

The Samdhana Institute

(Philippines, Southeast Asia)

Acronym List

CADT	Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DGMI	Dedicated Grant Mechanism Indonesia
FPE	Foundation for the Philippine Environment
IPLC	Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities
NCIP	National Commission on Indigenous Peoples - Philippines
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NSC	National Steering Committee
Samdhana	The Samdhana Institute
USD	US Dollars

I. Context

The Samdhana Institute (Samdhana) is a non-stock, non-profit organization focused on “working alongside Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) to achieve social and environmental justice” throughout the Southeast Asian region. It is registered in the Philippines and Indonesia, with offices in both countries, as well as operations in the Mekong region.

For the period 2019 to 2028, the organization envisions “a region where natural, cultural and spiritual diversity are valued, [and] where communities have control over their territories and well-being.” To this end, their work focuses on supporting “communities to have land rights for their territories and full recourse to the rule of law, through a combination of independent leadership and organizational support, [so that they may] be responsible for their own development and well-being.”

For the same period, Samdhana has identified six strategic objectives, summarized as follows:

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- Developing protocols, strengthening capacities and maintaining funding for **Grants Making**;
- Supporting the **Capacity Development** of IPLCs and other social and environmental movements in the region;
- Developing **Lifescapes**, or integrated landscape and seascape strategies, with initiatives piloted in West Papua and Papua provinces in Indonesia, and Calamianes and Northern Mindanao in the Philippines;
- Continuing **Policy Support**, particularly to address gaps in the areas of tenurial rights, tenure security and natural resource management in the region;
- Continuing **Knowledge Management and Resource Development**, through the development and implementation of plans for knowledge management, communications and resource mobilization; and
- Renewing and growing the **Fellows Programme**, including clarifying roles and recruiting new fellows to join the pool.

These strategic objectives inform each other. Grants Making, for example, has an especial focus on the identified Lifescapes - this approach connects the programmes to support partner IPLCs. Likewise, regard for lifescapes situates resource development approaches, such as livelihood activities for IPLCs, and ensures that these focus on developing local economies and local self-sufficiency.

II. Background

Samdhana was established in 2013 by a group of activists and development practitioners, also known as Samdhana Fellows. A number of these Fellows had been Southeast Asia advisers of the Global Greengrants Fund, and had been advocates for, and with, IPLCs in the region for many years. Samdhana continues to work with and through a pool of Fellows that plays a central role in the direction and implementation of their programmes.

This role is especially important in Samdhana's grants program, which has always been centered on "funding the unfundable," based on deep connections established by "chains of trust." This chain builds from personal and professional connections with an Indigenous or Local Community or Local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) – Samdhana's Fellows trust, and have the trust of, IPLCs; Samdhana, in turn, has confidence in its Fellows. This model allows Samdhana to be introduced to communities as a partner, with local leaders and key stakeholders already vouching for the organization.

Through this, communities are introduced to Samdhana via a “referral system,” or through recommendations of Fellows, advisers, and trusted networks. Likewise, IPLCs are appreciated as parts of broader “lifescapes,” an approach that highlights the interconnectedness of all lives, human or non-human alike. Samdhana’s lifescape framework recognizes the interrelatedness of the geographic region, not only to the political and economic activities therein, but more importantly, to the cultures and spirituality of people and communities. All these are seen as integral parts of the landscape-to-seascape continuum that contributes to communities’ resilience. IPLCs’ priorities align with this view, particularly as they seek to protect both the tangible and intangible values of ecosystems and resources and actively push back against extractive industries and development aggression in their territories. Furthermore, IPLCs are also part of the wider social and environmental movement advocating for social justice and human rights at local, national and international levels.

Samdhana has been implementing its Grants Programme since 2005, starting with small grants in the average amount of USD 5,000. In 2021, Samdhana reported that grants had been approved for community partners in Indonesia, the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Myanmar. These covered seven thematic areas, as follows:

- IPLC natural resource management;
- Rural livelihoods and green economies;
- Climate change action;
- Institutional strengthening and governance;
- Next-generation leadership development;
- Resilience and recovery support in relation to COVID-19; and
- Disability rights and their intersection with environmental justice.

