



**Global
Alliance**
of Territorial
Communities

Indigenous Peoples' Territories and Local Communities on the Frontlines:

Mapping Threats and Solutions
Across the World's Largest
Tropical Forests



Indigenous Territories and Local Communities on the Frontlines:

“Our traditional knowledge is the expression and language of our mother earth. This mother earth, its resources, and ecosystems must be protected for our current and future generations.”

The world is facing interrelated crises: climate change, biodiversity loss, rights violations, and inequalities, which threaten both the planet and the well-being of humanity. In our territories, increased pressure on our lands and resources is leading to environmental degradation, pollution, land grabbing, forced displacement, attacks on rights defenders, poverty, and youth migration. Mother Earth and her natural resources are our means of subsistence and not a source of economy with adverse effects.

Our Alliance brings together more than 35 million people who are guardians of territories, forests, and resources, living in more than 24 countries and defending more than 958 million hectares of forests.

Our communities remain resilient and play a vital role in protecting vast traditional territories that are home to a significant portion of the world’s remaining intact forests and ecosystems, which play a vital role in carbon sequestration and biodiversity. We are therefore essential partners in combating the current global crisis. We cannot play this essential role if our territories, our rights, our identity, and our livelihoods are under extreme threat.

By bringing together data, mapping, and storytelling from Indigenous Peoples and local communities, this report serves as an important tool for our advocacy to live in our territories. This collaboration with Earth Insight serves as a first step in a continued partnership that can provide regular assessments to understand and combat the extractive threats facing Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

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Mapping Threats and Solutions Across the World’s Largest Tropical Forests



A LETTER FROM EARTH INSIGHT

It is with deep respect and gratitude that we present this report, co-created with the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GATC). This work reflects the collective voice, vision, and leadership of Indigenous Peoples and local communities who safeguard the world’s most vital forests and ecosystems.

The findings presented here are not only maps, data, and analyses. They are also testimonies of lived realities, territories under increasing pressure from extractive industries, and yet also landscapes of hope, resilience, and solutions. The GATC and its members stand at the frontline of the climate and biodiversity crises, defending life itself, often at great personal risk.

This report is also a call to action. The evidence is clear: without urgent recognition of territorial rights, respect for free, prior, and informed consent, and protection of the ecosystems that sustain all of us, global climate and biodiversity goals cannot be achieved. At the same time, we must recognize and amplify the community-led models of stewardship and governance that already point us toward a just and regenerative future.

We want to thank our partners in the GATC and allied organizations for their trust, wisdom, and commitment, as well as the dedicated team at Earth Insight. Their tireless work, creativity, and solidarity made this collaboration possible.

May this report serve not only as a warning of the threats ahead but also as an invitation to stand in solidarity, to listen deeply, and to act with courage.

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Executive Summary

Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPs and LCs) steward nearly a billion hectares of tropical forests, acting as guardians for lands that regulate the global climate, sustain biodiversity, and embody cultural and spiritual continuity. They represent less than 5% of the global population, yet they safeguard more than half of the world’s remaining intact forests and close to half of all Key Biodiversity Areas.

Despite their proven stewardship, their territories are under unprecedented pressure. Across the pantropics, extractive industries, agribusiness, logging, and infrastructure projects—often justified by national development agendas and even the green transition—are rapidly eroding ancestral lands, undermining climate stability, and endangering human rights. While this report focuses on four key regions, these threats reflect broader global patterns of extractive pressure on Indigenous lands. This report, co-created by the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GATC) and Earth Insight, combines geospatial analysis, community data, and case studies to map both the magnitude of these threats and the resilience of Indigenous-led solutions across four regions: the Amazon, the Congo Region, Indonesia, and Mesoamerica. **Together, these regions encompass 958 million hectares of forests and sustain the livelihoods of 35 million IPs and LCs.**

The scale of threats across these regions is sobering. **In the Amazon, approximately 9.8 million hectares of Indigenous and community lands are overlapped by mining concessions and 31 million hectares (12%) of Indigenous territories are overlapped by oil and gas blocks**, exposing peoples like the Waorani to pollution and displacement. **In the Congo Region, 38% of community forests are overlapped by oil and gas blocks**, and peatlands critical to global carbon storage are threatened by new licensing. **In Indonesia, more than 18% of Indigenous territories face overlapping concessions in the timber industry**, and communities like the O’Hongana Manyawa are under existential threat from nickel extraction. **In Mesoamerica, nearly 4 million hectares are encroached upon by oil and gas blocks, and 19 million hectares (17%) by mining concessions**, with the Muskitia “Little Amazon” facing rampant narcotrafficking and colonization.



Women harvest Maya nuts (ramón seeds) in the Guatemalan forest. Image credit: IUNW

These threats from extractive industries extend beyond territorial boundaries. Between 2012 and 2024, at least **1,692 environmental defenders were murdered or disappeared across the GATC countries**. Of these, **208 killings were linked to extractive industries** and another **131 to logging**.

In the face of these existential threats, Indigenous Peoples and local communities continue not only to endure, but consistently advance solutions rooted in inclusive governance, collective stewardship, and regenerative practices. In **Indonesia's Wallacea Archipelago (Flores Island)**, the **Gendang Ngkiong communities reclaimed 892 hectares of Indigenous Peoples' land** through participatory mapping and new Indigenous law reforms—securing recognition and strengthening territorial governance. In **Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve**, **community forest concessions achieve near-zero deforestation alongside resilient livelihoods**. In **Colombia**, Indigenous Territorial Entities maintain **over 99% of their forests intact**. And in the **Congo Region**, the landmark **2022 Pygmy Law** signals a more just and inclusive governance model. Indigenous stewardship consistently proves more effective than state or private management, but without recognition and protection, the ecological and cultural foundations of these territories remain at risk.

The way forward is clear—grounded in the **GATC's Five Demands**, which are reaffirmed and expanded through the **Brazzaville Declaration**:

1. Securing and recognizing Indigenous land rights is the cornerstone of long-term climate and biodiversity stability.
2. Guaranteeing free, prior, and informed consent in all projects is non-negotiable, and fossil fuel extraction, mining, industrial agriculture, and other destructive activities have no place in Indigenous territories without consent.
3. Direct financing must reach communities themselves rather than trickling through intermediaries, so that climate and conservation funding can strengthen territorial governance.
4. Protecting life by ending violence, criminalization, and persecution of leaders is essential for continuity of stewardship.
5. Indigenous knowledge, governance systems, and cultural rights must be integrated into policies and agreements on biodiversity, climate, and sustainable development.

This report is both a warning and an invitation. Without decisive action to uphold rights and support Indigenous-led stewardship, humanity will fail to meet its climate and biodiversity goals. Yet by following the leadership of those who have protected these ecosystems for generations, the world has a viable roadmap toward regeneration. The future of the world's tropical forests, and humanity's shared climate, will be determined by whether governments, funders, and global institutions act on this knowledge.

At a Glance – Regional Summaries

Amazon

Thirty percent of the Amazon (250 million hectares [Mha]) consists of IPs and LCs lands. Twelve percent (31 Mha) are threatened by oil and gas, 9.8 Mha by mining, and 2.4 Mha by logging.

Territorial Threats Case Studies

- **Yavarí-Tapiche Corridor (Peru/Brazil):** The proposed 16-Mha corridor for Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation (PIACI) retains 99% intact forest but faces overlapping oil, gas, mining, logging, and road projects; Peru has failed to recognize key reserves, jeopardizing vulnerable PIACI.
- **Woorani Territory (Ecuador):** Sixty-four percent of 800,000 hectares (ha) of Indigenous territory is overlapped by oil blocks, exposing Indigenous communities to health crises and biodiversity loss.
- **Mato Grosso do Sul (Brazil):** Fifty-eight percent, or 21 million ha, of Mato Grosso do Sul and 30% of Indigenous territories are currently covered by farmlands.

Territorial Solutions Case Studies

- **Indigenous Territorial Entities (ETIs) in Colombia:** Twenty-five ETIs seeking formal recognition cover 36% of the Colombian Amazon, maintaining 99.5% intact forest.
- **Indigenous-Led Financial Mechanisms:** Initiatives such as the Podáali Fund are redirecting climate and conservation finance directly to Indigenous organizations, supporting territorial defense and community resilience.
- **Indigenous Peoples' NDC:** Indigenous Peoples in Brazil have launched an Indigenous Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to advance a community-driven climate strategy that links territorial rights with forest protection, climate action, and just transition.

Congo Region

Community forests protect nearly 7 Mha (2% of the region), but 38% are threatened by oil and gas, 42% by mining, and 6% by industrial logging.

Territorial Threats Case Studies

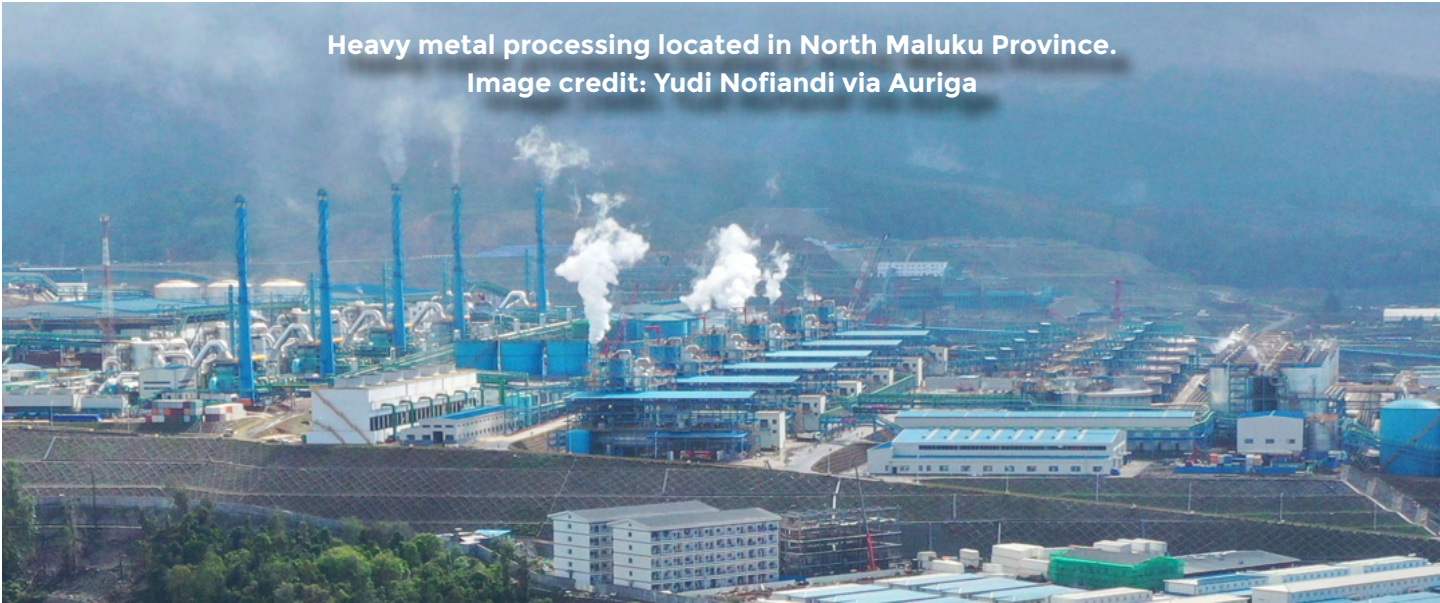
- **TRIDOM Landscape (Republic of Congo, Gabon, Cameroon):** In this region 17.8 Mha, home to 97% intact primary forest and approximately 10,000+ Indigenous Peoples, faces 55% overlap with logging concessions and 32% with mining; community forests are increasingly pressured.
- **Cuvette Centrale Peatlands (Western Democratic Republic of the Congo [DRC]):** Oil licensing overlaps with 99% of community forests, threatening a globally critical 30 billion-ton carbon sink while undermining food security and cultural survival.

