



# Forests of Care

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Indigenous perspectives and practices of protection in a contested landscape in southern Philippines

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# Key learning goals

01

Understand how Indigenous forest care practices inspire and strengthen community climate action

02

Recognize climate justice as caring and repairing relationship between people, nature and future generations

03

Foreground Indigenous approaches to protecting forests & ecosystems beyond conventional conservation & support thriving communities & environments

# Outline



A story  
about rituals



Context:  
understanding  
Indigenous  
relations with  
forests /  
mountains



Practices of  
forest care



What does  
this tell us  
about  
climate  
action?



Final  
reflections

# A Story about Rituals



On May 2, 2024, the Bukidnon tribe of Daraghuyan conducted their annual Panungdan ritual at Mt. Damitan (right), and the Panalahawig Ritual at the Sawaga River inside their ancestral territory (left). The Indigenous community prayed for rain and stronger water flow to quench their parched farms and lands. Rituals are embodied acts of care and resistance: marking certain areas as sacred, aiming to protect the environment & resist unwanted developments

# Mt. Kitanglad range and its Indigenous Peoples



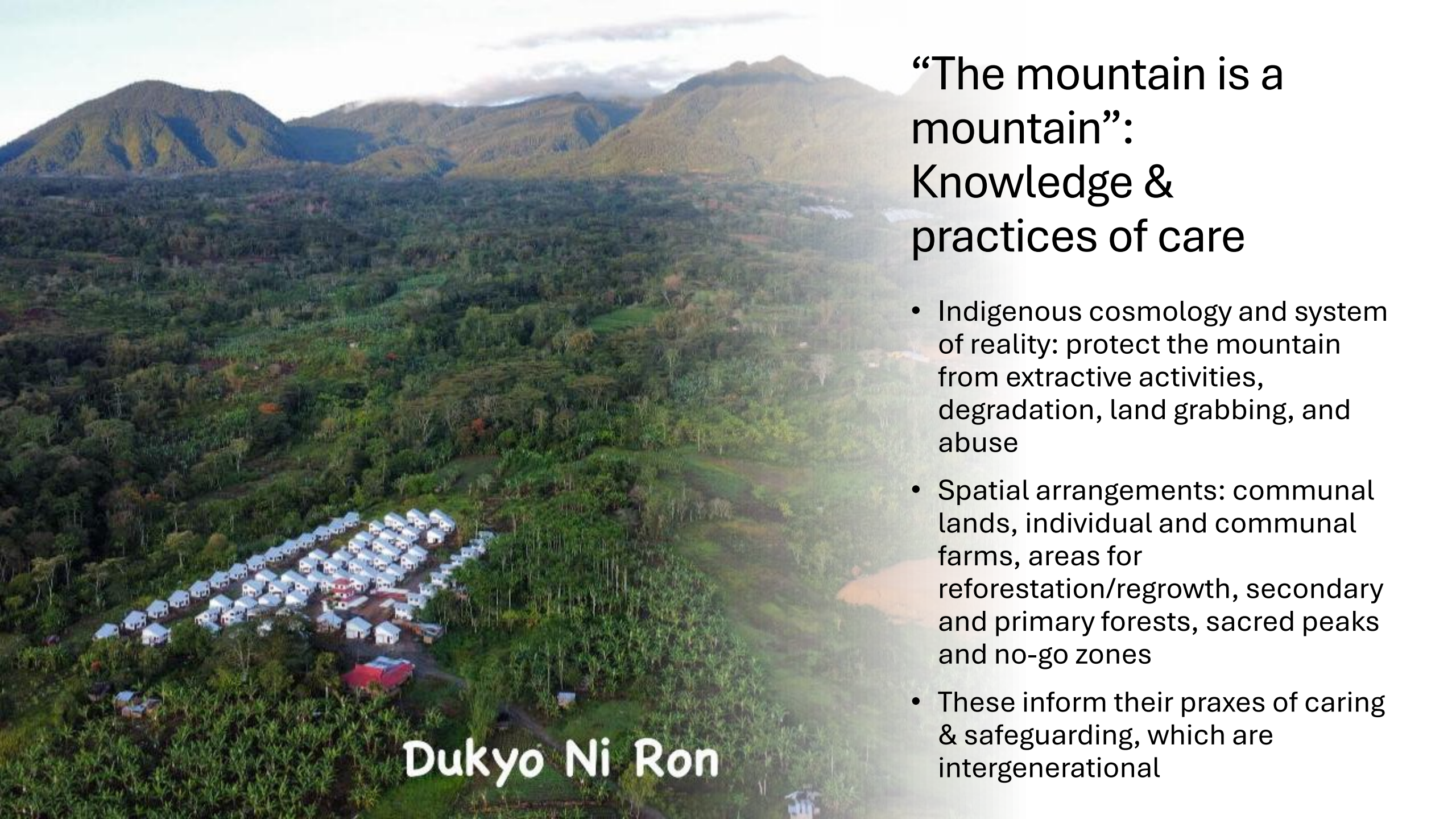
- **Located in the province of Bukidnon, in southern Philippines**
- **A contested territory and landscape:** home to three indigenous groups of Higaonon, Talaandig and Bukidnon tribes; jurisdiction of local governments; nationally-declared protected area covering 47,270 hectares of forests
- **Site of competing multiple land use, conservation and development regimes** (plantations, ecotourism, etc.)

