



FORESTS &  
COMMUNITIES  
INITIATIVE

# CALL FOR ACTION

**INCLUSIVE  
CONSERVATION:  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES  
AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES  
AT THE FOREFRONT OF  
FOREST PROTECTION**





"It is no coincidence that today 91% of the land owned by Indigenous Peoples and local communities have good or fair ecological status, when elsewhere it is so misused. This is the result of hundreds and thousands of years of intimacy with nature. This is the result of an approach that is more respectful of the overall balance of ecosystems. And it is, I believe, also the result of greater modesty and greater respect in regard to the wealth provided by our environment. Today, since we need to change our methods and approach, it is essential to do so with these peoples and these communities from whom we have so much to learn."

*HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco*

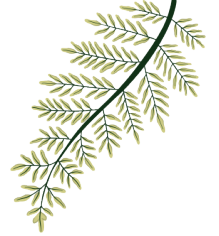
Forests sustain the majority of Earth's terrestrial biodiversity and provide a variety of ecosystem services to humanity, such as climate regulation, water supply and regulation, soil conservation, and food and livelihoods for millions of people. **Preserving and regenerating forest cover is essential for the subsistence of humanity.** However, in modern human history, forests have been cleared at an unprecedented rate. Land and sea use change<sup>1</sup> is considered the most important direct driver of biodiversity loss. With over 4 million hectares of primary tropical forest lost in 2022, the situation is critical.

To address the staggering rate of biodiversity loss, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was adopted by the Member States of the Convention on Biological Diversity in December 2022. It is increasingly acknowledged that global biodiversity goals will be unattainable without full inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPs & LCs). Studies have shown

that 91% of IPs & LCs lands are in good or fair ecological condition and at least 36% of the global land area currently identified as Key Biodiversity Areas, lie within their lands. Deforestation, biodiversity loss and climate change pose severe threats to IPs & LCs, whose livelihoods and cultural identity are intrinsically connected to the ecosystems around them, and who possess critical knowledge about these ecosystems.

The GBF recognizes the rights, roles, and contributions of IPs & LCs for inclusive forest and biodiversity conservation. While the GBF provides a framework, it is essential that its principles, goals and targets are translated into tangible actions on the ground. **This call for action is an outcome of the first conference of the Forests and Communities Initiative\***, organized in Monaco from 21 to 23 November 2023, which brought together 110 participants from conservation, science and policy, including representatives of IPs & LCs.

\* Created in 2022, the Forests and Communities Initiative (FCI) is dedicated to support conservation of forest ecosystems through the action of Indigenous Peoples and local communities | [www.forestsandcommunitiesinitiative.org](http://www.forestsandcommunitiesinitiative.org)



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*Nemonte Nenquimo Waonani*  
Ecuador

“Mother Earth is not waiting for us to save her, she’s just waiting for us to respect her. Very often those who speak about human rights and climate change are presidents and politicians. Decision-making does not include us indigenous women, and does not respect indigenous knowledge. We must be part of this discussion.”



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*Benki Piyako Ashaninka*  
Brazil

“People are not thinking about the future. They want to drink, eat, spend money right away. If we don’t change our ways of doing things, the bill to pay will be much higher. But if we protect forests and animals and rivers, we will be wealthier than by burning forests; it will pay off in a different way, beneficial to all.”



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*Tumunsuekh Jal*  
Mongolia

“The planet is weeping. It is burning and dying because of illegal human activity. Do we want money or do we want to be able to breathe? We have to choose.”



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*Mundiya Kepanga*  
Papua New Guinea

“Please don’t think that there are only five guardians of the forest, people with feathers on their heads from the end of the world. Each one of us has a responsibility. Whether at home or in their community, everyone is a guardian of the forest. If everyone acts that way, then we will be able to continue living on this planet.”



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*Twyla Edgi Masuzumi*  
Canada

“Native people are best suited to protect the land because the knowledge has been passed on by generations of our ancestors. They’ve always taught us to keep fighting for Mother Earth. If we don’t continue that practice, they will have done all that work for nothing.”