Territorial Solutions Case Studies

- **DRC's Pygmy Law:** This important law offers the first legal recognition of Pygmy peoples' rights to land, services, and political participation. Implementation frameworks launched in 2025 are meant to ensure Indigenous participation in land governance and climate strategies.
- **Ajemalebu Self Help's (AJESH's) Community-Led Conservation:** Over 60 participatory land-use plans, 49 maps, and co-management of reserves showcase decolonized conservation in Cameroon. Scaling this model could protect 37 Key Biodiversity Areas while dismantling fortress conservation approaches.



Logging camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on vast carbon-rich peatland forests around Lokolama/Penzele in the Congo Basin.
Image credit: © Daniel Beltra / Greenpeace



Heavy metal processing located in North Maluku Province.
Image credit: Yudi Nofiandi via Auriga

Indonesia

Seventeen percent (33.6 Mha) of the country is covered with Indigenous lands. Threats to Indigenous lands include 5% (1.6 Mha) overlap from oil and gas concessions, 3% (0.9 Mha) from mining, and 18% (6 Mha) from wood concessions.

Territorial Threats Case Studies

- **Nickel Mining for Energy Transition (North Maluku Island):** More than 65,000 ha of Indigenous O'Hongana Manyawa territory are overlapped by mining concessions.
- **Geothermal Development on Pocoleok Territory (Flores Island):** Over 2,000 ha of Indigenous Peoples' lands in Pocoleok Territory fall within geothermal working areas; projects approved without Free, Prior, and Informed Consent threaten biocultural systems like *Gendang One, Lingko'n Peang*.
- **Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL) Expansion (Sumatra):** Forestry concessions overlap 31,000+ ha of Indigenous lands and there is ongoing criminalization, intimidation, and destruction of sacred sites, with Indigenous women leading frontline resistance.

Territorial Solutions Case Studies

- **Wallacea Archipelago (Flores Island):** The Gendang Ngkiong communities reclaimed 892 ha of Indigenous Peoples' land supported by participatory mapping and legal reforms, securing recognition under new Indigenous law regulations.
- **Persistent Resistance in Sumatra:** The Ompu Umbak Siallagan community won legal recognition of their Indigenous territories after decades of struggle against pulp concessions, supported by AMAN and allies.



Mining infrastructure in Guatemala.
Image credit: Getty Images - Brian Lawless/PA Images

Introduction, Scope and Methodological Approach



Indigenous men marking a tree as part of community forest management project in Central Africa.
Image credit: REPALEAC

Indigenous Peoples and local communities stand at the frontlines of many of the world's most critical ecological systems. Their territories hold immense cultural and ecological significance, biodiversity, and climate resilience—yet they are increasingly pressured by extractive industry and demand for land and resources. This report is grounded in that reality: that the future of Indigenous territories across the pantropics and beyond is inseparable from the future of the people who call these places home.

This report combines geospatial analysis, literature review, and community-informed consultations and data to assess threats to Indigenous Peoples and local communities across four key tropical forest regions: the Amazon, the Congo Region, Indonesia, and Mesoamerica. It maps industrial pressures—specifically oil, gas, mining, agriculture, logging, and infrastructure—while also highlighting Indigenous and community-led solutions and offering global and regional recommendations. Each regional section is organized around two complementary lenses: **Territorial Threats** and **Solutions**. Territorial Threats case studies analyze industrial pressures on Indigenous territories, biodiversity, and the climate, while Territorial Solutions showcase Indigenous strategies that protect lands, restore ecosystems, and advance climate action, emphasizing effective stewardship, governance, and sustainable livelihoods.

Mesoamerica

Oil and gas threaten 3.7 Mha of IPs and LCs lands while mining concessions threaten 18.7 Mha (17%) of IPs and LCs lands. Reforestation projects and regional collectives are actively protecting forests, with some lands showing 1.5% forest loss over ten years—seven times less than national averages.

Territorial Threats Case Studies

- **Muskitia (Honduras/Nicaragua):** The “Little Amazon” faces severe pressures from narcotrafficking, deforestation, and weak governance. Oil, mining, and agriculture overlap with millions of hectares of community lands.
- **Sierra Norte de Puebla (Mexico):** Communities resist gold/silver mining, fracking, and transmission megaprojects; 14,000+ ha of Ejido land are threatened. While some concessions are suspended due to legal challenges, toxic legacies of fracking wells persist.

Territorial Solutions Case Studies

- **Community Forests in El Petén (Guatemala):** The Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP) manages 480,000 ha in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, maintaining near-zero deforestation (1.5% between 2014–2024) and creating sustainable income streams. Youth, women, and assemblies drive governance, demonstrating a replicable model of community forestry.
- **Autonomy and Rights-Based Stewardship in Gunayala (Panama):** The self-governed territory of Gunayala operates a sustainable nature-based tourism model where ancestral governance, land, and culture are inseparable. Governed by customary law and cosmovision, the territory operates under community agreements that honor ecological and cultural protocols.



The Vice Ministers of the Environment from the Peruvian government, meet with the representatives of local indigenous groups. Image credit: Flickr - Ministerio del Ambiente

The report's focus on the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GATC) regions reflects both the ecological importance of the lands the alliance represents and the legitimacy of GATC members; GATC represents 35 million Indigenous Peoples and local communities in 24 countries who steward over 958 million hectares of forests. Regional threat maps are paired with case studies and narratives of resistance and regeneration, underscoring IPs and LCs' leadership and governance capacity as essential to climate and biodiversity solutions.

There are numerous variations in the documentation and tenure status of IPs and LCs lands, data availability, and political context across regions and between countries, and methodologies have been developed and adapted accordingly. Spatial data on recognized IPs and LCs lands were used where available, while community resource rights, unrecognized IPs and LCs lands, and proxy indicators have informed the analysis in areas with limited data. Areas without data on maps in this report may have uncollected, unrecorded, or unrecognized Indigenous Peoples and local communities lands.

Grounded in the 2025 Brazzaville Declaration and GATC's Five Demands, this report highlights threats to Indigenous territories, as well as Indigenous-led solutions, underscoring the need for a shift from extraction to regeneration. It urges recognition, respect, and partnership with Indigenous Peoples—not only as a matter of rights and justice, but also due to their essential role as guardians of nature and climate for the benefit of all.

Setting the Global Scene

For millennia, Indigenous Peoples have lived in harmony with the Earth, stewarding lands and waters in ways that uphold the sacredness and interconnectedness of all life. More than just ecological relationships, the connections between Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPs and LCs) and their territories are cultural, spiritual, and political.

Despite representing less than 5% of the global population, IPs and LCs safeguard 54% of the world's remaining intact forests, and their territories overlap with 43% of the world's Key Biodiversity Areas—underscoring their irreplaceable role in sustaining life.¹ Yet IPs and LCs are facing unprecedented threats to their territories and ways of life. Across tropical forests, deserts, savannahs, and coastal regions, pressure from extractive industries is mounting. Oil, gas, timber, mining, and agricultural expansion are threatening ancestral lands, often under the guise of green transitions, carbon offsetting, or national development agendas. These incursions risk not only undermining climate and biodiversity goals but eroding the knowledge systems and communities that have safeguarded ecosystems for generations.

Around the world, Indigenous Peoples and local communities are confronting an accelerating convergence of global crises: the collapse of biodiversity, intensifying climate change, and widespread dispossession of traditional territories.

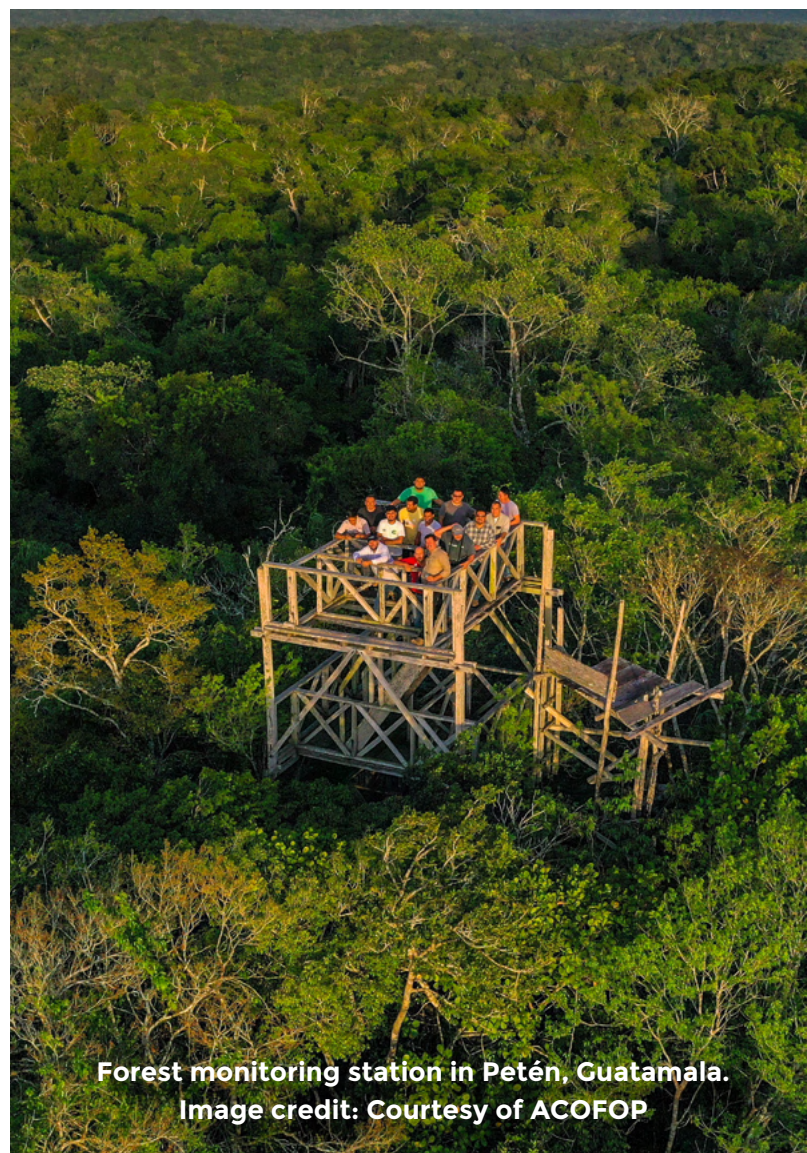


Children from an Indigenous community in Central Africa take part in a tree-planting activity. Image credit: REPALEAC

