

CASE STUDY 4

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PHILIPPINES

Organization: Philippine Association for Intercultural Development, Inc. (PAFID)
Region: Asia

In the Caraballo Mountains of Nueva Vizcaya and Nueva Ecija, the Ikalahan–Kalanguya Indigenous community safeguards an ancestral domain covering approximately 58,117 hectares of tropical forest. This territory forms a vital watershed, supplying water to millions of hectares of rice paddies in the central plains of the Philippines. For centuries, the Ikalahan–Kalanguya have cultivated their land and relied on the forest for hunting, resisting assimilation for more than three hundred years while developing Indigenous systems of conservation that remain relevant today. Their pioneering role in community-based forest management and sustainable agriculture has earned them recognition both nationally and internationally.

The community's territory faces persistent threats. Encroachment, speculative land claims, and renewed mining interests put constant pressure on their forests and farmlands. Infrastructure development has also accelerated environmental degradation, most notably through the construction of a by-pass road cutting directly across the ancestral domain. These external pressures threaten not only biodiversity and ecosystem services but also the community's cultural and territorial integrity.

Despite these challenges, the Ikalahan–Kalanguya maintain a highly sophisticated system of land management rooted in traditional ecological knowledge.

Their Indigenous farming techniques nurture soil fertility and reduce disaster risks. The gen-gen system uses rotational farming with long fallows to restore land productivity, while day-og applies controlled burning of undergrowth to prevent wildfires and regenerate grasslands. Pang-omis, developed by an elder, accelerates soil fertility recovery, and balkah relies on contour planting of deep-rooted species to trap eroded soil. These practices are complemented by *Forest Improvement Technology* (*FIT*), a selective thinning method that strengthens forest growth. Customary rules enshrined in the *Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan* (*ADSDPP*) prohibit harmful practices such as the use of chemicals in fishing, the introduction of exotic species, and commercial over-harvesting. The community also designates at least one-third of its domain as sanctuaries and wildlife reserves, underscoring its long-term commitment to conservation.

Legal recognition has reinforced these efforts. The Ikalahan ancestral domain is covered by two *Certificates of Ancestral Domain Title* (*CADTs*) and is further supported by a historic Memorandum of Agreement signed in 1974, which granted the *Kalahan Educational Foundation* (*KEF*) management rights over 14,730 hectares. This agreement became the foundation of the social forestry movement in the Philippines. Today, the territory is also recognized as an *Indigenous Community Conserved Area* (*ICCA*), where elders ensure compliance with land use zones and conservation regulations. With the support of PAFID, the community continues to strengthen recognition of its governance systems and works with local authorities to institutionalize Indigenous forest management.

Monitoring and data collection form another pillar of territorial defense. Through inventories of natural resources and careful documentation, the community has been able to resist external development pressures and assert evidence-based claims over its lands. Environmental outcomes are significant: between 2001 and 2023, forests under Ikalahan management sequestered far more carbon than they emitted, removing an estimated 147.5 $ktCO_2$ from the atmosphere each year.[34] Stable forest cover and minimal loss further highlight the effectiveness of Indigenous-led conservation in this critical watershed.

34 Harris, N.L., D.A. Gibbs, A. Baccini, R.A. Birdsey, S. de Bruin, M. Farina, L. Fatoyinbo, M.C. Hansen, M. Herold, R.A. Houghton, P.V. Potapov, D. Requena Suarez, R.M. Roman-Cuesta, S.S. Saatchi, C.M. Slay, S.A. Turubanova, A. Tyukavina. 2021. Global maps of twenty-first century forest carbon fluxes. Nature Climate Change. ***https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-00976-6***. Accessed from ***www.landmarkmap.org***.