Samdhana further reported that it had received USD 3,543,000 in grants in 2021. Of these 24 percent of expenditures were allotted to direct grants making for local partners (re-granting), while 66 percent of expenditures were for direct programme implementation.

Further, in 2021, Samdhana processed a total of 112 grants across the region. Of these, 30 grants, totaling USD 74,684, supported climate change action. In terms of amount disbursed, more funds supported programs for IPLC natural resource management, with 25 grants totaling USD 954,938. Furthermore, 23 grants totaling USD 767,221, were allocated towards the development of rural livelihoods and green economies. Nevertheless, Samdhana emphasizes that “most if not all of the grants for IPLCs could be considered supportive of climate change mitigation,” considering that IPLC territories cover forests and marine areas that are proven carbon sinks.

In terms of geographic distribution, 46 percent of grants, totaling approximately USD 1.669 million, were awarded in Indonesia - considering the implementation of the World Bank Direct Grant

Mechanism - Indonesia (DGMI), a granting window for IPLCs under the government's Forest Investment Programme, with contributions towards its climate change initiatives. Communities in the Philippines received 36 percent of the grants, amounting to USD 170,856.

III. Operations

Notwithstanding its grants program, Samdhana does not identify itself as a “regranting organization.” Neither do they agree with being referred to as an “intermediary,” as if their primary role were simply a conduit for external funds, although the majority of its resources are channeled to other organizations or groups. Significantly, Samdhana differs from other regranting organizations with its core operations anchored on: 1) the process of trust-building, facilitation and assistance to IPLCs in preparing their proposals to address strategically the concerns and problems they face, 2) the capacity development support to grantee-partners, and 3) the flexibility by which Samdhana makes its funds accessible to IPLC grassroots organizations.

Likewise, Samdhana does not issue an “open call” for proposals to access any of these grants. Communities and partners may reach out as the need arises, and Samdhana personnel can assist them with the proposal preparation and other requirements. Community needs and concerns are paramount in the determination of what Samdhana supports through its grants and capacity development programs. The latter is particular for each community partner, are intended to match their capacity development needs and readiness, and are designed to be culturally appropriate and gender sensitive.

Samdhana has largely been able to secure a similar flexibility from its donors, so as to be able to cater to on-the-ground needs, without having to be limited by funders' agenda. In this way, the grants program is less competitive and more responsive to the priorities of IPLCs themselves. Although Samdhana has recently had to take some donors' interests into account – the Global Greengrants Fund, for example, has begun to highlight support for access to clean water, per the priorities of its funders – these have thus far aligned with the needs of Samdhana's partner communities.

Moreover, donor requirements might also inform the capacity development programs of community partners. For example, some ask for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) information or financial management provisions. In these cases, training can be made available for most, if not all, community partners.

Samdhana has likewise explored modes where funds from national and international donors are pooled and deployed for maximum impact. For example, from 2009 to 2011, funds under Samdhana's small grants program were pooled with those from the Foundation for the Philippine Environment

(FPE) to develop a dedicated Indigenous Peoples Support Fund. Consistent with FPE's mandate, this grant window focused on forest conservation measures by providing direct funding access to IPLCs.

These approaches have allowed Samdhana's grants to support a range of actions – from rights awareness-raising on human rights and IPLC rights, capacity development in governance and leadership, community infrastructure and livelihoods, conservation and enterprise development, to processes for formal recognition of land tenure. This support is provided through **small grants**, and in some areas, through **medium and large grants**.

Small grants

Samdhana's **small grants** mechanism is modeled after that of the Global Greengrants Fund. Small grants are provided for IPLC initiatives and projects under the broad themes of work of Samdhana, at an average of USD 5,000 for projects implemented for over 6 months to 1 year. Since 2016, in consideration of regional inflation, the funding ceiling has been increased to as much as USD 10,000, although the minimum amount for these grants has remained steady at USD 500. Moreover, in 2021, Samdhana updated its grants policy to increase the range of the small grants to a ceiling of USD 30,000.