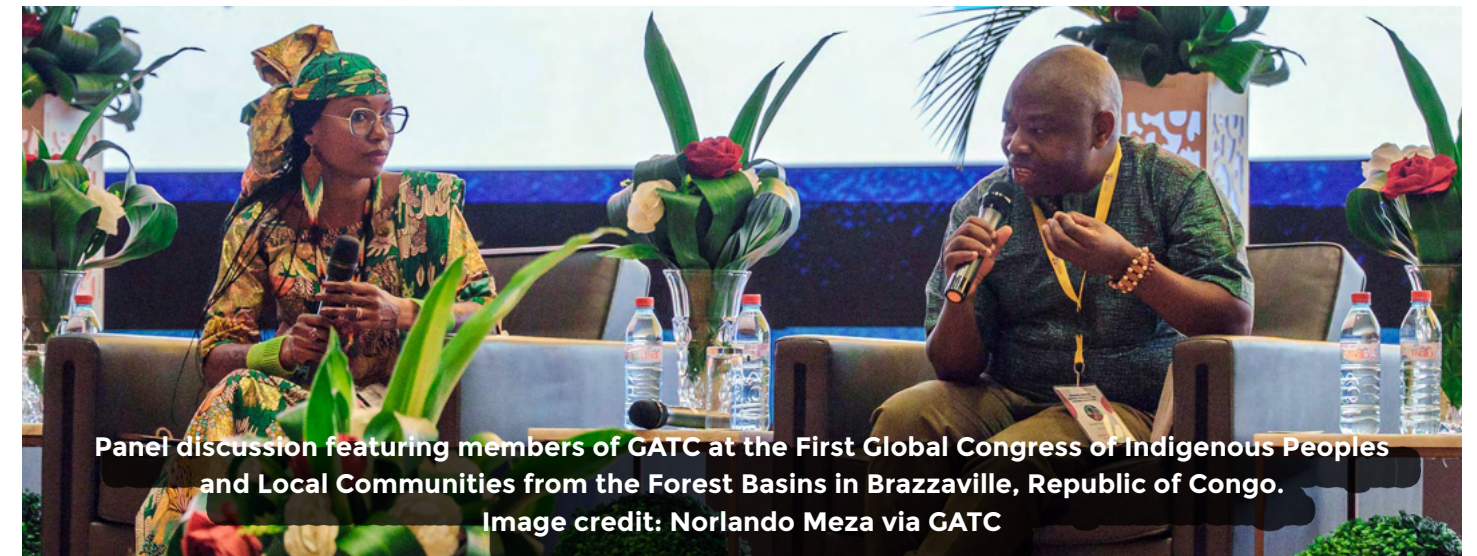
Indigenous Peoples and local communities are the guardians of nearly a billion hectares of tropical forests, demonstrating remarkable effectiveness in conservation. For example, sustainably managed forest concessions in El Petén, Guatemala, lost approximately 1.5% of forest cover between 2014 and 2024 compared to 11% in surrounding areas—nearly seven times less forest loss. Yet even as they succeed, threats loom. In Mesoamerica, 3.7 Mha (3%) of lands are overlapped by oil and gas concessions and 18.7 Mha (17%) by mining; the Amazon sees 31 Mha (12%) of oil and gas overlap with IPs and LCs lands, and the Congo Region faces 38% of community forests overlapped by oil and gas threat. Indonesia’s Indigenous lands are similarly pressured, where 1.6 Mha overlap with oil and gas concessions and 18% are overlapped by wood concessions. These threats are not limited to IPs and LCs land. Between 2012 and 2024, 1,692 environmental defenders were murdered or disappeared in Amazonian countries (1,018), Congo Basin countries (81), Indonesia (25), and Mesoamerican countries (568), with Indigenous Peoples, small-scale farmers, and Afro-descendants disproportionately impacted. At least 208 of these killings have been linked to extractives and an additional 131 deaths linked to logging.²

These numbers reveal the paradox: even as Indigenous stewardship proves its effectiveness, the very act of protecting land and forest places communities at grave risk from extractive industries and the violence that follows. Without stronger protection and direct support, IPs and LCs remain on the frontlines of threats they did not create, while the climate stability and biodiversity they safeguard remain at risk.

Earth’s tropical forest belt, stretching across the Amazon, the Congo Region, Indonesia, and Mesoamerica, has become a critical frontier where the future of Earth’s climate, biodiversity, and cultural survival is being negotiated. These landscapes, rich in life and tradition, are increasingly treated as sacrifice zones for global resource demands.



Forest monitoring station in Petén, Guatemala.
Image credit: Courtesy of ACOFOP



Panel discussion featuring members of GATC at the First Global Congress of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities from the Forest Basins in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo.
Image credit: Norlando Meza via GATC

The rush for fossil fuels, critical minerals, and land for industrial agriculture is tearing through territories that are not only indispensable for planetary health but are also central to Indigenous identity, survival, and autonomy.³ In response, **IPs and LCs across the pantropics have been rising to defend human and non-human life.** United under the Global Alliance for Territorial Communities (GATC), 35 million people living in communities across the Amazon, the Congo Region, Indonesia, and Mesoamerica defend 958 Mha of land.⁴ In May 2025, GATC representatives came together during the **First Global Congress of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities from the Forest Basins** to sign the **Brazzaville Declaration**,⁵⁻⁶ a milestone commitment to securing land tenure rights and ensuring that IPs and LCs are recognized as key actors in climate and biodiversity action. The Declaration demands legal recognition and protection of IPs and LCs land and tenure rights; to safeguard their lives and leaders from violence and criminalization; to ensure Free, Prior, and Informed Consent in all projects affecting their territories; to integrate and honor traditional knowledge; to secure direct financing; and to embed their rights and roles as central in policies and agreements for climate, biodiversity, and sustainable development—ahead of the 30th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP30) and beyond.

The growing recognition of Indigenous leadership in climate and biodiversity is increasingly reflected in international policy processes. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), through the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, explicitly acknowledges the role of IPs and LCs in achieving global conservation targets, including the ambitious “30x30” goal. Likewise, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has opened space for Indigenous leadership, including through the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) and the recognition of traditional knowledge in national adaptation and mitigation planning. But policy recognition alone is not enough. Without concrete mechanisms to finance and support Indigenous-led solutions, these commitments risk remaining symbolic.

Financing remains one of the most significant barriers to equitable and effective conservation and climate action. Despite safeguarding a significant share of the world's biodiversity, Indigenous Peoples and local communities receive little financial support for their stewardship. For example, in 2024, only 7.6% of funding disbursed from the \$1.7 billion COP26 pledge went directly to IPs and LCs, prompting continuing calls for greater access to these funds.⁷ The contrast between global rhetoric and on-the-ground realities remains stark. If the world is serious about stemming the tide of biodiversity loss and addressing the climate crisis, increasing financial flows directly to Indigenous-led action is necessary. This includes direct funding mechanisms, long-term investment in territorial governance, and policies that recognize and uplift Indigenous rights to land, knowledge, and self-determination.

“The Answer Is Us” campaign amplifies this message, emphasizing that IPs and LCs are the solution to the intertwined crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. Across the pantropics, these communities are demonstrating that effective conservation and climate action emerge when those who live in and depend on the land lead the efforts. By highlighting their knowledge, governance systems, and proven stewardship practices, the campaign calls for global recognition, direct support, and partnership, underscoring that safeguarding the planet requires centering the very people who have been protecting it for generations.

To shift the course of our planet's future, Indigenous Peoples and local communities are calling on the world to not only acknowledge their leadership, but to act on five clear and urgent demands:

- 1. Land rights**
- 2. Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)**
- 3. Direct Financing**
- 4. Protection of life**
- 5. Traditional Knowledge**



Amazon

“It is said that the Mother Amazon forest gives rain to the clouds and makes rivers in the sky. If the forest disappears, it will take the rain and the rivers with it.

The Mother Amazon forest and her peoples have resisted disappearance for centuries. The forests have withstood looting, degradation, and fragmentation. Our knowledge systems and ancestral wisdom revived them and the spirit of their inhabitants. We have withstood plunder, poison, and genocide. Now we call upon governments, allies, and all peoples of the Earth to stand up and assume their responsibility. This is no act of solidarity but of survival: If the Amazon disappears, it will take our shared future with it.

- Fany Kuiru
General Coordinator, Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin (COICA)



The Amazon is a connected ecosystem of the world's largest continuous tropical rainforest, the most extensive river system, and the diverse beings that inhabit it. Every day, more than 670 million hectares of forest produce 20 billion tons of water in an atmospheric river even greater than the Amazon River itself.⁸

This hydrological cycle informs a biocultural landscape expressed in more than 300 Indigenous languages. For example, in the Marañón River basin of the Peruvian Amazon, the Kukama people often use the word iya or ia (heart) in river names, such as Samiria (heart of the small leaf) and Ucayali (heart of houses).⁹ The Tikuna people of Brazil, Colombia, and Peru use the word ajuri for traditional, collective rebuilding of a home after a flood.¹⁰ Kichwa people along the Arajuno River, a tributary of Ecuador's Napo River, warn that when the amarun, the anaconda who is the mother of all fish, leads mijanu (migrations) upstream, it is dangerous to enter the water.¹¹

Ongoing forest loss in the Amazon is approaching a critical threshold that could irreversibly disrupt these longstanding relationships.¹² A recent study showed that the Amazon's deforestation has already reduced rainfall by 74%.¹³ In 2023 alone, low rainfall contributed to dramatic drops in water levels, fish kills, river dolphin mortality, and rampant wildfires.¹⁴



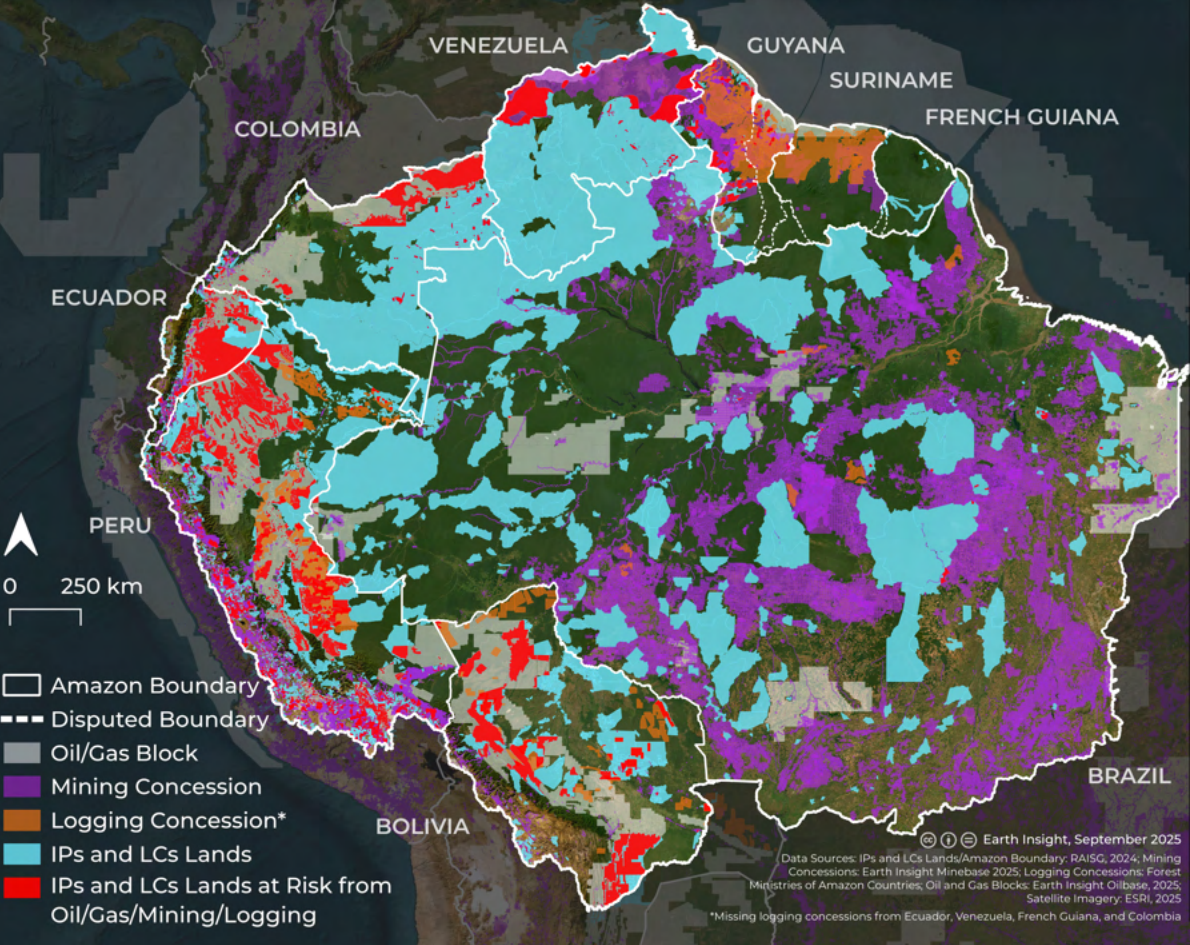
Indigenous people during a march in defense of the Amazon in Belem, Brazil.
Image credit: AP Photo/Dolores Ochoa

