and vegetables such as kale, tomatoes, squash, onions, cabbage and watermelon.

Funded by a small grant from the Indigenous Navigator, the project was successfully implemented and is now in full production. The women are growing food for the household and selling the surplus, achieving economic stability. This allows them to send their children to school and ensure they remain there, laying the groundwork for breaking the cycle of poverty. The change is especially noticeable for girls, who had not previously been a priority due to cultural barriers. Since Maasai culture dictates that mothers must provide for the basic needs of their daughters, as family incomes improve, more girls are now able to go to school.

In addition, women, who used to be burdened with unpaid domestic work (from caring for children and sick animals to collecting water and firewood) now have an income that allows them to hire help from within the community. They thus have more time for themselves and for other productive activities. With the profits they have made, they hope to expand the project and even replicate it in other villages.

### Self-Determination and Advocacy through the Indigenous Navigator

Since its creation in 2000, MPIDO has implemented numerous projects. However, the Indigenous Navigator Initiative is particularly noteworthy for two reasons. The first is that this process offered Indigenous Peoples the opportunity to generate information for their own benefit. The interviewees were selected by the communities and trained by the Indigenous organizations. As Nayiari Oyie, an Indigenous woman from Oltepesi noted, “I am deeply moved to see our own children interviewing us because they belong here and really understand our problems.”

The second distinctive feature is that the Indigenous Navigator enabled communities to identify and prioritize their own problems, supporting them with small projects that respond to those needs. This has made a big difference because, often when data collected,

it is not fed back to the communities, leaving them feeling used. Naboru Enole Kooshoi says: “We are very grateful because we have had surveys done in the past but, once the surveyors leave, we never see them again and we are left here with all our problems unresolved.”

Beyond the projects financed, the information generated has become a key advocacy tool, feeding into development plans at the local level. Data from the Indigenous Navigator has already been incorporated into the county’s Integrated Development Plans, ensuring that some of the gaps identified are addressed with public funds. In this way, communities have information that enables them to demand accountability from the local and national authorities.

In short, the Indigenous Navigator Initiative empowers Indigenous communities to collect and use their own data on issues crucial to their rights and self-determined development. Information generated at the community level is vital for making appropriate decisions, developing policies, strengthening social participation and guiding governance and development strategies determined by Indigenous Peoples themselves.

■ *Samante Anne is an Indigenous woman from the Maasai community in southern Kenya. She is currently serving as Head of Programmes, Strategy and Partnerships at the Mainyoito Pastoralists Integrated Development Organization (MPIDO). She is also the National Coordinator of the National Steering Committee of Indigenous Peoples on Climate Change.*



## Empowerment through Data: a Nepalese Community's Path to Self-Determination

*With support from the Indigenous Navigator Initiative, the Magar community of Dugeswor were able to develop a community survey methodology that was respectful of their people's culture. Once the data had been consolidated, the survey revealed a worrying situation for the Magar communities: a loss of their cultural heritage. As a result, a project was implemented, run by the community members themselves and aimed at promoting their self-determination through collective empowerment. Data collection thus became a path to self-determination.*

■ **Trijinad Chakma**

The Indigenous Navigator Initiative has proved to be a robust tool for collecting disaggregated data on the situation of Indigenous Peoples in Nepal. This survey process, led by organizations and communities, seeks to systematically monitor the recognition and implementation of Indigenous rights. Between its first pilot test in 2014-2015 and the end of 2024, a total of 20 surveys had been conducted in various Indigenous communities. Of these, 12 have already been published, providing a valuable base of information on the status of Indigenous rights implementation in the country.

This article focuses on the Magar community of Dugeswor and the culturally-sensitive methodology applied to conduct the community surveys. This process led to the creation of a project defined and managed by the community itself, aimed at promoting its self-determined development through collective

empowerment. The project actively works to preserve their language and culture while revitalizing their traditional institutions of self-governance.

### Data Collection in the Magar Communities

Numbering more than 2 million people, almost 7 percent of Nepal's total population, the Magar Indigenous People are one of the largest in Nepal. The community survey was conducted in the community of Dugeswor Municipality, Dailekh District (western Nepal), in close collaboration with the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) – Dailekh and the Lawyers Association for the Human Rights of Nepal's Indigenous Peoples (LAHURNIP).

Founded in 1995 by Indigenous lawyers, LAHURNIP works for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous Peo-

ples in Nepal. It undertakes to protect, promote and defend their rights, promoting the effective implementation of ILO Convention 169, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and other international human rights instruments. To this end, it employs various strategies such as the tools of the Indigenous Navigator Initiative, which enable the recognition and fulfilment of these rights to be monitored.

For its part, NEFIN is an autonomous and representative organization of Nepal's Indige-

nous Peoples, created in 1991. It has district branches throughout the country, including NEFIN-Dailekh, which supports the district's Indigenous Peoples to promote and defend their rights. LAHURNIP supports NEFIN-Dailekh's interest in monitoring the situation of Indigenous Peoples at the community level. The Indigenous Navigator Initiative aligned itself with this agenda, resulting in community surveys in two Magar communities in the district.