These cover needs and priorities that communities have themselves identified through traditional consultation and decision-making processes. Importantly, a partnership with Samdhana includes capacity-building in financial management and reporting, which empowers partners over the long-term, and which some communities have been able to use to access other funding channels.

When asked whether they anticipate an increased call from community partners for medium and large grants (such as those supported by the World Bank Direct Grant Mechanism, for example), Samdhana staff answered that this demand is not expected, as IPLC partners already find the current small grants quite substantial. Small grants already generate significant benefits, and can be spread out to reach more communities. Some staff and community partners have also not had experience with managing medium to large grants, and will require additional training on both ends. Likewise, they recognize that a sudden influx of funds before all stakeholders are prepared to manage these may become a cause of community conflict and division.

This wisdom also comes from the reflection of one of Samdhana's small grants Advisers, also an indigenous Menuvu from Mindanao, Philippines, who observed that "Indigenous communities have historically been self-sufficient without being dependent on the cash economy, and so the entry of huge money tends to affect the value system of such communities."

Medium and large grants

Samdhana has also provided medium and large grants, particularly for communities in Indonesia, through the World Bank's Forest Investment Program. These are for amounts of up to USD 30,000, although no grants beyond USD 100,000 have been awarded in one contract. This Direct Grant Mechanism Indonesia focused on building capacities required by IPLCs to secure tenure over their lands, and to practice sustainable livelihoods from forest management.

While a departure from their usual model, Samdhana undertook this project at the request of partner communities from the Indigenous Peoples of Indonesia. These Indigenous communities themselves were able to negotiate with the World Bank to adjust their systems to respond to on the ground needs. As an example, a national steering committee (NSC) composed of IPLC representatives and two government representatives was set up as the key decision making group for the DGMI. Following the Samdhana model, advisers were also part of the review process for proposals, and due diligence was conducted by Samdhana staff, before these proposals were put forward to the NSC.

The organization intends to return to mainly smaller and more flexible grants when this project ends in 2022. Nevertheless, Samdhana will continue to provide strategic and institutional support to selected local CSO partners that may be considered medium or large in size, as appropriate.

Urgent action grants

Urgent action grants of up to USD 3,000 are made available for requests that are time-critical and considered as emergencies or life-threatening. In the past, these have supported disaster relief for indigenous communities who do not have immediate access to humanitarian relief, forced evacuation and displacement, and personal security threats to community leaders or rights activists. Urgent action grants have also responded to other emergencies - for example, food relief and emergency health needs of isolated communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, bridge support for post-disaster recovery, and legal fees for community leaders at risk.

In this, Samdhana has given grants to individuals and not only groups or organizations, recognizing that IPLC environmental and rights defenders often face personal risks to their lives and safety. A simple letter, and even a call, can be used to make this request, and it can be approved in as quickly as three days, depending on the urgency of the need.

Because of the "chain of trust," the approval process for both small and urgent action grants is relatively straightforward. Proposals and requests can be written in local languages, and other requirements usually called for by traditional funders (such as government accreditation or a bank account) can be dispensed with. The Samdhana team and advisers review the proposal and can revert any additional questions to the communities before approval.

If needed, Samdhana can support communities throughout this process – field staff in the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Mekong go on field to consult with communities, observe the communities' consultation and decision-making processes, and can provide assistance as requested (see Part IV on Outcome Examples).

Internal Policies

To ensure transparency and accountability in its programs and operations, Samdhana is guided by four internal policies, as follows:

- Conflict of Interest Policy (August 2017) - Board members, directors, staff, Fellows, principal officers, consultants, or members of committees with a direct or indirect financial interest must disclose potential conflicts of interests in financial transactions and arrangements.
- Anti-Fraud Policy (August 2017) - To ensure transparency and accountability in financial and administrative processes, measures are put in place to prevent, report, investigate and address incidents of fraud.
- Code of Conduct (February 2019) - Principles and standards are put in place to ensure the ethical behavior of Samdhana staff, consultants, Fellows and Board members. Bullying, harassment and discrimination, and bribery are prohibited. Guidelines are likewise prescribed to ensure health, safety and security, social responsibility and compliance with local laws and mores.
- Grievance and Redress Policy (July 2020) - A process is put in place through which project partners, beneficiaries and participants, stakeholders and the general public may lodge complaints and receive resolution regarding suspected fraud and misconduct in relation to projects and programs implemented by Samdhana.