Beyond deforestation, industrial activities are directly poisoning the Amazon's rivers, and, in turn, local people. Indigenous communities near oil exploration sites in the Corrientes, Pastaza, Tigre, and Marañón river basins showed high levels of mercury, cadmium, and lead in their bodies.¹⁵ More than 70% of Indigenous women in the Sucumbíos and Orellana regions in Ecuador's Amazon report health problems related to oil-contaminated water.¹⁶ Indigenous territories in the Amazon saw a 265% jump in the spread of illegal gold mining, which now covers an area larger than Amsterdam.¹⁷ It is estimated that 50% of Indigenous communities in Brazil's Branco and Tapajós river basins face “extremely high” risks of severe acute kidney and liver damage from mercury contamination.¹⁸

Legal recognition of Indigenous guardianship is growing. Last year, in Loreto, Peru, an appeals ruling designated a Kukama-Kukamiria women's federation as co-guardians of the Marañón River and its tributaries, given decades of oil spills.¹⁹ This year, Colombia's Constitutional Court ruled in favor of 30 Indigenous communities in the Yuruparí River basin, acknowledging that gold mining and mercury use threatened their traditional knowledge systems.²⁰ However, our spatial analysis indicates that Indigenous territories in the Amazon remain under considerable threat from extractive industries, with close to 31 million hectares of Indigenous territory (12%) overlapped by oil and gas blocks, 9.8 million hectares overlapped by mining concessions, and 2.4 million hectares overlapped by industrial logging concessions.²¹ While our analysis focused on industrial logging concessions, it is important to note that forest loss in Brazil usually happens in other contexts, such as land clearing for industrial agriculture.

Extractive Threats to Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in the Amazon

Earth
Insight



In the Amazon region:
30%
or
250 million
hectares are covered by
Indigenous Peoples and
Local Community Lands

Of Indigenous Peoples
and Local Community
Lands in the Amazon
12%
or
31 million
hectares are overlapped
by oil and gas blocks

9.8 million
hectares are overlapped
by mining concessions

2.4 million
hectares are overlapped
by logging concessions*

Data Sources: IPs and LCs Lands/Amazon Boundary: RAISG, 2024; Mining Concessions: Earth Insight Minebase 2025; Logging Concessions: Forest Ministries of Amazon Countries; Oil and Gas Blocks: Earth Insight Oilbase, 2025; Satellite Imagery: ESRI, 2025
*Missing logging concessions from Ecuador, Venezuela, French Guiana, and Colombia

Mapping Threats and Solutions Across the World's Largest Tropical Forests

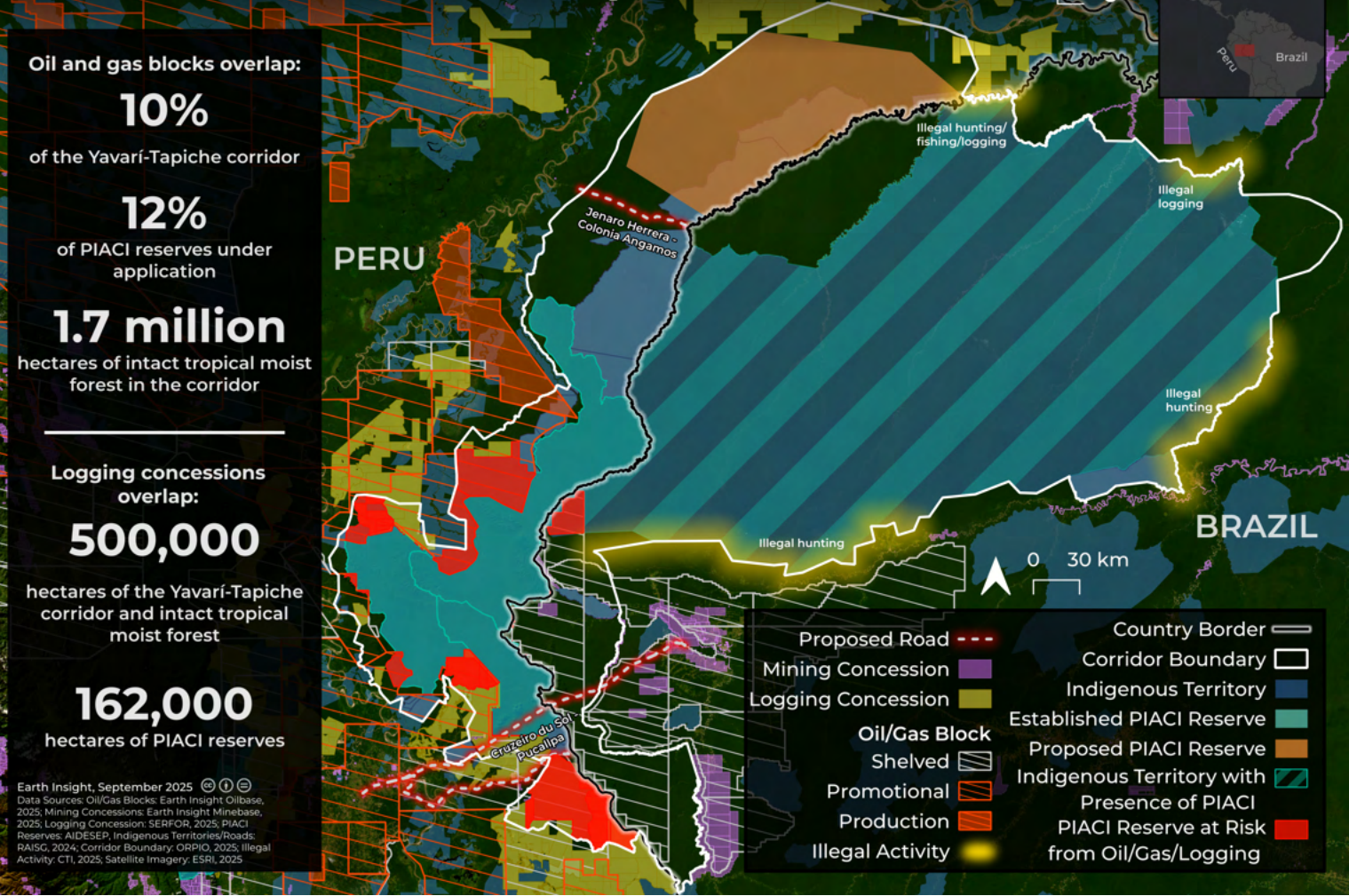


“The Brazilian Amazon is the green heart of our country and one of the largest reserves of biodiversity and freshwater on Earth. Its rivers, forests, and living soils sustain the climate, life, and culture of millions of people, including more than 180 Indigenous Peoples who have protected these territories since time immemorial. But our struggle goes beyond the Amazon: Indigenous lands across Brazil—from the Cerrado savannas to the Atlantic Forest and the Pantanal wetlands—are vital for safeguarding biodiversity, stabilizing the climate, and sustaining life. Our governance systems, ancestral knowledge, and ways of life keep these ecosystems in balance, yet this balance is breaking under the advance of mining, agribusiness, oil extraction, illegal logging, land invasions, and policies that undermine our rights. The Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB) unites organizations from across the country to defend our territories, ensure land demarcation, and strengthen climate and biodiversity solutions rooted in our cultures. Protecting our territories—in the Amazon and beyond—means protecting the future of Brazil and of all humanity. We call on the world to recognize and support our leadership—because we are not a barrier of last resort; we are the living root of a possible future.”

– Kleber Karipuna, Executive Coordinator
The Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB)



Threats to the Yavari-Tapiche Corridor



The proposed Yavari-Tapiche Corridor covers more than 16 million hectares, or twice the size of Panama across Brazil's western border with Peru.²² Twenty years ago, Indigenous organizations first advanced the idea to protect the largest concentration of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact in the world (referred to here by the Spanish acronym, PIACI).

PIACI and Indigenous communities on both sides of the proposed corridor face existential threats that range from oil, gas, and mining blocks to industrial logging and expanding roads and criminal networks.

The Long Road to a Corridor

In 2003, Indigenous organizations in Peru started working toward a binational PIACI corridor by initiating the long bureaucratic process to recognize five Indigenous and PIACI reserves.²³⁻²⁴ Over the next decade, ten Indigenous organizations in Peru and Brazil collaborated on the legal, anthropological, and environmental rationale for the corridor.²⁵ Nearly two decades after the first corridor reserve was proposed, Peru has recognized only three of five proposed reserves.²⁶ In September 2025, the Yavari Mirim Reserve was rejected in a major setback, despite 113 anthropological records that unequivocally prove that Matsés, Matis, Korubo, Kulina-Pano, and Flecheiro (Tavakina) PIACI peoples live there.²⁷

In a joint statement, Indigenous groups called the rejection “an obvious double standard: the Peruvian government has signed multiple international commitments, but now it is putting the survival of the most vulnerable people on the planet at risk.”²⁸

Oil threats

Our analysis shows that oil and gas blocks in Peru still overlap with more than 1 million hectares or 10% of the proposed Yavari-Tapiche Corridor. This includes oil and gas blocks on offer in the Yavari Tapiche and Sierra de Divisor Occidental PIACI reserves, as well as shelved blocks in the proposed Tamaya Abujao PIACI reserve. Potential oil spills carry these threats downstream to Indigenous and PIACI communities whose diets and lives rely on the Amazon River basin.²⁹





The Yavarí-Tapiche Territorial Corridor from above on the Peruvian side, near the Peru-Brazil border. Image credit: ORPIO

Logging

Between 2001 and 2023, two departments partially within the Yavarí-Tapiche Corridor (Loreto and Ucayali) lost more than 500,000 hectares in forest cover each.³⁰ Despite legal bans against concessions in proposed PIACI reserves, forest concessions were still awarded when the Yavarí Mirim and Isconahua reserves were under consideration.³¹⁻³² Groups, such as the Evangelical Association Israelite Mission of the New Universal Pact, who preach that forests should be cleared for farming, have also contributed to high deforestation rates in the lower Amazonas-Yavarí region of the proposed corridor.³³

Our analysis shows that 500,000 hectares of the proposed corridor are overlapped by logging concessions, raising alarms about the future of the region and the people who call it home.