■ The Magar community. Photo: Manoj Aathpahariya



To kick off the data collection, LAHURNIP organized a three-day national workshop for communities interested in generating their own data. Participants included community leaders, local government representatives and NEFIN-Dailekh delegates. The objectives were to establish a common understanding of Indigenous rights and development, and to provide attendees with the necessary skills for collecting data according to the Indigenous Navigator methodology.

### Community Participation in Implementing the Survey

During the workshop, thematic experts and a representative from the National Human Rights Commission trained participants in the 12 areas of Indigenous rights covered by the questionnaires. The training included concepts of human rights and fundamental freedoms, women's rights and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition, officials from the National Statistics Office guided the attendees on the use and quality of data when developing public policies.

Following the workshop, NEFIN-Dailekh presented a plan for conducting a survey in two Magar communities. Based on previous experiences, the focus group technique was chosen as the method. LAHURNIP recommended including between 15 and 25 diverse participants in each group, ensuring at least 33 percent female representation. During the focus groups, participants received guidance on the rights of Indigenous Peoples as recognized in the UNDRIP and an introduction to

the SDGs. Community members thus became aware of their rights and learned how to monitor their compliance.

Data collection required two days of continuous work with the participants, making it difficult to retain the same people across both days. In addition, some questions were too technical for community members. To ensure active participation, different tools were used, including discussions supported by a review of the literature, which helped stimulate dialogue and data production. For example, simple questions were asked about birth certificates (a topic of interest to women), citizenship documents, land titles and traditional occupations.

It should be noted that implementing community surveys is not a linear process: it requires in-depth knowledge of the communities involved, an understanding of the context and sensitivity to the daily lives of the participants. In turn, the responses were compared with other available data sources and the results consolidated into a draft. The next step was to hold a workshop with the community to cross-check the information, and then the survey was sent to a LAHURNIP representative for review. Finally, the verified data was uploaded and published on the Indigenous Navigator portal.

### Reviving Heritage and Self-Governance through Community Action

The survey revealed a worrying situation for the Magar communities: a loss of their cultural heritage. "The survey reached 1,797 peo-

ple in our community and revealed alarming findings. We discovered that our cultural and linguistic heritage, along with our customary institutions, are being lost. Centuries of colonial domination and state policies of assimilation have eroded our language, traditions and Indigenous identity. In response, we decided to start working to protect and promote our identity, language and cultural heritage,” explained local coordinator Rama Kumari Thapa.

Indigenous communities that have conducted surveys with the Indigenous Navigator

can use the results to advocate for their rights locally and to design solutions to identified issues, drawing on an Indigenous Navigator small grants fund. LAHURNIP is currently supporting three communities in this process, including the Magar community in Duges-hwor Municipality. In a proposal writing workshop organized by LAHURNIP, Magar participants used the survey data to identify the key challenges facing their community.



■ An important part of the data collection was the training of the communities concerned. Photo: Manoj Aathpahariya



The Magar community decided that the best way to develop a proposal and monitor the implementation of activities was to form a Project Implementation Committee, composed of community members. This committee set out the objectives and activities to be carried out and, with the support of LAHURNIP, prepared a proposal for one year of financial support, in line with the Indigenous Navigator's requirements.

Based on the discussion of the community survey results and the findings of concern, the community decided that the grant should focus on promoting their self-determined development through collective empowerment by re-establishing the institutions of self-governance, while also preserving their language and culture.

### Hope for the Community

Appointed to manage the implementation of one of these small grant-funded projects, Magar leader Thapa Magar expressed her hope for the process: "As an Indigenous woman activist in Dailekh District, I have always felt deeply connected to the struggles of my people. For years, I witnessed the gradual loss of our cultural and linguistic heritage and identity. But now things are changing for the better thanks to the Indigenous Navigator community project."

As part of this initiative, the Magar community in Oiru village has succeeded in re-establishing the Bheja, their traditional self-governance institution. Although these institutions existed in other Magar areas, they had long

since disappeared from Dungeshwor. The project not only raised awareness in the community of the rights of Indigenous Peoples but also provided them with tools and opportunities to dialogue with the local government and advocate for their own development agenda.

As part of the project, a series of community engagement activities were carried out to connect the Magar community in the rural municipality of Dungeshwor with the local authorities. As a result, in 2024, the local government allocated funds to protect Magar cultural heritage (including traditional dances, songs and costumes) and support activities aimed at preserving their language.

### Data as a Pathway to Self-Determination and Cultural Revival

The experience of the Magar community in Dungeshwor demonstrates how member-led data collection, based on culturally-sensitive methodologies and guided by Indigenous rights frameworks, can effectively assess and document the challenges they are facing, such as a loss of cultural heritage. Through structured community surveys, they were able to generate valuable information that not only made their members aware of their rights but also produced reliable disaggregated data to support their advocacy work.

Crucially, the data collected became the basis for designing and implementing concrete, community-led initiatives to preserve their language, culture and governance systems. As a result, the community succeeded in es-

establishing the Nepal Magar Sang at the local government level, which is now active and functioning independently. A Magar Women's Organization of Nepal was also formed to promote their rights. Both organizations have implemented activities linked to ILO Convention 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, with a strong emphasis on Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and land, territory and resource rights.