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*Hilarion Kassa Moussau 'Mambongo'*  
Gabon

“We have to reforest, and to teach children how to reforest by consulting the sages who are still able to hand down knowledge. This knowledge is not taken into account in the halls of power.”



## 1 | Effective Forest Conservation Methodologies

Despite the recognition of the crucial role of IPs & LCs in forest conservation and the wealth of indigenous wisdom available, many modern conservation efforts overlook or only partially incorporate this valuable source of knowledge. Existing guidelines, regulations and best practices for effective forest conservation were developed with a Western mindset and often for temperate forests. They are often not adapted to the reality of IPs & LCs, and not always easily accessible.

Furthermore, the lack of established instruments, laws and institutions at the national level to implement the GBF targets limits IPs & LCs effective participation in forest and biodiversity management. Many IPs & LCs are facing external threats which are degrading and damaging communities' territories. Recognizing traditional land rights as well as securing land tenure and management could minimize this risk.

### WE CALL FOR

- **Respecting** and integrating Indigenous Peoples' rights, traditional knowledge and methodologies, recognizing indicators used by IPs & LCs to monitor forest ecosystem health.
- **Bridging** modern knowledge and science with indigenous knowledge to thoughtfully co-construct new guidelines and best practices that better reflect reality on the ground, and sustain intergenerational continuity.
- **Fostering** access to and availability of evidence-based methodological materials in multiple languages and formats (apps, infographics, short videos etc.) to facilitate broad uptake and ownership of effective forest conservation methodologies.
- **Promoting** and ensuring a truly inclusive forest conservation, placing IPs & LCs at the center of decision-making, including when implementing the GBF and developing National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), as well as when taking action on climate change through, inter alia, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- **Securing** customary land tenure, control and management.

## 2 | A Rights-Based and Gender-Just Approach

Human rights and effective forest conservation go hand in hand. A healthy environment underpins human rights (health, subsistence), and failure to fulfill human rights can lead to forest destruction and undermine conservation goals. Adhering to the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and adopting a rights-based approach is essential for creating a secure space for community participation in conservation discussions, policies, and actions.

Gender inequality remains alarmingly common, obstructing effective forest conservation and climate mitigation efforts, with women continuing to face various forms of discrimination and marginalization. It is imperative to ensure that women's voices are heard and included in forest conservation decisions. It is important to respect the local and cultural gender roles and dynamics while supporting the communities in creating the conditions that will enable women to participate in decision-making.

Additionally, the protection of eco-activists and rangers is a serious concern in many countries, posing a threat to those advocating for environmental preservation. This is aggravated by difficulties accessing justice, and institutions not complying with the rule of law.

### WE CALL FOR

- **Promoting** awareness about the value of conservation actions while adhering to the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and adopting a rights-based approach.
- **Enabling** safe conditions for sharing experiences by IPs & LCs, particularly women and youth, to empower them to actively engage in discussions and decision-making processes relevant to forest conservation.
- **Supporting** grassroots movements for international forest conservation, amplifying the voices and concerns of IPs & LCs in shaping effective policies and practices.
- **Implementing** a regulated and safe environment for those advocating for environmental protection, including rangers, and ensuring the right of access to justice.





### 3 | The Role of Environmental Law in Forest and Biodiversity Conservation

Various efforts have been made across jurisdictions to come up with legal frameworks, structures and mechanisms to control, regulate, abate and, in some cases, stop deforestation. However, the interactions of forest governance with legislative, judicial and executive bodies of governments, along with their cross pollination with various socio-cultural and economic facets of communities have posed major obstacles in devising regulations that tackle these challenges holistically.

The heterogeneity of forests around the world and the lack of inclusivity of IPs & LCs in their governance systems have posed new challenges to forest governance through legislative and administrative enactments. This issue is compounded by the fact that several existing domestic forest regulations were promulgated at a time when climate change and deforestation were not considered major threats.