Overall, project reporting requirements depend on the donor that Samdhana is working with. Periods can vary (quarterly, semi-annual or annual), although Samdhana has had a donor waive the submission of reports, indicating a high level of trust in the organization.

IV. Outcome Examples

Samdhana's community partners agree that the organization's approach to grant-making differs greatly from other NGOs. A distinguishing feature is the flexibility throughout the process of accessing funds, and the assistance provided to IPLCs to prepare applications and other required documents, even in the long term.

For example, a partner from Panaghiusa Alang Sa Kaugalingnan Ug Kalingkawasan, Inc. (PASAKK), in the province of Agusan del Sur in Mindanao, Philippines described that proposals could be submitted in *Binisaya*, the local language used in their area. Capacity-building support¹ from Samdhana also enabled the organization to begin to engage and train “second liners,” or younger members who are better equipped to take over proposal writing, reporting and management for succeeding projects.

Community partners are not required to be formally registered entities. Many indigenous organizations are established based on traditional political systems or modes of governance, and Samdhana can work with them in this capacity. Additionally, Samdhana is also able to support informal community groups with clear plans around short term projects. A bank account and official receipts are also not required – funds can be released directly to community representatives, and Samdhana staff can assist them at the bank to ensure the transfer. In lieu of official receipts, Samdhana accepts acknowledgment receipts. Capacity building support also helps the community to set up a simple financial and recording system.

Moreover, because Samdhana makes efforts to sustain the relationship with their partners beyond the support that they provide, and even after their projects are formally concluded, they are able to address the challenge of reaching out to other communities that may not yet be familiar with Samdhana’s work. Samdhana, and their Fellows’, deep level of engagement with IPLCs adds links in the “chains of trust,” allowing them to scale up their work.

A concrete illustration of this was shared by a Samdhana partner from the Serukadang Menuvu Tribe Organization (SMTO), in Samdhana’s Northern Mindanao Lifescape, in the province of Bukidnon in Mindanao, Philippines. They were referred to Samdhana in 2015 by the local priest, whose parish had been an ally in their struggle for their land rights. Following this introduction, Samdhana staff visited the community and observed traditional discussions, during which the need for a communal water system was identified. When the project² was completed successfully, this first engagement with SMTO led to a more programmatic capacity development support guided by the community’s five-year development plan.

Furthermore, the indigenous leader (or *Datu*) also introduced Samdhana to neighboring areas within their unified Ancestral Domain (covered by Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title 206 of the Menuvu Kirenteken-Ilantengen), and the organization was invited by the other communities to support the strengthening of their indigenous governance and address internal leadership and land ownership

¹ Through funds from the Women Environmental Defenders program of The Asia Foundation

² Implemented with the NGO, A Single Drop of Safe Water, Inc.

conflicts. In the last two years, SMTO was able to help facilitate access grant support for water systems for five other Kirenteken-Ilantengen communities within the unified Ancestral Domain.

Similarly, Samdhana's model of engagement allows them to scale up actions to build lasting partnerships. Inter-Cultural Organizations' Network for Solidarity and Peace, Inc. (ICON-SP), an IPLC rights-focused NGO based in Kidapawan City in the Philippines began their partnership with Samdhana when they agreed to host grants for indigenous communities that had been displaced from their Ancestral Domains by a severe earthquake. Requests were received for construction materials to build shelters in relocation areas, but to maximize this support beyond disaster rehabilitation, Samdhana and ICON-SP agreed that the latter would also facilitate consultations with the indigenous communities to develop an Indigenous Peoples agenda for the local government's disaster rehabilitation programme.

