How Mexico's Indigenous Collective Lands Protect the Nation's Biodiversity



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Historical Indigenous Tenancy and Territorial Resistance

Mesoamerican Roots

Mesoamerican civilizations organized land tenure under collective schemes intrinsically linked with nature.

Liberal Dispossession

The Lerdo Law privatized communal forests for the benefit of large landed estates.

Agrarian Reconquest (1917)

Article 27 institutionalizes the ejido and communal lands.





Territorial Footprint of Social Property in Mexico

51%

Of national territory is social property

(Forests, rainforests, and watersheds)

76%

Of land ownership in Indigenous areas is collective

(Communal and ejidal property)

5.4M+

Registered rights-holders

(Decision-making through assemblies)

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

2nd Constitutional Article

Territorial Autonomy: Right to self-determination and internal governance.

Preferential Rights: Priority access and use of local natural resources.

Prior Consultation: Mandated under ILO Convention 169 standards.

Agrarian Law (Art. 27)

Common-Use Lands: Legally inalienable, imprescriptible, and unseizable.

Ecological Shield: Protection against massive land privatization.

Community Assembly: Highest decision-making authority.



Biocultural Heritage and Community Stewardship

Biocultural Heritage

Deep ties between biodiversity, language, and traditional ecological knowledge.

Voluntary Conservation (ADVC)

CONANP-certified reserves created and managed directly by assemblies.

Community Forestry

Social enterprises curb illegal logging and generate sustainable local employment.



CONTEMPORARY THREATS



Mining Law Asymmetry

Priority given to extractivism over agrarian and environmental rights.

Real Estate Pressure

Full dominion conversion fragments community biological corridors.

Risks to Defenders

Targeted violence from illegal logging, mining, and water land-grabbing.

Study Case

Tosepan Titikiske

Tosepan Titikiske is a Nahuatl expression meaning "United We Will Win." It represents one of the most successful and renowned indigenous cooperative movements in central Mexico, operating primarily across the Nahua and Totonac regions of the Sierra Norte de Puebla.

Location: The Sierra Norte de Puebla, Mexico

What They Do: An autonomous cooperative model founded by indigenous communities that collectively manage the production of shade-grown organic coffee, honey, and ecotourism initiatives, taking complete control of the value chain without relying on exploitative middlemen.

Main Objectives:

- Achieve economic sovereignty and self-determination for indigenous communities through collective work.
- Protect local ecosystems and prevent deforestation using sustainable, traditional agroecological practices.
- Safeguard and revitalize local indigenous culture, native languages, and traditional ecological knowledge

indigenous autonomy and social land tenure are powerful tools to halt environmental degradation, conserve megabiodiversity, and drive sustainable local development without destroying our biocultural heritage.



Without safeguarding Indigenous peoples, conserving Mexico’s mega-biodiversity is impossible.

Giving thanks for Indigenous peoples requires moving beyond discourse to active legal protection of their common-use lands and territorial self-management.