Alongside this, efforts to revive and promote the Magar mother tongue have secured funding from the local government. Most significantly, the project has supported the revival of the traditional institution known as the Bheja, marking a fundamental step towards the re-establishment of traditional governance. This has undoubtedly been a significant step in exercising their right to self-determination and regaining control over their own future.

■ *Manoj Aathpahariya belongs to the Aathpahariya Indigenous community. He holds a Master of Law degree from Nepal Law Campus, as well as a Master of Arts and a Master of Public Administration from Tribhuvan University. He has nine years of experience practising law and has served as the focal point for the Indigenous Navigator with LAHURNIP.*

*Rama Kumari Thapa is the local coordinator of the Small Grant Project and belongs to the Magar community. She has extensive experience in social mobilization and has worked with children. In addition, she specializes in issues such as good governance, gender violence and community-based psychosocial care.*





of Mapuche territory that had previously been recognized through Merced Titles (a concept that emerged in the late 19th century as a form of State recognition of Mapuche land after the “pacification” of Araucanía). Today, the process of urban expansion continues apace, together with the debate over how much more cities can grow, and how our ancestral territory and its common assets can be protected.

### Nutxam, Txawün and Community Surveys

It was against this backdrop that the Indigenous Navigator initiative, a data platform developed by and for the world’s Indigenous Peoples, was implemented for the first time in Chile in 2024 with the Mapuche people. The project was implemented in the Araucanía Region, with the 25 communities that form part of the Txawün of Temuco Commune. This initiative was conducted with the support of the Observatorio Ciudadano, a Chilean civil society organization that promotes, documents and defends human rights.

The community surveys were thus implemented from the start of 2024, through *nutxam* and *txawün* (Mapuche forms of dialogue that gather contributions from all participants), during extensive days of reflection and collective debate on the situation of their rights and their implementation by the State. Community representatives participated in these meetings: women and men of different ages, community authorities, and ancestral authorities such as the *lonko* (Mapuche authority) and the *machi* (spiritual authority). The chil-

dren also accompanied the entire process and a professional from the communities themselves facilitated the conversation and application of the instrument, as well as the systematization of the experience.

The results of the survey were clear in relation to the effects the communities are now suffering as a result of urban sprawl. Not only is the territory being lost but also the knowledge associated with its management and its spaces of cultural and spiritual significance, all of which goes hand in hand with a decline in the use of *Mapuzugun* (the Mapuche language). The process of urban expansion has had an extensive impact on the good living and well-being of the communities, even including repression of those leaders who question the neoliberal economic model, a model that fails to take Mapuche ontologies of self-determined development into account.

The need to strengthen Mapuche food sovereignty and recover native seeds for good living and the protection of biocultural heritage was also raised. The communities reported a decline in the consumption of traditional Mapuche foods, particularly due to the loss of land and territory on which to grow them. They also felt the loss of native seeds was an issue due to the introduction of foreign or transgenic seeds and the use of pesticides. In the long run, these practices result in a loss of Mapuche knowledge associated with the care and protection of native seeds and diseases related to malnutrition, mainly, in older adults.





■ *The Wiñoy Txipantu. Photo: Liukura Mariman*

### The Survey as a Tool for Making Land Loss more Visible

Based on the results of the community survey, the Txawün communities of Temuco have reflected on the use of different strategies, both internal and external, by which to make progress towards guaranteeing their rights. The main one of these has been advocacy with the local, regional and national authorities. The Txawün communities decided to take the data collected in the survey to the Land Roundtable that they hold with the National Indigenous Development Corporation (CONADI). In this institutional space, the communities seek solutions to and compensation for land lost due to private, corporate, and State interference in their recognized Merced titled land.

This advocacy work could be seen during the Wiñoy Txipantu event, where CONADI awar-

ded a Resolution of Applicability to the Pedro Curiqueo community: the ngen ruka (owner) community who were claiming the land where the activity was taking place. This document enshrines the State's official recognition of the loss of land. It determines whether a piece of land can be acquired by an Indigenous community and is a crucial step in initiating the process of land purchase by Indigenous communities. This process was supported by Senator Francisco Huenchumilla, who also participated in the activity.

Of the approximately 30 communities that today make up the Txawün, at least half already enjoy recognition of their Resolution of Applicability granted by CONADI. Many others, however, still do not have this, despite having between 30 and 99 percent of their land loss recognized by the State. This is extremely im-

portant because young people do not have land on which to build their homes or work, and they have to rent in the city, a situation that is complicated by the high cost of living in Chile.

It is precisely this context and reality that is reflected in the Indigenous Navigator community survey that was conducted with the Txawün. The survey, by providing much more detail and hard data, has served as an important input for the leaders so that they have better tools with which to defend their territories.