These consultations also served to highlight existing issues of marginalization of IPs in the province, consistent with ICON-SP's environmental advocacy and governance programmes. Succeeding engagements with ICON-SP focused on capacity building, particularly for indigenous youth on rights, leadership and cultural sensitivity.

Samdhana has also been able to provide long-term support to communities, especially as this pertains to securing formal tenure over their land. In the Philippines, for example, indigenous communities may apply for a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT), to formally recognize their ownership over their traditional lands and territories. This usually involves a long process, taking upward of three years on average.

While Samdhana does not provide all the funds that are usually indicated by the lead government agency, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), in the application's technical work and budget plan, the organization can provide resources to support the required data collection (such as for local census and genealogical surveys) and internal gatherings, depending on the community's needs. Moreover, the length of engagement required to see this process through may entail repeated grants for specific activities in separate stages, which Samdhana can provide. Community counterparts for these CADT processing grants are also made clear and explicit.

As part of the Fair, Green and Global Alliance, Samdhana is implementing a five-year program, with a grants component focused on "initiatives on rights assertion and recognition, tenure security, conflict resolution, management and governance of territories, agro-ecology, community-based livelihoods and enterprises" throughout their areas of work in Southeast Asia. Other components of this engagement also support capacity building, research and documentation, which are all critical to long-term tenure security.

Support for dialogues and consultations has also had the additional advantage of strengthening communities, particularly by capacitating and empowering the younger leaders from the next generation on a broad range of issues. For example, an indigenous leader from the Iponan Higaonon Organization, in Cagayan de Oro City in the Philippines, shared that their work with Samdhana created opportunities for “bonding,” particularly between indigenous elders and indigenous youth. This allowed them to come to an understanding of each other’s perspectives and learn from each other, guaranteeing that their tenure and rights are better protected in the long term.

Moving forward, Samdhana hopes to support IPLCs in moving from funding streams to long-term self-reliance in the management of their territories. This should be done from an equal footing with other partners and investors. An example discussed during the interviews cited existing models for renewable energy facilities - in some cases, when solar energy facilities are established in IPLC territories, communities have an equal stake in the proponent companies, as their lands are considered their investments.

V. Challenges Encountered

For IPLCs, access to funding to support their initiatives is only one of a range of challenges that they confront – Samdhana’s community partners spoke of the threats to their traditional territories from mines and plantations, the absence of basic social services, the difficulty and delay in securing formal recognition of tenure, and the threats to their lives and security from both State and private forces. In mobilizing allies to assist them in these struggles, they have experienced other NGOs leaving them in the lurch, or taking their ideas and presenting these as their own funding proposals, without benefit to the community. They agree that Samdhana’s model, built around lifescapes, chains of trust, and long-term engagement, differs from these significantly.

For their part, Samdhana shared challenges around accessing funding from multilateral and bilateral donors. Because of the amount of money and multiple fund sources involved, maintaining enough flexibility to support community initiatives can be more difficult. Outcomes in these cases are measured according to national³ and/or institutional standards, making it near-impossible for IPLCs to access funds.

Samdhana spoke to their experiences managing their World Bank project⁴ in particular. Management pointed out that the Bank’s Environmental and Social Safeguards framework is designed for large-scale

³ Samdhana has received support from Norway, through their International Climate and Forests Initiative (NICFI); the Netherlands through Both ENDS; and the United States, through The Asia Foundation.

⁴ Implemented in up to 200 communities across Indonesia

development projects, such as bridges, dams and similar infrastructure, all of which have potentially destructive impacts. Despite this context and the obvious differences in scale and impact, projects managed by IPLCs are made to implement the same framework.

This stringency stems from a donor's mindset, which Samdhana points out as an area where change is sorely needed. Donors enter into agreements with mistrust, or an assumption that "project implementers will not use the funds properly, even before this has happened." Donors usually use this premise to justify restrictive measures which prevent IPLCs from accessing funding, and implementing projects in a manner consistent with their priorities and worldviews.