Roads in the Rainforest

Roads can catalyze deforestation up to 10 kilometers away, as unofficial roads grow from the highway “spine,” in what is called the “fishbone effect.”³⁴⁻³⁵ Two proposed highways in particular threaten lands within the Yavarí-Tapiche Corridor:³⁶ The first, which connects Cruzeiro do Sul in Brazil with Pucallpa in Peru, which cuts through the Isconahua PIACI Reserve, is under construction. The second highway would connect Jenaro Herrera in Loreto, Peru, to Colonia Angamos near Brazil in the Yavarí River basin. For now, a Peruvian court has stalled its construction, given the risks of exposure for PIACI communities, but the threat of future development remains.³⁷

Additional Threats

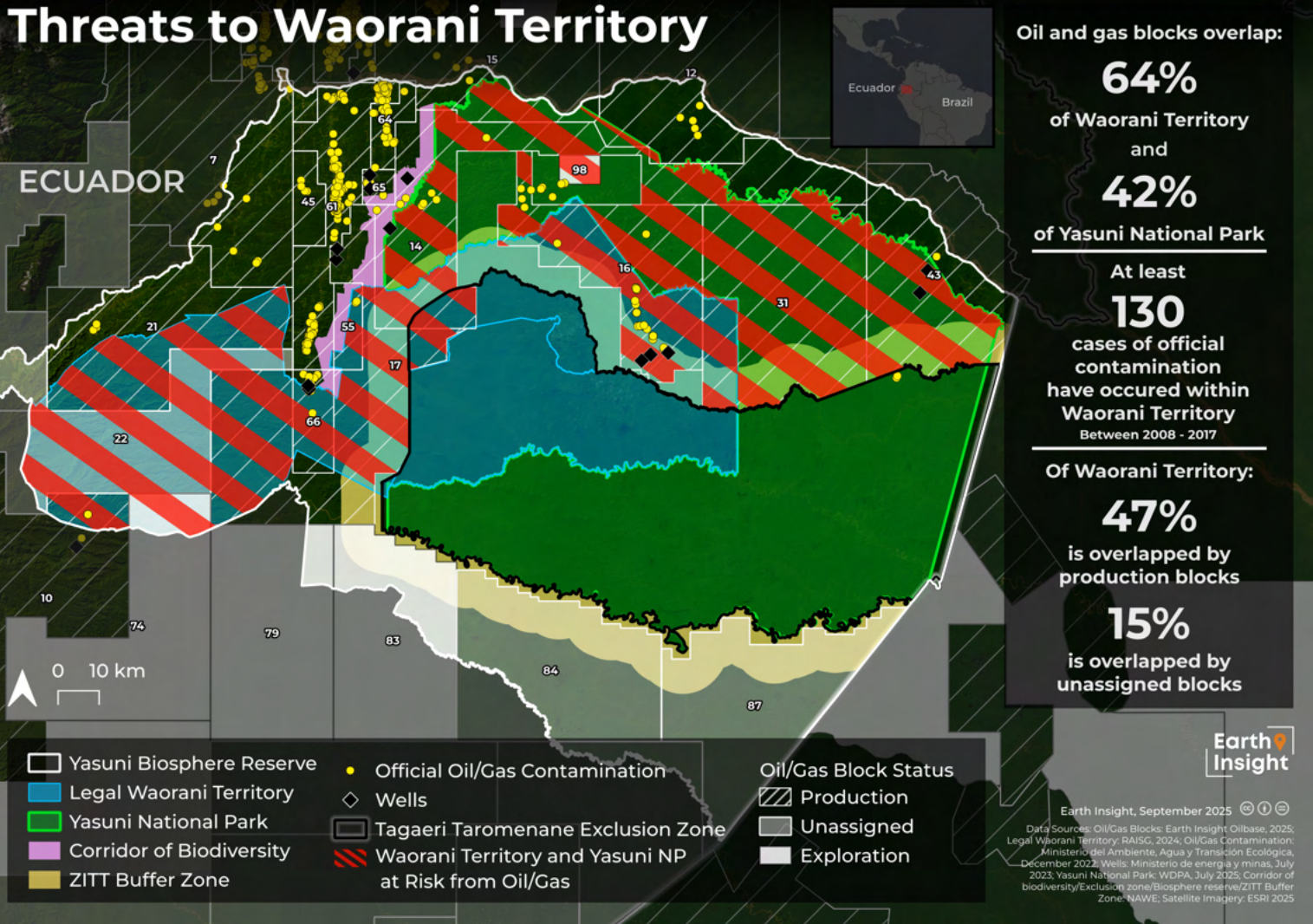
Illegal gold mining can be a vector of pathogens to which PIACI communities have no immunity. Cross-border drug trafficking that spreads from a central hub known as the “Three Frontiers” (where Colombia, Peru, and Brazil intersect) into Indigenous and PIACI territories, is known to use illegal logging, gold mining, and fishing as fronts to launder the profits.³⁸⁻³⁹ Illegal fishing and hunting also threaten the food security of Indigenous and PIACI communities. In a single day, for example, illegal fishers in the Vale do Javari Indigenous territory captured half a tonne of pirarucu fish and 700 turtles.⁴⁰

Bullets, Beef and Bibles

Political forces are working diligently to reverse recognition of Indigenous and PIACI territories. For example, in Brazil a front of ranchers, agribusiness, mining interests, and evangelical churches (often called the “Bullets, Beef, and Bible” caucus)⁴¹ regularly introduces legislation to undermine Indigenous rights, such as the Demarcation Framework and the recently passed “Devastation Bill,” which would limit Indigenous territories.⁴²⁻⁴³ A similar front in Peru has consistently proposed legislation (dubbed “genocide bills”) to erode PIACI territories.⁴⁴ In 2023, Indigenous groups in both Brazil and Peru who collaborated on the Yavarí-Tapiche Corridor initiative joined forces and defeated one of these bills.⁴⁵ In 2025, two new bills would allow oil and gas activity in PIACI territories and protected areas, redefine PIACI territories, and limit Indigenous participation in related policy decision-making.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ One of these bills would mandate that existing and proposed reserves be reviewed every six months and would grant politicians authority to modify or even cancel them—leaving PIACI dangerously exposed, with few long-term protections.⁴⁸

Indigenous groups in Peru are concerned that if these laws pass, within six months they could nullify all PIACI reserves and stop the creation of new ones.

Threats to Waorani Territory



We Defend Our Territory: A Campaign of Resistance in the Face of Decades of Impact

In the Ecuadorian Amazon, the scars of oil extraction run deep on the land, rivers, and lives of the Waorani people. Of more than 3,500 identified places polluted by Ecuador’s oil and gas sector, only half have ever been ecologically restored.⁴⁹ In a survey conducted by the Waorani Nationality of Ecuador (NAWE) last year, 50% of Waorani people reported experiencing impacts from oil pollution, from fewer fish in the rivers to poor harvests and scarce forest foods.⁵⁰ From July 2024 to March 2025, NAWE community monitor groups issued 30 reports on oil spills.⁵¹

After decades of resistance, Waorani communities started mobilizing under a campaign, *Ome Yasuni* (“We Defend Our Territory”).⁵² Legal Waorani territory extends over 800,000 hectares of the Ecuadorian Amazon, and our spatial analysis finds that 64% is overlapped by oil and gas blocks. In September 2025, the Waorani joined six other Indigenous groups to denounce the government’s “hydrocarbon roadmap” in which 18 of 49 proposed oil blocks overlap their territories.⁵³

Renewed threats including oil and gas extraction and hostile legislation demand that new generations of Waorani must take up *Ome Yasuni* and defend their territory.

Renewed threats

The Waorani in Ecuador’s Amazon had barely about a month to celebrate an historic victory in 2025 from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) before new threats emerged. Soon after the ruling, the country’s president announced the auction of oil blocks on some 2 million hectares of ancestral lands, and the legislature passed a new law in July 2025 that could weaken Indigenous land rights.⁵⁴

In *Tagaeri and Taromenane Peoples vs. Ecuador*, the IACHR found that the state had violated multiple rights of Waorani communities in voluntary isolation by permitting oil operations within and around Yasuní National Park.⁵⁵ The ruling also underscored the government’s failure to abide by a 2023 national referendum against oil drilling in the park. Despite a court order, only 4% of Yasuni’s oil wells have shut down.⁵⁶

In February 2025, the judge in the oil blocks case asked for a written statement of what it “means to be Waorani and what consultation means to them.”⁵⁷ In response, a delegation of elders, youth, and warriors marched through the streets of Quito in May 2025 to present their answer in person. Two months later, the Ecuadoran legislature passed a law to open management of conservation zones to private entities (including foreign companies) that could weaken Indigenous rights outlined in the 2008 Constitution.⁵⁸

In August 2025, the Waorani Nationality of Ecuador (NAWE), the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE), the National Organization of the Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon (OPIAC), and the Coordination of the Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB) issued an open letter of demands at the V Summit of the Presidents of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty in Bogotá, including a regional mandate to protect PIACI communities from oil and gas extraction and end oil activities in Yasuní National Park and the Intangible Zone, where PIACI people live.⁵⁹



Waorani Indigenous people lead a demonstration outside the Constitutional Court in Quito, Ecuador. Image credit: AP Photo/Dolores Ochoa



Ome Yasuní

Before oil operations and evangelical missionaries arrived in what elders called “the Civilization,”⁶⁰ the Waorani lived in voluntary isolation between the Napo and Curaray rivers in one of the Amazon’s most biodiverse regions. By 1972, the National Culture Law codified a presidential decree that stated “we all become white when we accept the goals of the national culture.”⁶¹ Waorani territory was dramatically fragmented by oil companies, whose extreme campaigns included air-dropping lit dynamite into villages to drive people from concession areas, while missionaries worked in collusion with the companies to force the Waorani into mission settlements.⁶²