### A Mapuche Cultural Encounter

Based on the results of the community survey, representatives of 25 communities of the Txawün of Mapuche Communities of Temuko are implementing the community project “Towards food sovereignty for Mapuche communities in Temuco through the safeguarding of territory, biodiversity and the revival of traditional knowledge”. This workshop has been designed and implemented in a participatory manner through *nütram* (Mapuche conversation that opens a participatory dialogue) and focuses on reviving traditional knowledge and practices related to food production, seeds and cultivation methods.

The meetings and exchanges likewise ensure the well-being of families, strengthening intergenerational ties between young people,

adults and children. The project has generated a great deal of enthusiasm among the communities and is being developed through practical modules imparted by Mapuche individuals; meetings with traditional, local and regional authorities; and documentation of the experience through a documentary and a *trafkintu* (exchange of products, knowledge and seeds between communities, based on reciprocity and strengthening of social and cultural ties).

The workshops on the care and protection of seeds, medicinal plants, Mapuche gastronomy and the production of natural fertilizers and compost are over-subscribed. Women and men of all ages participate, many young people share with the *papay y chachay* (older adults), children listen to the stories and eat healthy and nutritious food. Memory lives and flourishes during the meetings: participants recall the teachings of their grandmothers and grandfathers; describe the vegetable gardens they tended in their childhood; and narrate the meals they shared at celebrations.

Through this encounter, the demand for territory thus takes on greater nuance and a new urgency: to keep Mapuche identity and culture alive.

■ *Danko Mariman is an anthropologist and the coordinator of the Txawün of Mapuche Communities of Temuko.*

*Karina Vargas is a lawyer and coordinator of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Programme of the Observatorio Ciudadano.*



## Indigenous Navigator: a New Era for Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh

*The Santal community worked together with the Indigenous Navigator initiative and Kapaeeng Foundation to collect community data on the main problems affecting them. After conducting surveys and focus groups, land defence emerged as the most urgent challenge. A project was therefore developed to raise the visibility of their demands and to unify efforts to defend their rights. The data collection has served to raise awareness of the historical gap in documentation and has had an impact on the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the country's census.*

■ **Trijinad Chakma**

The Indigenous Santal community, settled mainly in northern Bangladesh in the sub-districts of Parbatipur and Gobindaganj, continues to face multiple challenges despite occasional recognition of their rights and culture. One of the key problems is land dispossession: many families have lost their ancestral lands to State development projects or land grabbing. The situation reflects a clear marginalization: legal protection remains weak, social inclusion limited and economic conditions fragile, which hinders both the preservation of their cultural identity and the possibility of socioeconomic mobility.

In turn, access to education is extremely limited: while many children attend primary school, few manage to continue on to secondary or to access higher education due to poverty, language barriers, lack of institutional support and sociocultural pressures. For their part, Santal women bear the burden of agri-

cultural work, face gender inequality and lack support to improve their livelihoods. Another serious problem is discrimination and social isolation: they are excluded from public spaces, suffer cultural marginalization and often do not receive justice when they are the victims of violence.

The survey, conducted in Dalu, Hodi, Khasi, Kondo, Lushai and Santal communities, collected data on the implementation (or not) of a wide range of Indigenous Peoples' rights: self-determination, cross-border connections, cultural integrity, employment, freedom of expression and media, fundamental freedoms, socioeconomic development, health, land and resources, legal protection, access to justice and participation in public life. The data generated by the community itself laid the groundwork for initiatives aimed at strengthening Indigenous territorial rights.

### Documenting Rights and Realities with the Santal Community

The human rights organization Kapaeng Foundation is the implementing partner for the Indigenous Navigator, which has had a presence in Bangladesh since 2017. In this role, it supports Indigenous communities to collect data through community surveys and focus group discussions. The current research on the implementation of Indigenous rights was initiated in October 2022, through surveys in 40 communities across the country. This information, which is already available on the portal, is being used by communities to guide and implement self-determined development projects.

Kapaeng Foundation has an extensive network of contacts throughout the country. Given the severity of land conflicts affecting the Santal community in Parbatipur and Gobindaganj, the Foundation felt it was crucial to include them in the community surveys and used its network to make this possible. For the community, the Indigenous Navigator thus became a key tool with which to highlight the discrepancies between official government data and the reality experienced by the communities. This gap particularly came to light during the analysis of the community surveys.



Photo: Shiblul Tudu



The surveys were conducted through focus groups with a wide range of participants: men, women, youth, people with disabilities and the elderly. For the Santal (as for other Indigenous Peoples), the Indigenous Navigator introduced a framework and a set of tools that enabled them to generate valuable data and monitor and document their overall human rights situation. Up to that point, there had been no formal documentation of the community. Participants found the questionnaire empowering and transformative and were surprised to discover that this framework was designed by and for Indigenous Peoples.

Young community leader Manik Soren highlighted the relevance of the initiative: “The Indigenous Navigator has highlighted the information gaps regarding the land, education, health, culture and human rights of Indigenous Peoples to the Bangladeshi government. I believe it will be a key tool with which to document these shortcomings and improve our human rights situation. As a global framework, I hope that the government will use this information and take the necessary measures to promote and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the country.”