“If the forests will be destroyed, our culture will be destroyed”:  
indigenous self-determination & identity tied to the mountains

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- The mountains as foundation of Indigenous life
- Nature and spirits as kin: relatives and neighbors they co-exist with
- Interconnectedness of ecosystems
- Mountains and forests as church, pharmacy, markets, cemetery and life-giving
- Intergenerational responsibility of caring, sustaining and protecting them





## “The mountain is a mountain”: Knowledge & practices of care

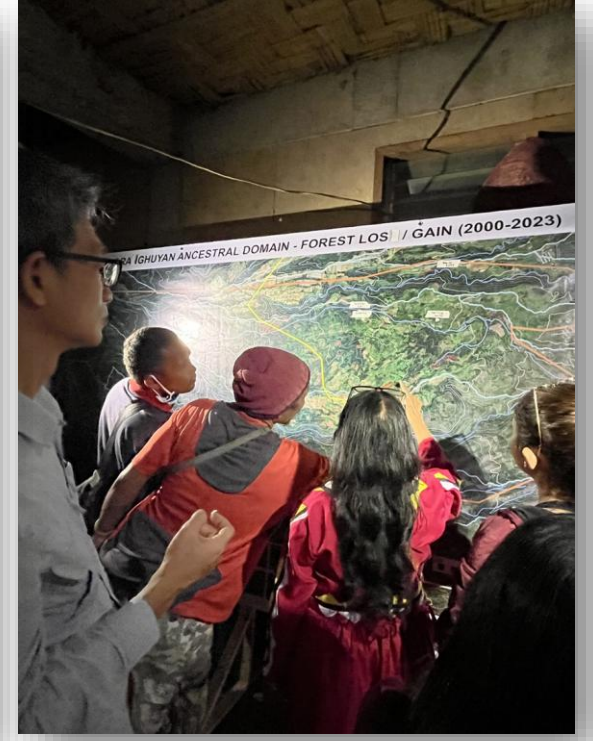
- Indigenous cosmology and system of reality: protect the mountain from extractive activities, degradation, land grabbing, and abuse
- Spatial arrangements: communal lands, individual and communal farms, areas for reforestation/regrowth, secondary and primary forests, sacred peaks and no-go zones
- These inform their praxes of caring & safeguarding, which are intergenerational

**Dukyo Ni Ron**

# Generative practices (1)

- Rituals
- Non-destructive livelihoods: agroforestry and limiting farm size for agricultural production
- Assisted natural regeneration and rewilding
- Designating sanctuaries for wildlife
- Intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledge and practices
- Partnering with academia to assess their water sources





Left to right: Bae Inatlawan, leader of the Bukidnon tribe of Daraghuyan teaching her community about protecting their ancestral territory; Ate Silda Hing-on visiting their coffee plants inside their forests, the women of Daraghuyan carefully choosing their coffee beans for roasting to sell; the community with identifying their water sources in collaboration with a local university

# Ginadili protocols (prohibitions) (2)

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- Enforcing no-go zones and restricting entry into sacred areas + Eco-cultural mapping of bangkasu (altars) and sacred zones
- Preventing fragmentation, privatization, and commercialization of lands
- Defending forests from logging, water and land grabbing, poaching and pollution through regular patrolling in the forests by cultural guards, community-based forest patrol volunteers & youth mobilization



