WYSS ACADEMY FOR NATURE

CONSERVING 30%: WHERE, HOW AND TO WHAT END?

Lessons for Target 3 on social impact, OECMs, and implementation



Elina Yumbato and Oswaldo Balarezo collect Amazon nuts in their concession, a sustainable and community-based tourism initiative, in Tambopata National Reserve, Peru. ©Natalia Peralta

Reaching Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) – conserving 30% of land, inland waters and coastal and marine areas by 2030 (30x30) – will affect billions of people. Recent studies from the Wyss Academy for Nature and partners reveal that *how* we achieve this matters as much as whether we do.

First, the lens we use to decide what to conserve has major impacts on the number of people affected, and to what extent. New comparative modelling by Fajardo et al. (2026) across three scenarios suggests that prioritising biodiversity protection would affect the largest number of people globally, while prioritising Indigenous and traditional territories would affect fewer people, but from far more economically vulnerable populations and with deeper livelihood dependence on the landscape.

Second, governance effectiveness constrains which approaches can work where. Research from the Peruvian Amazon shows that Indigenous lands and non-timber forest product concessions can deliver substantial conservation gains, though less than strictly protected areas. Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) can protect biodiversity in contexts where conventional protection is infeasible, but effectiveness varies considerably by governance type and context (Negret et al. 2026).

Third, implementation determines whether outcomes materialise. A recent workshop in Kenya's rangelands suggests that tenure clarity, genuine free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), and existing governance systems matter more than new policy frameworks. Participants noted that boundary disputes, capacity gaps and siloed institutional mandates hold progress back, not just legislation (Wyss Academy for Nature et al. 2026).

Numerous pathways to reaching 30x30 exist; whether they end up delivering lasting benefits for nature and people requires evidence-informed decisions about which lands to protect, which governance mechanisms to recognise in which contexts, and how implementation is handled on the ground.

KEY MESSAGES

Siting conservation is a value choice with unavoidable trade-offs.

Different pathways will affect different numbers of people in different circumstances, and these social implications must be considered when deciding which governance approaches to recognise and support.

Some OECMs deliver where protected areas can't, depending on context and capacity.

Their effectiveness hinges on governance type, institutional stability and political context. Decision-makers need evidence on both conservation potential and social consequences to decide which existing arrangements to recognise and support.

Implementation capacity is the critical constraint.

Tenure clarity, genuine FPIC, existing governance systems and community leadership matter more than new policy frameworks. In Kenya, participants pointed to boundary disputes, siloed institutions and insufficient resourcing as the barriers to progress – not legislative gaps.

WHY THIS MATTERS

To conserve biodiversity and maintain the ecosystem functions that sustain humanity, more of the planet's land- and seascapes need to be protected and conserved. The GBF's Target 3 seeks to catalyse action toward this goal.

Establishing protected areas (PAs) has been the main strategy for doing so to date. Yet while PA coverage and effectiveness is growing across the globe, the CBD acknowledges that achieving Target 3 will also require OECMs to be recognised. In many locations with significant biodiversity, PAs are inappropriate or infeasible, for instance because of the number of people living in and/or relying on the land or seascape. OECMs therefore have a critical role to play, particularly those that can accommodate existing land uses and relationships with nature.

Yet the various kinds of potential OECMs – such as community-run conservancies, privately protected land and other locally governed conservation initiatives – will have different effects on both conservation outcomes and the people who live in and depend on these landscapes and seascapes. The decision about which existing arrangements to recognise and support, and how to implement them on the ground, will determine whether 30x30 serves both biodiversity and human wellbeing equitably.

OUR INSIGHTS

The social implications of meeting conservation targets

Research by Fajardo et al. (2026) supports a context-specific approach. It modelled three scenarios for reaching 30x30 on land and tracked the social implications of each, measured by the number of people affected, their development status and what they depend upon for their livelihoods.

These scenarios were a biodiversity-based approach focused on maximising species and ecosystem representation; a Nature's Contributions to People (NCP) scenario centred on ecosystem services; and an Indigenous and Traditional Territories (ITT) scenario that prioritises high-biodiversity ancestral lands governed by Indigenous Peoples and other custodian communities.