### Defending the Land: the most Urgent Challenge

Before uploading the information to the Indigenous Navigator portal, the data was analysed and reviewed by Kapaeeng Foundation’s team, external experts and the community itself. The results were shared with the participants through a workshop. There it was

confirmed that the Santal people are facing serious social, cultural, economic and political challenges. Alongside this, a lack of political representation in local government is further limiting their advocacy capacity.

The lack of affirmative action on the part of the State has led to the loss of ancestral lands. The most emblematic case is Bagda Farm, from where more than 2,500 Santal and Bengali families were violently evicted by the police in 2016: three Santal men were killed and hundreds of houses destroyed. Although 1,500 families still live there, they face a renewed threat of eviction due to government plans to install an Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in the territory that the Santal assert is their own.

The community consultations also pointed out that their land rights remain unrecognized and they are forced to make enormous sacrifices to defend them. Their cultural heritage and traditional social structures are at risk of disappearing. In addition, the Santal suffer racial discrimination from the Bengali majority, and women and girls are exposed to sexual and physical violence (including rape, kidnapping and fabricated court cases), used as a mechanism to generate fear, insecurity and forced displacement.

### Small Projects, Big Impacts

Of all the problems analysed, the community identified land defence as their greatest challenge. For such cases, the Indigenous Navigator has a small grants mechanism so that participating communities can develop

and implement their own projects. Once they have analysed their surveys, communities are therefore able to collectively prioritize their most urgent problems and develop tailor-made solutions, with the initiative's support. In November 2024, through this mechanism, Kapaeng Foundation and the Indigenous communities launched two projects.

One of the projects targeted the Santal community and identified land rights as the most critical issue. In the face of evictions

and encroachment by Bengali groups, State agencies and the security forces, the Santal community developed a project to promote and protect their land rights in Parbatipur and Gobindaganj sub-districts of northern Bangladesh. Framed as a collective movement, the proposal was supported by Kapaeng Foundation and designed jointly by two organizations: Jatiya Adivasi Parishad and the Bagda Farm Struggle for Recovery Committee (SBUSC).



■ The Santal community in Parbatipur and Gobindaganj is primarily affected by land conflicts. Photo: Shiblal Tudu



The project's activities seek to raise community awareness of their rights and provide them with the tools to strengthen their advocacy capacity. One key component involves supporting advocacy efforts with the local authorities to resolve territorial disputes. To this end, Kapaeeng Foundation developed advocacy materials in Bangla and English aimed at amplifying the community's voice. The project also seeks to strengthen the links between the Santal, the Indigenous organizations and national networks, with the aim of unifying and amplifying their struggle for territorial rights.

Following approval of the project, the Santal community has shown confidence and determination to push forward towards the agreed objectives, convinced that this initiative will unite them, strengthen their relationship with local, national and international actors, and consolidate their struggle for rights and dignity.

### Advancing Indigenous Rights from the Grassroots up

In Bangladesh, Indigenous Peoples – both in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and on the plains – continue to face a lack of recognition and systematic violations of their rights. Among the most serious problems identified was that of territorial dispossession, which continues to displace families and threaten their cultural

survival. This general context highlights the importance of the Indigenous Navigator, whose tools empower Indigenous communities to define their priorities and design projects based around their own solutions.

Beyond the Santal experience, the Indigenous Navigator has brought pride and recognition to marginalized groups across Bangladesh, including the Lushai, Pangko, Hodi, Bagdi and Gorait. Community data available on a global platform has become an invaluable resource for advocacy and research. In fact, Kapaeeng Foundation's efforts have influenced the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics to include Indigenous Peoples in the national census, thus addressing longstanding data gaps.

After a long period of data collection, the Santal community designed a project that focuses on raising awareness of Indigenous rights, strengthening community advocacy, and building capacity for effective dialogue with the authorities. It also strengthens ties between the Santal and other Indigenous organizations, consolidating a united front in the struggle for justice and recognition. This progress demonstrates the transformative potential of accurate data and grassroots empowerment. Ultimately, the Indigenous Navigator has had a positive impact both on the Indigenous communities and on the different actors involved in defending their rights.

■ ***Trijinad Chakma is a human rights activist in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of south-eastern Bangladesh. He is the project coordinator of Kapaeeng Foundation and has been involved in the activities of the Indigenous Navigator project in Bangladesh since 2019.***



## Recovering the Land to Recover Everything: the Misak People and Participatory Surveys

*In the upper heights of the Central Andes mountain range, the Misak community of the Guambía Reserve (Silvia - Cauca) and the Ovejas Council (Caldono - Cauca) implemented data collection using a participatory methodology as part of the Indigenous Navigator project, exercising their self-determination to deliver their own data. The Indigenous Navigator portal contains the data uploaded by the Misak, which is enabling their international recognition and the establishment of dialogue with other Indigenous communities, promoting support for global human rights organizations.*

■ **Mauricio Martínez**

The implementation of the Indigenous Navigator with the Misak community of the Guambía Reserve, Colombia, is contributing to recognition of their cultural identity and their autonomous data management by integrating their language and worldview into the survey and guaranteeing that their own delegates are the ones who review and validate the information and comments before publication in the portal.