# Eco-mapping of bangkasu (altars) & sacred zones

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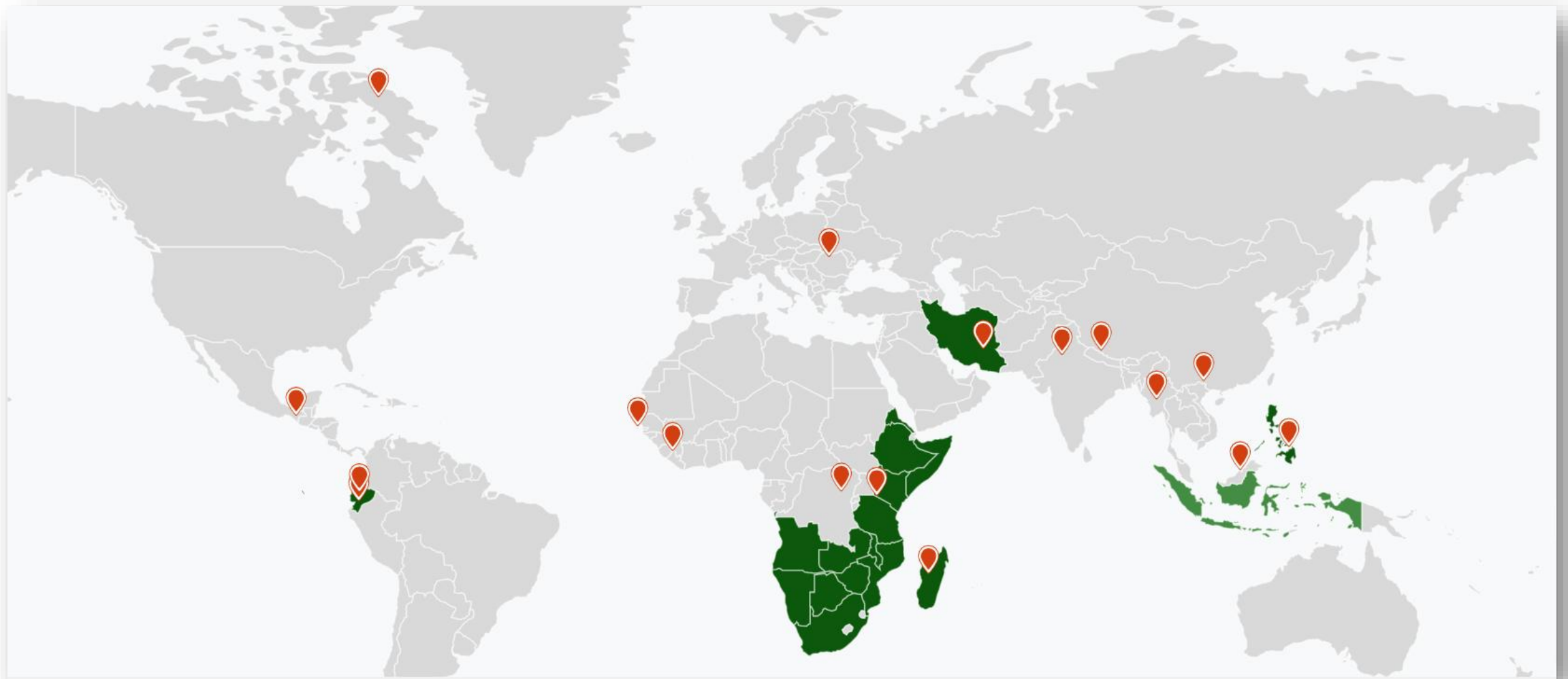
- 3-year socio-cultural mapping and documentation that spatially identified the sacred zones in Mt. Kitanglad
  - Contain more than 30 altars, which serve as spiritual markers that house the spirits of nature; ecologically diverse areas
  - As advocacy toward government: called for the declaration of the sacred sites as no-go zone for eco-tourism and other extractivist activities
  - As protective strategy against the “violence of extinction by directly and collaboratively fostering alternatives to the dominant biodiversity-conservation paradigm” (Thierault, et. al, 2019, 1) beyond state-market
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# What do these praxes of forest care tell & teach us about climate action?

Protecting	Protecting biodiversity and sacred ecosystems through sustainable land use
Sustaining and repairing	Sustaining and repairing relations with nature and the non-humans through community leadership, intergenerational learning and collective actions
Defending	Defending territories tied to Indigenous self-determination, survival and flourishing
Advocating	Advocating for, supporting and strengthening Indigenous-led governance through Indigenous cultural conservation areas (territories of life) as environmental and climate justice

# Map of documented 'territories of life' & their custodians (ICCA Consortium, 2021)



# Healthcare professionals as climate justice & Indigenous rights advocates

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**Expose health harms of extraction**

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**Contribute to reframing land and the environment as part of health infrastructure & Indigenous knowledge as legitimate (ethnoscience)**

Indigenous territories, intact forests & stable ecosystems as foundational to public health, not optional environmental concerns



Source: Global Health program, 2023

# Solidarity & Structural Accountability

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**Support Indigenous governance:** work alongside Indigenous communities, respect Indigenous knowledge, foster dialogue on holistic wellness, and help protect defenders facing coercion, criminalization & dispossession (e.g. Doctors to the Barrios Program; Tribal Botika advocacy)

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**Challenge state-corporate narratives:** call out conflicts of interests, demand meaningful free, prior and informed consent and health impact assessments, and resist 'development' framings that normalize ecological and social harms

# On a final note...

Indigenous communities remind us: **climate action is not only about reducing emissions or managing resources, but caring for relationships**: with water, forests, lands, ancestors, future generations

**Rethink protection not as a technical task but as ongoing practice of responsibility, reciprocity and collective care**

**Health of people and planet are interconnected**

# Food for thought

- What forms of knowledge and care are already present in your communities that could strengthen climate action?
- How might climate justice look different if we began with relationships rather than resources?
- What can each of us, especially healthcare professionals, do to support and learn from Indigenous peoples who continue to protect the ecosystems on which planetary health depends?

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Thank you!  
Daghang salamat!  
Salamat tungkay!  
Merci! Bedankt!  
Gracias!

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