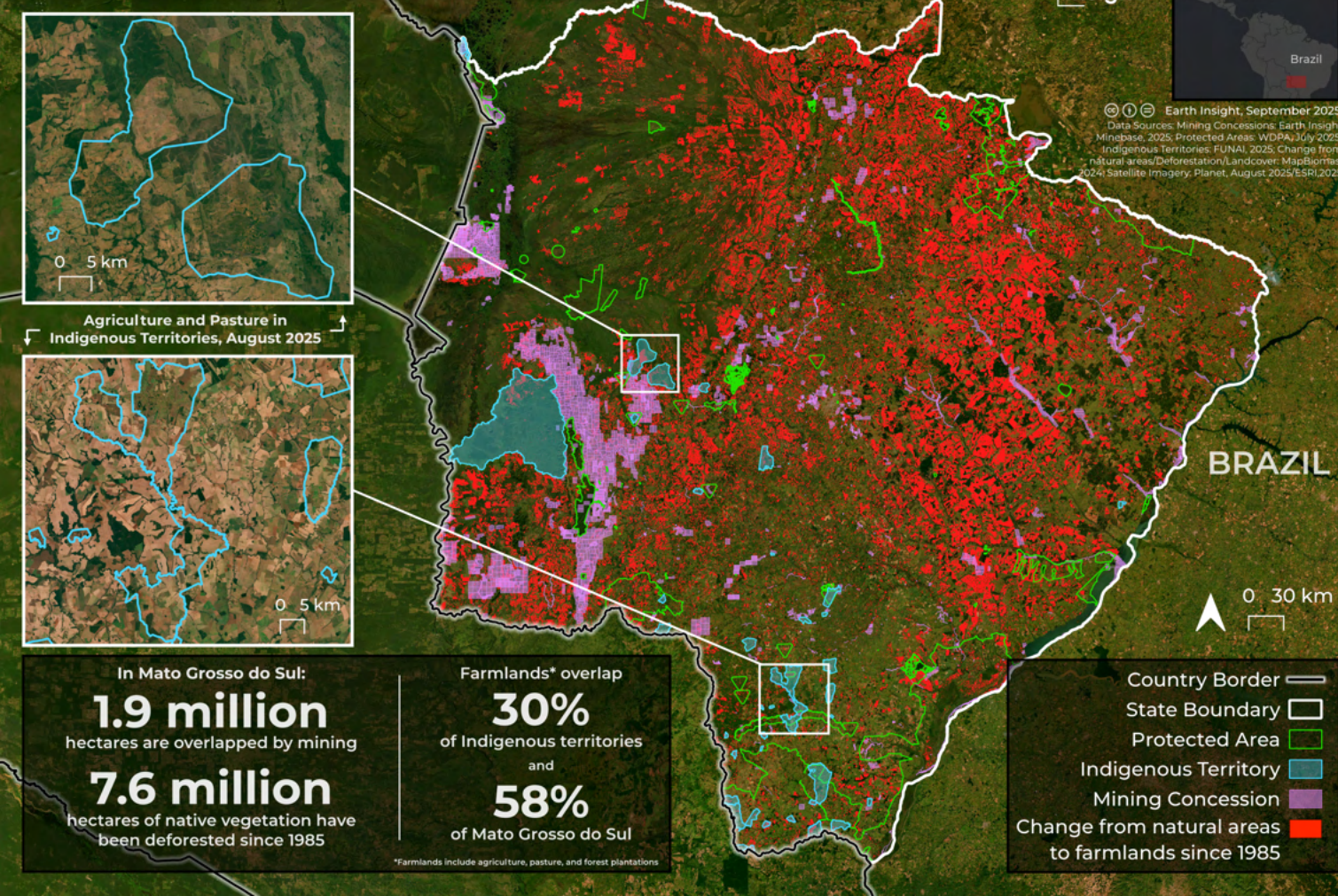
By 1999, both contacted Waorani groups and those living in voluntary isolation moved into the 758,000-hectare Intangible Zone, a conservation area off-limits to extractive activities.⁶³ Between 2021 and 2024, Waorani monitoring squads issued more than 1,000 threat alerts in their territory, including forest and plant extraction, deforestation, invasions, poaching and illegal fishing, pollution, road construction, and illegal mining.⁶⁴

Legal threats

The decades-long legal battles by Waorani have suffered from an intercultural schism between two governing systems: Indigenous and industrialized. As new generations of the Waorani defend their territory, the renewed threats from the hydrocarbon roadmap illustrate the vigilance required from every change in government administration.

Farmland Threats to Indigenous Peoples in Mato Grosso do Sul

Threats to Mato Grosso do Sul



Agriculture and Accelerating Impacts and Dangers to Indigenous Peoples

Mato Grosso do Sul (MS) is the epicenter of some of the most accelerated land-use conversions in Brazil, driven primarily by agriculture. It is also one of the most dangerous for Indigenous land defenders. Between 2003 and 2021, 608 Guarani-Kaiowá land activists were killed in Mato Grosso do Sul, which made the Guarani-Kaiowá the most threatened Indigenous group in the country.⁶⁵ The persistent, systematic violence against the Guarani-Kaiowá communities of Mato Grosso do Sul has led genocide scholars to introduce a specialized term, kaïowicide, to describe this targeted pattern of persecution.⁶⁶

A Trend That Must Be Halted and Reversed

In addition to violent conflict with these communities, agribusiness expansions threaten both the region's ecosystems and its water resources.⁶⁷ Our spatial analysis shows that 58%, or 21 million hectares, of Mato Grosso do Sul is now covered by farmland. One third, or 265,000 hectares, of Indigenous territories in the state are covered in farmland used for agriculture, livestock, and plantation forests. Most lands were cleared for agribusiness, primarily for pastures and soybean or eucalyptus plantations.⁶⁸ Intensive agriculture has devastated the Pardo River Watershed (PRW) in MS, with nearly 60% of the watershed covered by pastures.⁶⁹

Mato Grosso do Sul has the third highest Indigenous population in the country. After losing 99% of their ancestral lands, approximately 50,000 Guarani-Kaiowá Indigenous People now live in eight severely overcrowded reserves surrounded by industrial agriculture, and in one case, a high-income gated community.⁷⁰ Living quarters are so tight in some of the reservations that each family survives on less than two hectares of land, which is insufficient for traditional subsistence farming and cultural practices.⁷¹ Families lack access to clean water⁷² and food insecurity across the reservations in MS surpasses 76%.⁷³ Constant land grabs by agribusiness interests, private landholders, and real estate developments have intensified disputes. In 2023 alone, at least three communities experienced extrajudicial evictions shortly after trying to reclaim their lands.⁷⁴

Intertwined Crises

While the lack of space in the Indigenous reservations hinders subsistence farming, families nonetheless have cultivated small herbal gardens as part of their medicinal traditions. However, increasing water scarcity and the use of pesticides by industrial agriculture are making even these small gardens difficult to sustain.⁷⁵

Expanding agribusiness in Mato Grosso do Sul, driven by large-scale clearing of native forests, grasslands, and wetlands, has steadily eroded ancestral territories, fragmented ecosystems critical to traditional livelihoods and cultural practices, poisoned water sources, and limited families' ability to restore their health through Indigenous herbs.

At the same time, communities face recurrent episodes of violence linked to land disputes. Together, these pressures amount to intertwined crises that pose an existential threat to the Guarani-Kaiowá.



Pitaguary community members protest in Ceará, Brazil. Image credit: APIB

Indigenous Territorial Entities in the Colombian Amazon

For generations, Indigenous peoples in the Amazon have stewarded their territories based on Indigenous systems of government and governance, cultural and spiritual practices, and traditional knowledge systems. These diverse governance models reflect deep relationships with the forest, rivers, and wildlife and are rooted not in extraction or profit, but in harmony with nature. Yet colonial structures and their enduring legacies have repeatedly undermined these systems, threatening the survival of both Indigenous Peoples and the ecological integrity of the Amazon Basin.

In Colombia, Indigenous reserves have long provided a framework for protecting territories, but the 1991 Colombian Constitution marked a transformative step by formalizing Indigenous Territorial Entities, or Entidades Territoriales Indígenas (ETIs), as part of the political and administrative structure of the State. Importantly, ETIs are governed by Indigenous self-governance structures, which act as both public and territorial authorities. This legal recognition allows Indigenous Peoples to strengthen governance based on their knowledge systems, rather than external worldviews, a significant acknowledgment of their sovereignty and traditional stewardship, in constant interaction and engagement with third parties.⁷⁶

Advocating for Increased Recognition of ETIs

Despite the constitutional win, for over 30 years the Colombian State has failed to formalize ETIs, leaving Indigenous communities in a liminal space where their rights have been recognized on paper but difficult to exercise in practice. In 2018, persistent advocacy and organizing by Indigenous Peoples in the Amazon prompted the government to issue Decree Law 632, establishing clear mechanisms for formalizing ETIs in the departments of Guainía, Vaupés, and Amazonas.⁷⁷ This milestone represented important legal recognition of Amazonian Indigenous Peoples and their struggle for their constitutional rights. At the helm of this advocacy was Organización Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas de la Amazonía Colombiana (OPIAC), which continues to advocate for ETIs and provides the political and organizational backbone for Indigenous communities seeking recognition, formalization, and protection of their lands.

Today, 20 territories are in various stages of formalization, with another five territories expressing interest in the process.⁷⁸ Collectively, these 25 Indigenous territories cover 36% of the Colombian Amazon and play a central role in conservation. Remarkably, they maintain 99.5% of their natural cover intact, representing 41% of the region’s total forests as of 2023.⁷⁹ The formalization of ETIs ensures that these territories are legally recognized as entities with public functions similar to those of the institutions that are part of the Colombian State, empowering Indigenous Peoples to continue safeguarding biodiversity, mitigating climate change, and preserving irreplaceable cultural knowledge.

The story of ETIs illustrates that Indigenous governance is not only a matter of cultural survival and sovereignty—it is a global environmental imperative. As biodiversity loss accelerates and climate crises intensify, the traditional knowledge of Amazonian Indigenous Peoples offers solutions that the world can no longer afford to ignore. By formalizing their governance as an entity with public functions inherent to the institutions that form part of the Colombian State, Colombia has taken an important step toward recognizing these contributions and securing a future where both people and the planet can thrive.

“This historic step achieved by the Amazonian Indigenous movement will reaffirm the self-governance systems of the 64 peoples in the Colombian Amazon, leading to greater participation in the budget and in decision-making on public policies with an Amazon-specific approach, thereby strengthening Indigenous governance, which is directly linked to the conservation of nature and the life of all humanity.”

- Pablo Hernan Jamioy, Expert Advisor on Territory General Coordination of the Environment, OPIAC



Pablo Jamioy from OPIAC speaking at COP16 in Cali, Colombia.
Image credit: Earth Insight

Directing Financial Flows to Indigenous-Led Conservation and Territorial Defense

Access to sustained, flexible funding remains one of the greatest barriers for IPs and LCs seeking to protect their lands, defend their rights, and address climate change. The lack of funding reaching IPs and LCs directly leaves communities without the sustained, flexible resources needed to effectively steward nature against escalating threats. For Indigenous leaders, the urgency has been clear: they needed financial mechanisms designed and governed by themselves, reflecting their priorities and realities.

Building Indigenous-Led Financial Mechanisms

Across the Amazon and beyond, Indigenous communities have responded by building financial mechanisms to protect their territories and to sustain their ways of life. The creation of the Fundo Indígena da Amazônia Brasileira, or Podáali Fund, in 2020 marked an important milestone in these efforts. The Podáali Fund, launched by the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB) and its network, became the first fund created and led by Indigenous Peoples to cover the entire Brazilian Amazon. Podáali was designed to channel resources directly to grassroots Indigenous initiatives through collective, territory-based processes, with the goal of promoting self-determination, preserving cultural heritage, and ensuring autonomous and sustainable management of lands and resources.