Through participatory methodologies, the communities themselves led the process, generating key information for planning and political advocacy based on their priorities. The tool allowed them to raise the international profile of their reality and consolidate strategic alliances. In addition, they promoted a community project to improve the water system in an important area of their territory. During this process, traditional practices such

as the minga and the use of the Talking Map were revived. This has reaffirmed their autonomy and capacity for self-management in the face of external development models.

### Ancestral Self-Recognition of the Misak People

The Guambía Reserve is located in the department of Cauca, in south-western Colombia, in the upper heights of the Central Andes mountain range. This territory represents only a fraction of the former ancestral Pubenence territory, today claimed by the Misak as an historical subject and the basis for the construction of a new universal narrative, rooted in their collective memory.

Misak, in Namtrik Namuy Wan (the Misak language), means “people”. The shures and shuras (elders) manage the category of being misak misak, that is, the relationship of

human people with the people of nature. This relationship brings us to another category that contains everything: the nupirauk or territory, which includes the cosmos, the soil and the subsoil.

The foundation of their ancestral wisdom comes from the teachings of the natural order: from the language of the nupirauk, by which the identitary principles of the Misak people have been governed. These principles are expressed in community values, such as *lata-lata* (mutual aid), *mayailai* (abundance for all) and *alík-minga* (festive community work).

During the times of the republic, even though they did not enjoy rights and nor were they recognized in the National Constitution, the struggle for the recovery of part of their usurped territory led the Misak to legislate for themselves in their territory. In the same vein, in the 1980s, they called on the Indigenous and non-indigenous people of Colombia to envision a possible world governed by mutual respect: "Recover the land to recover everything. It is ours and yours too."



■ Presentation of the Talking Map at the Guambía Leaders' School. Photo: Laura Carillo Patau



### Intercultural Dialogue: a Driving Force for Initiating Surveys

The initial relationship between the Misak people and the Indigenous Navigator was the fruit of a connection established in 2020 between the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and the Ala Kusrei Ya Misak University (Casa Minga de Pensamiento), through the ARTE + Foundation. This collaboration focused on creating communication materials with the collective participation of Misak students and teachers, and “allies” (non-indigenous people supporting the Indigenous struggle).

Of the productions to emerge from this cooperation, the radio documentary “Walking

from Guambía, the Puben Territory” is particularly noteworthy. This was made up of four chapters that have been used as study materials by a group of young Misak people. Likewise the animation “Walking the Memory” a collective creation based on the writing of Taita Abelino Dagua, Raíz y retoño; the podcast on the 10 years of the Ala Kusrei Ya Misak University (spoken in Namtrik Namuy Wan); and the documentary film Piwam Mera (Voices of the Water) produced with the participation of Misak elders – water sowers, traditional (spiritual) doctors, midwives, seed collectors and the local governor–.



■ The Misak territory is located in Cauca, in the Central Andes mountain range. The landscape is mountainous and green, ranging from 2,800 to 3,500 metres above sea level. Photo: Nikita Bulanin

In May 2023, the Indigenous Navigator proposal “Towards the full and effective recognition and realization of the rights of Indigenous Peoples” was publicized. The meeting was attended by the authorities of the Guambía Reserve, representatives of IWGIA and the ARTE + Foundation. Through a frank and direct dialogue, the purpose and scope of the community survey was discussed in depth and approved for uploading to the Indigenous Navigator platform.

The Misak authorities expressed a deep interest in the project: they recognized its potential to raise the profile of their history internationally, strengthen alliances with other Indigenous communities and gain the support of human rights organizations globally. It was also agreed that the survey should be implemented in Ovejas Kaltunk Chak and in the municipality of Caldono (Cauca), given that this Misak community has been suffering ongoing violations of its right to establish its territory as a reserve.

### Participatory Methodology, own Language and Collective Reflection

It was first agreed to use the focus group methodology, selecting local representatives and zonal authorities with experience of the issues to be addressed. The Tatas governors appointed Mama Nancy Tumiñá as general coordinator, who led the process with the support of three community members. The four leaders were trained on the structure of the survey and the methodology for collecting the information and the concluding comments.

During the training process, the importance of using *namtrik namuy wam* (the Misak’s own language) became evident as it would ensure a more active, deep and comfortable participation by the respondents. It was also agreed to form four groups on the first day so that each group could respond to different topics in the survey. The next day, coming together in an assembly, the answers given in each group would be reviewed and approved collectively. Each member of the coordinating team took on the responsibility of facilitating one of the four thematic groups.

One of the most significant reflections arose in response to the question on poverty, based on international standards. The collective response of the Misak communities, both in Guambía and Ovejas Kaltun Chak, was forceful: “The question does not correspond to what we have learned from our elders. These categories do not align with our thinking. We do not live in poverty: we are a dignified people. We plant our vegetable gardens or *yatules* on the small plots of land we have. We are a cornered people who are unable to fully develop our talents or our economy. So we are a people fighting for our rights.”

### Community Validation

After processing and validating the data with the help of the ARTE+ team, the information collected through the surveys served as the basis for a summary that was disseminated across the Guambía territory. This work was done by consultant Diana Mendoza, who has extensive knowledge of the Indigenous Navi-



gator Initiative and who conducted the national survey on Colombia.