According to Samdhana, foundations have been more flexible in their requirements and processes. However, they maintain the need to see measurable impacts over a relatively short time frame. To illustrate, Samdhana shared that many foundations consider a ten-year period overly long, without considering the length of time needed to produce appreciable impacts in actions to address climate change or conserve biodiversity. In particular, many IPLC aspirations for tenure security may span more than a decade making project time frames inadequate to see the results.

VI. Strategic Insights

What would "good" look like?

The experience and expertise of Samdhana and its partner communities show that effective, inclusive and equitable support must be built on long-term engagement, rooted in deep understanding of local contexts, and above all, guided by the IPLCs' ownership over projects and their outcomes. These are described further below:

- **Effectively supporting IPLC land tenure and rights requires long-term partnerships and commitments. Support is not necessarily a question of having more money for project implementation, but must be approached holistically.**

Samdhana has worked with donors who puzzle at how their investments in tenure have yielded so little "impact." However, for many IPLCs, the struggle to secure tenure and rights is lasting and ongoing - in no small part due to national tenure regimes that disadvantage IPLCs, exacerbating the multiple layers of marginalization and conflict that they face. As such, long-term support will inevitably be longer than the funding cycle of most projects. Supporting this may require donors to rethink their notions of "impact," and how this can be appreciated.

Moreover, the availability of funds is not necessarily the factor that will tip the scales and make the difference, especially in the sense that traditional funders seek. The Donors' Group commitment, while a significant contribution, will not guarantee beneficial social and environmental outcomes if communities are not themselves part of the process of identifying what should be achieved, and how this can be done.

- **Organizations that have deep ties with IPLCs must be seen as more than “intermediaries” or “disbursers” of larger funds.**

Samdhana's grants model of “funding the unfundable,” anchored on established chains of trust, has allowed the organization to build long and lasting partnerships with IPLCs in its areas of work. These deep ties make the organization more than an “intermediary” or “disburser of funds.” In fact, Samdhana finds these designations “derogatory” and they challenge the assumption that their only purpose is to dole out funds that “cater to the donor's agenda,” without consideration of their relationship with communities and embeddedness in the struggle for their rights.

Samdhana places great importance on the relationships they are able to build with partners, which have proven key to responding to the unique circumstances and challenges in each organization, community, or site where they operate. This model also has a positive impact on the effectiveness of the funds' usage and reach.

- **A flexible and small grants model can be more effective, especially when these respond to specific community-identified needs.**

A common problem for many IPLCs is the lack of access to basic social services, which is often rooted in a long history of marginalization and discrimination. The flexibility of a small grants model allows for these needs to be addressed promptly and effectively, with minimal need for bureaucratic processes and requirements. Small grants also carry smaller risks – if communities are unable to implement projects as expected, this can form part of the costs of learning.

In comparison, larger funds require additional due diligence and assessment of partners' long-term patterns of spending and fund management. Samdhana has observed that many communities may need additional capacity to meet these requirements while simultaneously implementing project activities. Through the small grants model, funds are available to sustain communities longer, compared to a sudden influx of a large sum of money that can also be challenging to manage and disburse.

Samdhana's model adds value by building financial management and reporting capacity into their partnerships, allowing communities to access other funding channels and prepare younger leaders to

take on this work. When considered together with the “chains of trust” and their emphasis on continuing engagement, these partnerships have resulted in multiple gains and sustainable long-term benefits.

- **Support must extend to the process of community dialogues and consultations, and creating spaces for discussion and learning within communities, where IPLCs assess and prioritize their needs and identify what actions to pursue.**

Flexibility in the grants model allows Samdhana to build on community processes for dialogue and decision-making. These can be extensive and take some time, and can require leveling-off between Samdhana and their partners. On the other hand, by starting from collectively identified needs and priorities, projects are able to avoid internal disagreements and “factions” within the communities.

Anchoring projects on these processes has resulted in a strong sense of community ownership. This is evidenced in the communities’ counterparts for project implementation, which they voluntarily offer. These usually come in the form of resources for the conduct of consultations and volunteer labor, which allow them to exceed the outputs and results that the grants originally envisioned.