Indigenous Territories and Local Communities on the Frontlines:

From its earliest years, Podáali has become a model for Indigenous-led finance. Its support extends beyond environmental protection, encompassing the broader struggle for rights, visibility, and cultural continuity. For example, in September 2021 the fund supported the 2nd Indigenous Women's March, mobilizing resources through a partnership with the *Fundo Brasil de Direitos Humanos* to respond to urgent demands from women leaders during their encampment in Brasília. Podáali's ability to move resources quickly in solidarity with movements on the ground directly to land defenders supports both the political and social fabric of Indigenous struggles. It is a replicable model to allow IPs and LCs not only to secure their rights but to protect the ecosystems so inherently tied to their cultural survival and the well-being of the planet.

While Podáali continues to scale its work across Brazil, similar initiatives are emerging globally to reshape how conservation and finance intersect. In 2022, Shandia, an Indigenous-led platform convened by GATC, was launched to accelerate direct access to finance for IPs and LCs worldwide. Still in its early days, Shandia connects investors and donors with Indigenous-led funds, offering a bridge between global capital flows and the local realities of communities stewarding some of the planet's most biodiverse and threatened territories. In Latin America, this momentum has also given rise to efforts like the Jaguatá Fund, which is strengthening Indigenous territorial governance and advancing community-driven conservation.

Global Momentum for Indigenous-Led Finance

These initiatives share a common principle: resources must flow directly to Indigenous Peoples and communities, who are best placed to decide how to sustain their territories, cultures, and futures. Yet the challenges remain steep. Structural barriers in traditional finance systems, political pressures from extractive industries, and limited long-term commitments from donors all constrain their potential. What is needed now is greater financial recognition of Indigenous-led mechanisms as legitimate, effective vehicles for conservation and climate action. Stable, long-term, and flexible funding can enable these funds not only to respond to crises, but also to build resilient systems rooted in self-determination.

The rise of Indigenous-led funds represents a profound shift in conservation finance. Instead of channeling resources through distant intermediaries, these funds put decision-making power in the hands of the communities who depend on and care for their lands. By sustaining and expanding these models, governments, donors, and investors can help ensure that the vision and leadership of Indigenous Peoples remain central to addressing the intertwined crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and cultural survival.

Mapping Threats and Solutions Across the World's Largest Tropical Forests



Fire in the Amazon rainforest.
Image credit: Wiki Commons

“Demarcation is Mitigation”: Indigenous Peoples’ NDC Call Coming Out of Brazil

The Brazilian Amazon, one of the world's most biodiverse and contested landscapes, has been at the center of decades of Indigenous organizing to defend nature, culture, and territorial rights. As climate change continues to intensify around the globe, the topic has become even more heated: Indigenous Peoples in Brazil have warned that without their territories, the climate crisis will spiral out of control. Yet despite constitutional guarantees, more than 270 Indigenous territories remain unrecognized, leaving them vulnerable to land grabbing, violence, and deforestation. These pressures are not only a threat to Indigenous communities—they undermine Brazil's ability to meet its Paris Agreement commitments. Nearly 75% of the country's greenhouse gas emissions come from deforestation and agriculture,⁸⁰ meaning that protecting forests is essential. Indigenous leaders know that their territories, which have the lowest deforestation rates in the country, are one of the most effective climate solutions for Brazil.

Territories as Climate Solutions

Faced with government inaction and escalating climate impacts, Indigenous Peoples in Brazil have recently come together to articulate their own vision: an Indigenous Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with the Paris Agreement. Coordinated by the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB) and regional Indigenous organizations, the initiative sets out clear, community-driven climate policies rooted in Indigenous governance and ancestral knowledge. Their message is simple and powerful: “Demarcation is mitigation.”⁸¹ This vision directly echoes the Brazzaville Declaration, which asserts that Indigenous territories are central to biodiversity protection, climate stability, and cultural survival.

The Indigenous NDC, formally launched in August 2025, is a collective achievement built through exchanges among leaders across Brazil and the Amazon Basin and in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples from the Congo Region, Indonesia, and Central America.⁸² The demands include immediate demarcation of all Indigenous territories with declaratory ordinances, legal protection for Peoples in Voluntary Isolation, recognition of Indigenous economies, and direct access to at least 40% of climate finance. Equally important, it calls for full Indigenous participation in national and international climate decision-making.

Redefining Climate Policy Through Indigenous Leadership

The potential of this process is already clear. For the first time, Brazil’s climate debate includes a comprehensive, Indigenous-led plan that directly connects territorial rights with mitigation, adaptation, and just transition. The Indigenous NDC reframes territories not as passive protected areas but as active climate policies. It also centers women and youth as leaders, ensuring intergenerational perspectives shape governance.

By advancing the Indigenous NDC, Brazil’s Indigenous Peoples bring the Brazzaville Declaration to life. This shows how territorial rights, justice, and ancestral knowledge form the foundation of climate and biodiversity solutions. Indigenous leadership offers not only a path for Brazil, but a global model: when Indigenous Peoples are at the center, climate goals become achievable.



Demarcation Now! Brazil’s Indigenous Movement Secures Land Recognition Victories at Annual Free Land Camp.
Image credit: Raissa Azeredo

Congo Region

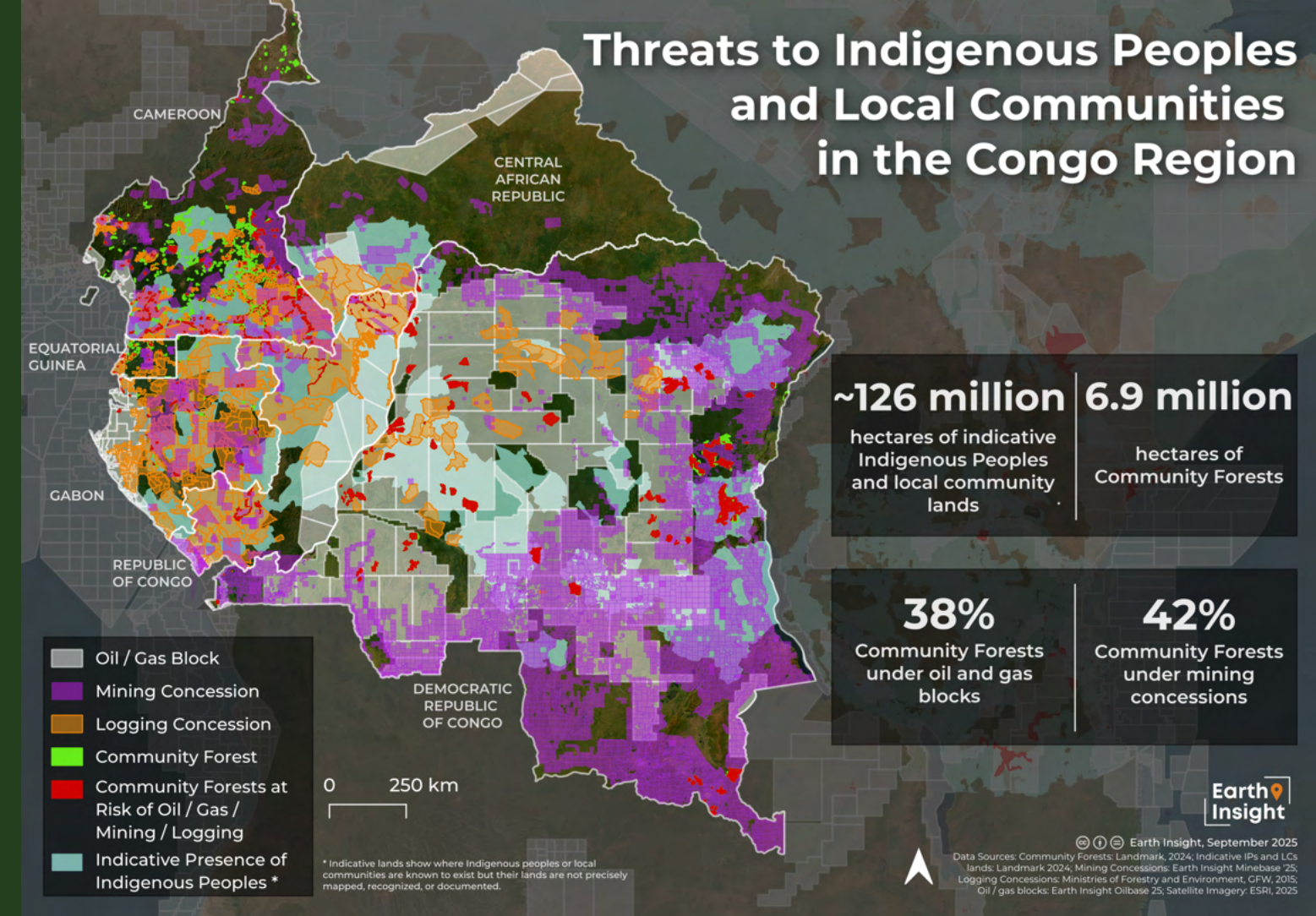


Women carrying baskets in the forests of the DRC.
Image credit: © Hugo Metz/If Not Us Then Who via REPALEAC



“The Congo Region is the second-largest tropical forest in the world and the most important carbon sink on Earth. It regulates Africa’s rainfall systems, safeguards extraordinary biodiversity, and sustains the lives of millions of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Our peoples have protected these forests for generations through customary systems of land management, yet our rights remain fragile. Land grabbing, oil and gas projects, mining, logging, and agro-industrial expansion continue to violate our territories and threaten our survival. At REPALEAC, we represent a united front of Indigenous and local communities across eight Central African countries who are advancing Indigenous conservation models, climate solutions rooted in ancestral knowledge, and land tenure reforms. If the world is truly committed to climate justice, it must support and finance the protection of the Congo Region through the leadership of its original custodians. We are not the beneficiaries—we are the architects of a different future.”

- Joseph Itongwa,
Regional Coordinator, REPALEAC



Situated in the heart of Africa, the Congo Region is one of the world’s most significant tropical forest and wetland complexes. Second in size only to the Amazon, its forests possess some of the greatest carbon sequestration capacity on Earth. Spanning approximately 200 million hectares across several countries, the rich ecosystems of the Congo Region are vital for biodiversity, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and the future climate stability of the planet. The region’s complex matrix of natural resources is home to Indigenous Peoples and forest-dwelling communities whose deep knowledge of the ecosystems have supported their subsistence and stewardship of the land for millennia.

Today, the Congo Region faces mounting threats from industrial logging, mining, oil extraction, and large-scale agriculture, which are degrading high-functioning ecosystems while displacing communities from their ancestral territories.⁸³ In many areas, extractive concessions directly overlap with community lands, undermining both cultural survival and conservation. In response, community forests have emerged as a powerful model of locally led management in many jurisdictions. Legally recognized and rooted in traditional practices, these forests enable communities to secure rights, protect biodiversity and traditional ecological knowledge, and resist unsustainable exploitation.⁸⁴

The Congo Region also plays an outsized role in global climate regulation, acting as a carbon sink of international significance. However, scientists warn that the Congo Region is approaching a critical tipping point⁸⁵—and the consequences will be felt far beyond central Africa.