The dissemination of the summary coincided with the handover between the 2023 and 2024 council authorities, thus enabling the involvement of new representatives and their contributions. Here, disagreement was expressed over government projects that have taken place on their territory, designing plans without community participation and with unjustified results. One of the main findings deriving from the data collection was the issue of water distribution in one of the areas with the greatest impact on the community, identified as a priority need.

This is how the Misak coordinator put it: “There are plenty of workshops, training sessions and so on, but no materials. How can we meet our needs if there are no materials? For example, the pipeline: we want to improve the aqueducts, but we don’t have enough resources.” To this concern was added the testimony of a recently elected representative: “The engineer built the intake pipe right where people, motorcycles and cattle pass. He didn’t think about the community, he only thought about fulfilling the contract. Now we have to drink dirty water.”

### Expansion of the Water Network

In response to these concerns, and with the assistance of an ARTE+ adviser, the environmental committee and the Tatas council governors, a technical project was designed to increase the flow in the water network from three to six inches and to reforest the

watercourse that supplies the reservoir tank. This project was submitted to the Indigenous Navigator and received support through a small grant from the European Union. Given the possibility of providing a solution to this felt need on the part of the community, the Council of Guambía undertook to co-finance the work with the resources and community work of the minga.

This intervention has benefited four villages and several community institutions, including the Town Hall, the Misak University, the Sierra Morena Medicinal Plants Centre and the cemetery. Finally, the Mama Manuela school, which was not included in the plan, also joined the network. The project was initiated under the leadership of the Tatas governors for the 2023 term and concluded with its handover to the community by the Mama governor elected for the 2024 term.

In the Guambía territory, in December 2024, a day of advocacy took place with the support of the Indigenous Navigator project. The activity involved the participation of State entities attached to the Ministry of Agriculture and was aimed at jointly constructing a strategic roadmap. This roadmap, aimed at improving food autonomy, proposes: the recovery and return of native and creole seeds, as well as the promotion of livestock reconversion and backyard production systems. As a result, agreements were signed with the Ministry, and these will begin implementing actions focused on seed recovery and technical assistance in 2025, with plans to develop sustainable livestock and backyard components by 2026. As we go to press, the Ministry of

Agriculture is being sued for failure to comply with the agreement.

Finally, the Indigenous Navigator experience enabled the Misak people to participate in a recent meeting of peoples of Abya Yala where they were able to share experiences and proposals with delegations from the Mapuche (Chile), Wampis, Asháninka and Quechua Nation (Peru), Morelos (Mexico), Kichwa of the Anzu River (Ecuador), Salinas de Lomerío (Bolivia) and Wayúu (Colombia) peoples. It has thus fulfilled a part of the objectives set and left open the possibility of keeping the survey feedback active.

■ *Mauricio Martínez is the director of Fundación ARTE +, a popular media communicator, folk musician, audiovisual producer and supporter of Indigenous struggles since 1980.*



## A Blueprint for Rights and Development in Kenya

*The Indigenous Navigator Initiative, together with Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA) has made significant progress in empowering communities in Narok, southern Kenya. The project seeks to systematically monitor the level of recognition and implementation of the Indigenous rights of Maasai pastoralists and Ogiek hunter-gatherers. The experiences, lessons learned and impacts of the initiative have been consolidated throughout the different stages. Community-led data collection and advocacy are undoubtedly the cornerstone of its success.*

■ **James Twala**

The Indigenous Navigator approach to data collection is unique. Unlike traditional research methods implemented by Western academia, which often extract information for the benefit of external actors, this project adopts a community-led participatory methodology. This ensures that the data are “by Indigenous Peoples and for Indigenous Peoples”, generating a sense of ownership and respect for the survey process.

Many Indigenous communities have suffered from so-called “research fatigue”, i.e., the feeling generated by external studies that extract information from the territories without leaving any tangible benefit behind. Instead, the Indigenous Navigator empowers communities, ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs prioritized in a way that respects their autonomy and their own development. Their worldview, priorities and needs are thus reflected in the surveys.

This article emphasizes the experiences and outcomes of conducting surveys through the Indigenous Navigator in Narok County, southern Kenya. It highlights how the process has resulted in advocacy actions, improved access to water and the construction and implementation of healthcare facilities, strengthening the Maasai and Ogiek peoples to defend their rights, define their development priorities and improve their economic and social well-being.

### Data Collection and Empowerment

A key element of the Indigenous Navigator Initiative is its emphasis on community-led data collection. The Indigenous rights organizations that work closely with local communities play a key role in this process. One such organization is Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA), a non-profit, community-based non-governmental organi-

zation in Kenya that promotes human rights, social justice, environmental protection, climate change advocacy and grassroots development, with a special focus on supporting the Maasai community in Narok County.

The data collection process begins with the translation of the Indigenous Navigator-developed questionnaire into local languages by ILEPA, which ensures accessibility and understanding. The next step is to identify data collectors in consultation with the community. These individuals, drawn from within the community, are trained in the main points of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and in the proper administration of the survey.