Despite a myriad of forest laws, courts, and extensive legal frameworks, global forest governance continues to be inept. This is due to several reasons, including a lack of human and financial resources, gaps or overlaps in institutional entities, lack of capacity building and training for governing authorities, lack of awareness and familiarity with legal frameworks and their application to forest conservation, as well as, in some cases, lack of political or administrative will.

In the absence of a holistic, systematic and globally binding legal regime, forests and wildlife are protected by national and local laws, which tend to be varied, applying different standards of protection and often inherited from the colonial legal frameworks. Many laws are obsolete and need updating, for example with regards to threats from climate change. Laws, in this context, are complemented by efficient and independent administrative agencies, including forest agencies, and institutions.

#### WE CALL FOR

- **Aligning** national legislations with legally binding international instruments, based on scientific evidence, pertaining to forest protection and Indigenous Peoples' rights.
- **Recognizing** territorial rights and nature resource use of Indigenous Peoples, reflecting the socio-cultural context, and recognizing the rights and duties of the local communities towards forest management.
- **Sharing** information about successful litigation processes used by indigenous communities for protection, conservation and management of forests.
- **Supporting** regional and international initiatives for the update, improvement and adaptation of environmental laws and governance.
- **Promoting** efforts to share templates and guidance on forest conservation legislation, such as the Model Forest Act Initiative developed by the IUCN WCEL, Global Judicial Institute for the Environment and other partner Organizations.

### 4 | Reconnecting National/International Funding and Governance to IPs & LCs

There is a lack of appropriate mechanisms for financing conservation initiatives and activities of IPs & LCs. Instruments and institutions responsible for implementing GBF recommendations and targets concerning the participation of IPs & LCs at the national level are either absent or inadequate. A certain opacity within those mechanisms may also eventually lead to corruption, hindering efficient forest conservation funding.

In addition, absence of transparency and control over land tenure has led to land-grabbing and dispossession to the detriment of IPs & LCs. The situation is worsened by projects and mechanisms trying to get hold of vast tracts of land to offset carbon emissions, including by planting trees in monocultures or by limiting access of IPs & LCs to their lands. Recent studies<sup>2</sup> showed that more than 90% of rainforest carbon offsets by major certifiers are actually not helping to tackle deforestation and that most of the money invested does not benefit IPs & LCs.

Moreover, agricultural developments and forest exploitation can be seen by some members of IPs & LCs as opportunities to improve income, access to health care, education and general standards of living. Adequate finance for conservation must consider the opportunity-cost if forest conservation is to be successful.

Recent data confirms there are no more than 555,000 terrestrial protected area personnel worldwide (1 per 37 km<sup>2</sup>), which is insufficient to deliver the global conservation targets and protect 30% of the planet by 2030<sup>3</sup>. In addition, these personnel, which include rangers, need better recognition, capacity, and resources to achieve conservation objectives. Rangers play a key role as essential planetary health professionals and are typically from IPs & LCs.

#### WE CALL FOR

- **Exploring** alternative solutions for biological resource use, encouraging sustainable use of resources, and promoting incentives and value transfer mechanisms that outweigh the short-term profit from destructive practices.
- **Improving** transparency and social control over land registries and land regularization processes.
- **Developing** transparent funding mechanisms to enable direct access to funding for IPs & LCs by promoting partnerships and alliances between IPs, LCs, and external partners.
- **Ensuring** consultation and Free, Prior and Informed Consent of IPs & LCs with regards to innovative financing mechanisms (including carbon credits) and supporting a policy framework in favor of equal benefit sharing.
- **Strengthening** support and resources for rangers of the world to conduct their work safely and professionally.

<sup>1</sup> *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, Volume 21, Issue 2, "Expert perspectives on global biodiversity loss and its drivers and impacts on people" p. 94-103

<sup>2</sup> West et al. 2020 and 2023 and Guizar-Coutiño et al. 2022. "A global evaluation of the effectiveness of voluntary REDD+ projects at reducing deforestation and degradation in the moist tropics"

<sup>3</sup> *Nature sustainability*, 2022. "Protected area personnel and ranger numbers are insufficient to deliver global expectations" [online]





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