

## **The Ethical Conservation Alliance and International Conventions: Towards a Global Movement**

Dr. Koustubh Sharma (India, Kyrgyzstan)

When you are supporting or partnering with indigenous peoples and local communities to protect species and ecosystems; you are focused on ensuring local peoples' well-being; your work assists in diversifying their nature-based livelihoods so that catastrophic impacts of climate change could be mitigated; and you are building cooperation across international borders, you are supporting national commitments to several international conventions. In a world where the impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, trans-boundary issues and conservation conflicts are increasingly interlinked, global conventions like the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) can play a significant role. These conventions aim to guide international and national efforts to protect the planet and its biodiversity. However, for their mandates to be successful, an ethical and inclusive approach to conservation is essential.

The Ethical Conservation Alliance (ECA) is emerging as a transformative force, aiming to help conserve biodiversity while addressing the historical injustices to indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs). Rooted in Western science and colonial practices, traditional biodiversity conservation methods have often marginalized IPLCs, sidelining the very groups that are crucial to the success of conservation efforts. Despite the inclusive principles of the CBD and other global frameworks, "fortress conservation" remains prevalent, driven by elite interests and national power structures. This outdated approach alienates IPLCs and hinders the broader goals of these conventions.

Recognizing the urgent need for a shift towards ethical biodiversity conservation, the ECA is working to develop cadres of frontline conservationists who are trained and have the needful tools to foster respectful relationships with IPLCs. By enabling respectful partnerships with IPLCs, the ECA aims to facilitate these communities as key stakeholders and rights holders in biodiversity protection, climate adaptation, and sustainable development. This approach aligns really well with the goals of multiple international conventions, particularly as these frameworks increasingly emphasize the importance of local and Indigenous involvement in biodiversity conservation.

One of the key strengths of the ECA lies in its capacity-building initiatives. With a growing network of conservation leaders from 31 countries, the alliance provides conservation practitioners with the tools, resources, and training needed to implement ethical practices on the ground. More than a dozen workshops have been conducted to orient or train more than 250 conservation practitioners, 50% of them women, in ethical conservation practices. These efforts will transform conservation at the local level and also offer scalable solutions that can be adopted by governments worldwide. The work of the ECA has already gained recognition, as

evidenced by its mention in the Kyrgyz Republic's statement at the 15th Conference of Parties (CoP) to the Convention for Biological Diversity.

The convergence of the ECA's mission with global conventions is a natural progression, especially given the explicit call for ethical treatment of IPLCs in these frameworks. Governments that have ratified conventions like the CBD and UNFCCC face the dual challenge of delivering on their commitments while ensuring that conservation efforts are inclusive and respectful. The ECA's expertise in ethical conservation can play a pivotal role in guiding these governments, helping them to implement their mandates effectively and with integrity.

Furthermore, as the world moves towards achieving ambitious targets like the Global Biodiversity Framework's (GBF) aim to protect 30% of the planet's land and marine areas, the involvement of IPLCs is not just desirable—it's essential. The ECA's work demonstrates that ethical conservation is not only a moral imperative but also a practical strategy for achieving long-term environmental sustainability.

The Ethical Conservation Alliance can emerge as an important partner to global conventions. It represents a vital synergistic force for change, driving the conservation movement towards a more inclusive, ethical, and effective future.

**About the author:** Dr Koustubh Sharma is the Science and Conservation Director of the International Snow Leopard Trust, and serves as the International Coordinator of the intergovernmental alliance called the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program.