Once the data is collected, it is presented in community assemblies for validation, ensuring that it reflects the needs and concerns of the population. This process encourages active participation and fosters a sense of ownership. The data collectors then review and comment on the information with the technical support of the ILEPA team. Quantitative data are then uploaded to the Indigenous Navigator online portal, while ILEPA conducts additional qualitative analyses in order to develop site-specific case studies. These findings are again shared with the community during assemblies, generating opportunities for feedback and discussion.



Photo: ILEPA



### A Health Centre for Women in Labour

The initiative includes a small grants fund that enables participating communities to identify their most pressing issues based on the data collected and to design and implement their own solutions. The Keneti community was identified as most in need of support among the four that participated in the community survey process. With technical assistance from ILEPA, they developed a project to improve access to basic health services through the construction of a primary-level healthcare facility.

Through focus groups, key informant interviews and community discussions using the questionnaire, the different sectors of the population agreed that a lack of access to basic health services was the biggest problem facing them. They also agreed on the need to build a water reservoir in Enkutoto, to dredge the dam in Maji-moto for irrigation, to construct a maternity hospital in Maji-moto and another clinic in Ololoipang'i, and to document land claims in Maji-moto and Enkutoto.

From the data collected, it emerged that the nearest health facilities are located 10 to 12 kms outside of Keneti, which is further complicated by the poor state of the road infrastructure. Vulnerable groups such as women, people with disabilities and the elderly are disproportionately affected by this situation. In the absence of nearby health facilities, women in labour have to be transported by donkey, while disabled or elderly people are often unable to travel long distances.

These small grants are highly valuable because they are driven directly by Indigenous communities. The needs are identified from within, without external influence, ensuring that initiatives align with their most pressing concerns. Moreover, by involving the community in both data collection and project implementation, the initiative fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, thus contributing to the sustainability of these actions.

### Main Achievements and Positive Impacts

The Indigenous Navigator project has yielded a number of important achievements and positive impacts within the participating communities. These outcomes not only reflect the effectiveness of the initiative but also highlight the importance of community-driven development in improving the lives of Indigenous Peoples.

**1. Availability of Indigenous data:** the data revealed critical problems, such as the long distances (an average of 15 kms) that people must travel to access clinics, resulting in high maternal mortality rates. Water scarcity and sediment accumulation in the Maji-moto reservoir was also identified as a major challenge.

**2. Improved access to health services:** access to health care has improved significantly. The construction of a dispensary and maternity ward in Maji-moto and Ololoipang'i has reduced maternal deaths and improved healthcare services for mothers and children. The Maji-moto dispensary and maternity

ward gained national attention when it was featured in the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation's Saving Mothers documentary. In addition, Narok County government assigned three health professionals to these clinics and pledged to ensure a continuous supply of basic medicines.

**3. Land rights advocacy:** the surveys revealed cases of illegal land allocations and land grabbing. These findings were cited in a landmark court ruling that secured the land rights of the Maji-moto community. The ruling has led to the recovery of public and community lands, to the benefit of both individual households and the wider community.

**4. Food security:** the rehabilitation of a reservoir in Maji-moto has significantly improved the food security of more than 500 agro-pastoral households, demonstrating the vital link between access to water and sustainable livelihoods.

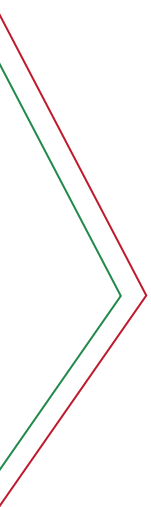
**5. Access to water:** one of the most important projects has been the construction of a large reservoir in Enkutoto. This work has reduced the distance women have to travel to collect water from 15-20 kms to just 1-3 kms. The project has also helped reduce human-wildlife conflicts by ensuring a stable source of water for both.

**6. Advocacy and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** the data collected has been referenced in Kenya CSOs' SDGs Forum Report and voluntary organizations' national reports. In 2020, ILEPA received the National SDGs Kenya Award for localizing these goals at the community level. In addition, the information has been used in advocacy efforts at both the local and national levels, influencing public policy decisions such as reducing water access distances in Narok County.

**7. National recognition:** ILEPA's work has received national recognition, including collaboration with the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics to validate and incorporate community-generated data into official reports. Information from the Indigenous Navigator has also been cited in Kenya's Climate Action Plan and in REDD+ processes, highlighting its significance in shaping national development strategies. Internationally, ILEPA received the Equator Prize in 2024, in recognition of its efforts and interventions at the community level.

■ *James Twala belongs to the Maasai community and is Coordinator of the Indigenous Navigator Project at ILEPA.*







The Indigenous Navigator is a unique and innovative tool implemented by and for Indigenous Peoples. It provides reliable and comparable data across countries and regions about Indigenous Peoples, their rights and needs.

It is a trailblazer in demonstrating how Indigenous Peoples can actively participate in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other global frameworks, while asserting their rights and advancing their self-determined development.

It provides a platform for sharing knowledge, experiences and good practices among Indigenous Peoples and other stakeholders worldwide.



<https://indigenousnavigator.org/>