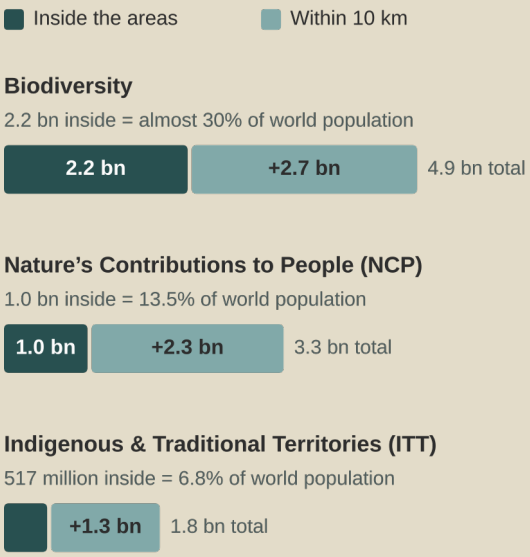
The three scenarios differ sharply in how many people already live in, or close to, the land that would need to be conserved to meet Target 3:

- **Biodiversity scenario:** around 2.2 billion people – almost 30% of the global population – live in these areas, with a further 2.7 billion within 10 kilometres.

- **NCP scenario:** around 1 billion people – 13.5% of the global population – live in these areas, with a further 2.3 billion within 10 kilometres.
- **ITT scenario:** around 517 million people – 6.8% of the global population – live in these areas, with a further 1.3 billion within 10 kilometres.

WHO LIVES IN THE 30%?

People living inside, or within 10 km of, the land each scenario would need to conserve to meet Target 3.



Source: Fajardo et al. (2026), Nature Communications. Totals include around 396 million people already living in today's protected and conserved areas, and 1.15 billion within 10 km of them.

The people these scenarios impact also differ substantially. Under the ITT scenario, 61% of the affected population lives in low Human Development Index (HDI) contexts, compared with 10.8% in the Biodiversity scenario (although the latter scenario includes the largest number of people in low-HDI contexts because it affects so many more people). Among people living in the tropics, those in ITT areas also depend far more heavily on wild harvesting for their livelihoods (91.2%, in contrast to 34.1% in the Biodiversity scenario and 66.7% in the NCP scenario).

These models reveal unavoidable trade-offs: scenarios affecting fewer people overall fall on those who are most vulnerable and most dependent on the land. The authors argue that none of the above scenarios is socially 'best' or 'optimal'; each represents a different value position with different implications for livelihood security and opportunities, as well as implementation risk.

For instance, the Biodiversity scenario could bring high implementation costs given the very large affected populations, as well as higher levels of human-wildlife conflict, although it might also create new opportunities, such as wildlife tourism. The NCP scenario would prioritise large areas of relatively intact forest for the global ecosystem services they provide, raising questions about who should pay for that protection. The ITT scenario affects the fewest people overall, but given their higher levels of socioeconomic vulnerability and dependence on the landscape, it would need to be implemented in ways that do not displace or disadvantage those people further but instead strengthen Indigenous and local governance.

Not all protection is equal

Research by Negret et al. (2026) compares the effectiveness of two governance mechanisms that could qualify as OECMs (Indigenous Lands and non-timber forest product (NTFP) concessions) and two extractive ones (logging and mining concessions) with PAs in reducing deforestation and carbon emissions. The researchers used statistical matching across the Peruvian Amazon from 2005 to 2021.



A river winds through rainforest in Madre de Dios, Peru, where protected areas, Indigenous lands and forest concessions sit side by side. © Gino Tuesta

Strict PAs performed best against those criteria, avoiding about 60% of expected forest loss while multiple-use PAs followed at 49%. NTFP concessions and Indigenous Lands also reduced expected forest loss, by around 26% and 21% respectively. In contrast, logging and mining concessions increased expected forest loss by 13% and 24%, although the authors note that some

large-scale logging concessions did reduce overall forest loss (Negret et al. 2026).

The work shows that a wide range of governance mechanisms can deliver conservation benefits, although their effectiveness in terms of slowing ecosystem degradation and carbon emissions varies considerably. For sites to generate conservation and human wellbeing outcomes, they require established management objectives and concrete or anticipated benefits to people already living there. Without these conditions, sites face higher risks of abandonment and human pressure. The authors call for better understanding of how and where each governance mechanism can most effectively contribute to conservation outcomes, including through ongoing funding for monitoring and management that is tailored to different governance arrangements.

Lessons from Kenya's landscapes

As well as selecting overarching approaches for conservation and protection, implementers need to pay close attention to how these are applied at the landscape level, and under what enabling conditions OECM recognition can meaningfully strengthen community rights and equitable governance.

In May 2026, the Wyss Academy convened a workshop in Nanyuki, Kenya, in collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA) and the State Department for Environment. The workshop brought together national and county government agencies, private and community conservancies, and a range of Kenyan and international conservation NGOs and UN agencies to explore these questions in the biodiversity-rich Laikipia, Samburu and Isiolo rangelands. It formed part of the Wyss Academy "Engaging with OECMs" project, which examines pathways for recognising and supporting OECMs across its regional hubs.

Across discussions, participants saw OECMs as a potential means to recognise community stewardship, support livelihoods, and extend conservation beyond protected areas. They emphasised, however, that recognition alone would not deliver these outcomes. Secure tenure, community leadership, fair benefit-sharing and supportive institutions were essential, with FPIC not treated as a one-off consultation but rather embedded throughout the process. These views are consistent with evidence from regions with low governance capacity, such as sub-Saharan Africa. When conservation areas expand there, the farming and land clearing they displace (known as "leakage") mostly moves onto nearby unprotected land rather than to other countries through trade. Where tenure is unclear, this can make new conservation areas a source of conflict and pre-emptive clearing, making rights recognition a precondition rather than an add-on (Ramírez-Mejía et al. 2026; Wyss Academy for Nature 2026b).

Discussions pointed to institutional fragmentation as a central barrier. One government participant observed that the Kenyan conservation landscape was already "over-legislated", arguing that siloed systems, rather than a shortage of legal tools, constrained progress. Network analysis of biodiversity pledges shows a related connectivity gap: conservation actors remain fragmented across local, national, and global scales (Nguyen et al. 2025; Wyss Academy for Nature 2026b). Together, these insights suggest that making existing mechanisms effective requires stronger institutional links through which local initiatives can access financing, inform national planning and contribute to international commitments. Participants therefore called for more inclusive and coordinated use of existing mechanisms rather than additional legislation.



Participants at the OECM pathways workshop in Nanyuki, Kenya, May 2026. © Amanda Koech

CALLS TO ACTION

01

Identify who is affected before deciding where.
Every pathway to 30x30 distributes costs and benefits differently: prioritising biodiversity, Nature's Contributions to People (Target 11), or Indigenous and traditional territories is a value choice, not a technical optimisation problem. Implementing Target 3 effectively and justly requires making such choices explicitly and in collaboration with the people most affected. In line with Target 22, the social implications of expanding protected and conserved areas need to be centred from planning to implementation, taking into account people's rights, development needs, livelihoods and relationships with nature. This requires livelihood and development support where resident and neighbouring populations are affected – such as co-designing appropriate biodiversity-positive income streams with local actors.

02

Recognise and support what's already working, using the evidence.
Existing governance arrangements deliver decidedly different conservation and social outcomes depending on context; some (such as logging and mining concessions) actively undermine conservation. Implementing Target 3, especially its OECM components, requires using the best available evidence to identify which arrangements merit recognition and support, and where improvements are needed. Decisions should reflect demonstrated outcomes and local contexts, with support adapted as new evidence emerges. This means strengthening assessment and monitoring capacities (Target 20) and making evidence accessible and usable (Target 21) to guide recognition, support and funding decisions. Linking these efforts to Target 19 means PA designation and OECM recognition should be accompanied by long-term national and international financing tailored to each governance type and context.

03

Build capacity and financing for OECM recognition, not just designation.
As the GBF approaches its first progress review at COP17, the Kenya case highlights the need to make sure that national commitments and policies can be put into practice on the ground. This requires institutional capacity building (Target 20) and accessible data (Target 21), alongside resource mobilisation (Target 19) to give institutions and local stewards the skills and sustained funding needed for equitable implementation and monitoring. This includes site-level FPIC processes, boundary resolution and mapping, and community land registration where appropriate, as well as the ongoing assessment and monitoring. Such funding should cover these costs and reward the quality and equity of conservation, alongside progress in coverage.

CONCLUSION

The 2030 target will touch billions of people's lives and livelihoods. Meeting it in a way that delivers positive conservation outcomes and is just for communities already marginalised today will require evidence-informed, appropriately funded decisions about which areas come under protection and conservation, how they are governed and implemented, and who they affect.

SUPPORTING MATERIAL

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The Wyss Academy for Nature at the University of Bern develops and catalyses solutions to complex challenges at the intersection of nature and people. It brings together science, policymaking, and concrete action and works with partners across East Africa, Southeast Asia, South America, and Switzerland. Its approach combines work in real-world landscapes with research, learning, and engagement in wider policy and governance processes.

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