TRIDOM Landscape: High Concentrations of Indigenous Peoples at Risk

The Trinational Dja-Odzala-Minkébé Area (TRIDOM) landscape, spanning 17.8 Mha across the Republics of Congo, Gabon, and Cameroon, represents nearly 10% of Central Africa’s tropical forests.⁸⁶ The TRIDOM landscape is one of the most pristine forest areas in the world, with 97% of the landscape retaining forest cover and a high proportion of primary forest. As one of the few remaining areas on earth with significant old-growth forest cover and low deforestation, the TRIDOM landscape holds global significance for climate and biodiversity conservation. These forests support endangered species including forest elephants, great apes, and countless other plants and animals. Beyond its ecological value, the TRIDOM region is home to the largest Indigenous population in Central Africa (at least 10,000 Indigenous Peoples), with a very low population density (1–3 inhabitants/km²).⁸⁷ For the region’s diverse Indigenous Peoples and local communities, cultural heritage, knowledge systems, and livelihoods are deeply tied to the forest.

Indigenous Territories and Local Communities on the Frontlines:

The TRIDOM region has invested heavily in the concept of community forests. In many cases, community forests form the basis for social and economic development for local communities, in addition to acting as instruments of natural resource management and conservation. Community forests within the TRIDOM landscape serve as a cornerstone for sustainable land management and a buffer against the growing pressures of deforestation and industrial exploitation. By granting local communities legal rights to manage forests, community forests enable traditional practices of stewardship, ensure access to natural resources, and generate local economic opportunities through small-scale forestry, agroforestry, and non-timber forest products. They also play a key role in climate resilience, supporting carbon storage, and safeguarding watersheds that supply water for people, agriculture, and wildlife alike.

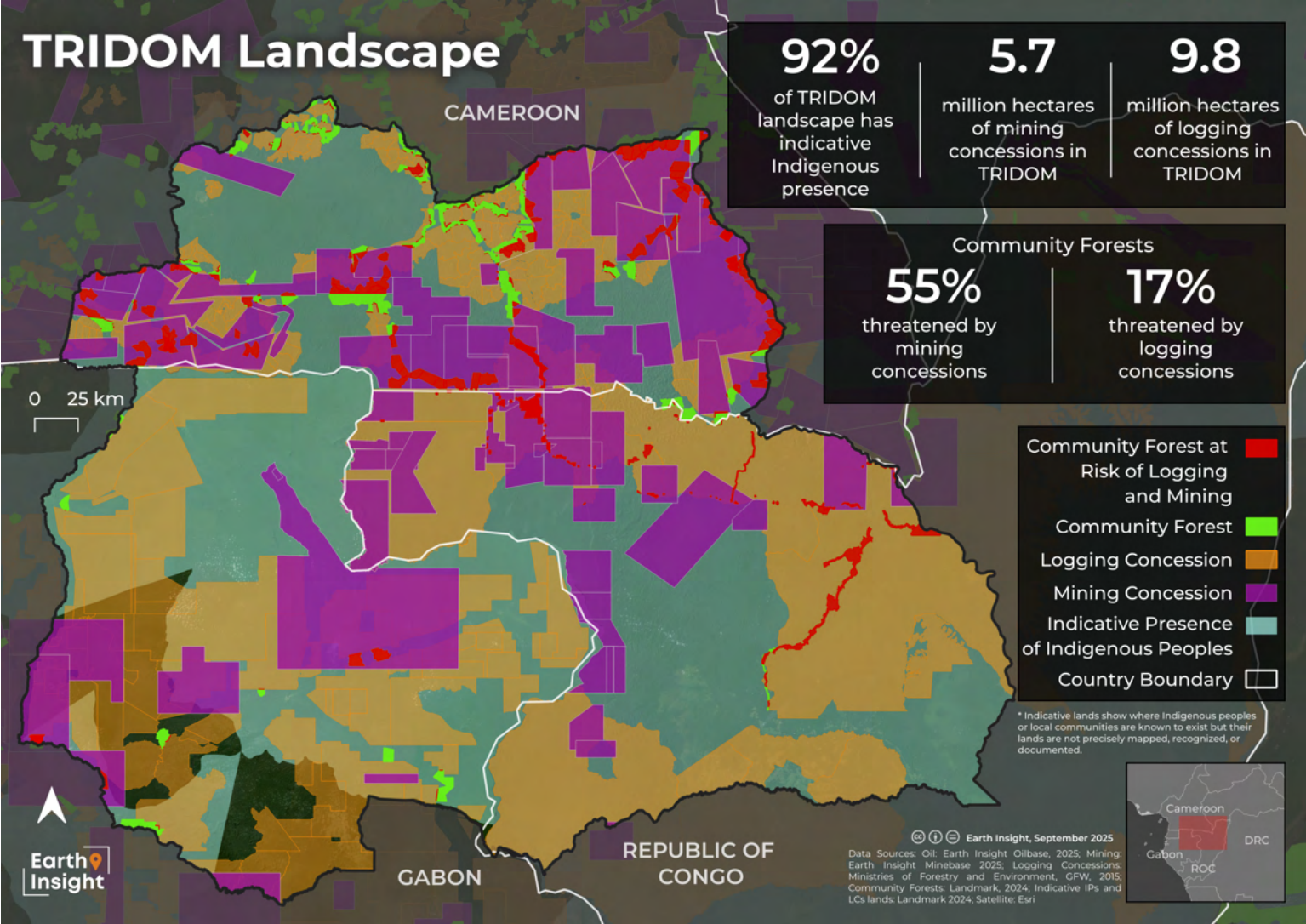


The daily life of the Baka people in Cameroon, who continue their ancient traditions of hunting and gathering while living along the forest's edge.
Image credit: Getty Images - Anadolu

Mounting Threats from Extractive Industries

Unfortunately, these community forests are under mounting threat from extractive industries. New maps reveal that 55% of all community forests in TRIDOM overlap with mining concessions, while an additional 17% are overlapped by logging concessions. This means that the very areas set aside to empower communities and preserve ecosystems are increasingly at risk of industrial exploitation. In practice, this overlap undermines the security of community land rights and exposes forests to degradation from mining roads, logging camps, and associated infrastructure.

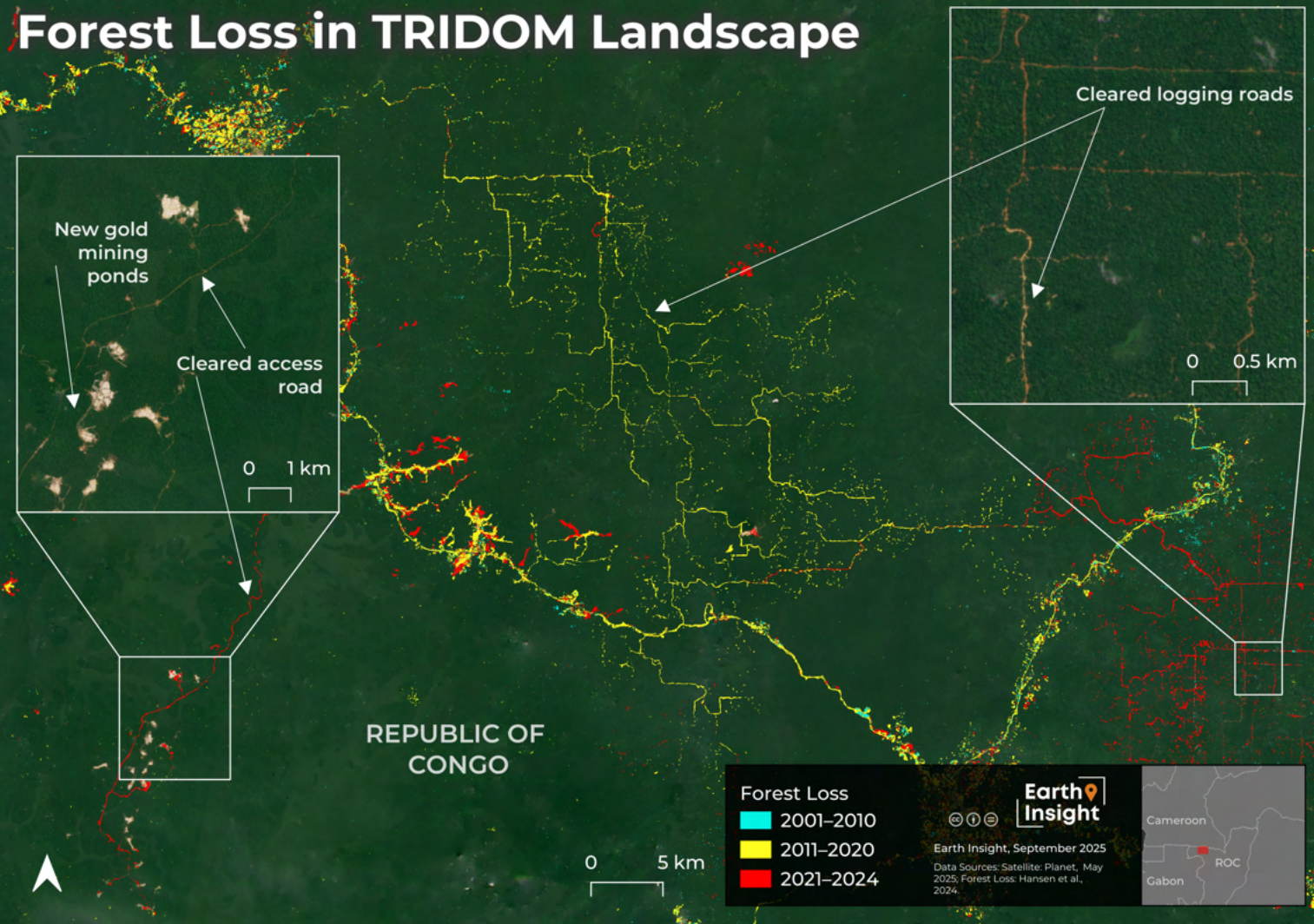
TRIDOM Landscape



For Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the TRIDOM region, the stakes are especially high. Many rely on hunting, fishing, and small-scale farming for subsistence, alongside the collection of medicinal plants and forest products for trade. When extractive industries move in, communities not only lose access to these resources but are often sidelined in decision-making processes. Promises of compensation or employment rarely materialize in meaningful ways, leaving local people to bear the costs of environmental destruction without reaping the supposed benefits of development. The overlap of concessions with community forests also raises concerns about legal conflicts and the erosion of hard-won land rights, making communities vulnerable to displacement and marginalization.

The TRIDOM landscape holds immense conservation value, and the loss of its ecosystems would have devastating consequences for biodiversity, local communities, and the global climate. Consequently, significant investment has gone into establishing 22 protected areas across the TRIDOM region, covering 4.9 million hectares, or nearly one third of the landscape. Yet logging and mining concessions continue to overlap these protections, with 1.1 million hectares of protected areas overlapped by mining concessions and 500,000 hectares overlapped by logging concessions. Encroachment by extractive industries undermines the very purpose of safeguarding this landscape for present and future generations and threatens the integrity of the transboundary conservation initiatives so many stakeholders have fought for.

Forest Loss in TRIDOM Landscape



The impacts of the mining and logging industries in the TRIDOM landscape are increasingly visible in satellite imagery. On the border between Cameroon and the Republic of Congo, mapping shows older forest loss (between 2011 and 2020) along informal roads, now-established mines, and logging roads. The most recent forest loss data (2021–2024) shows the clearing of new logging roads and access roads for a new mine site, and high-resolution satellite imagery from May 2025 shows the new gold-mining ponds, indicating the expansion of resource extraction in this landscape.

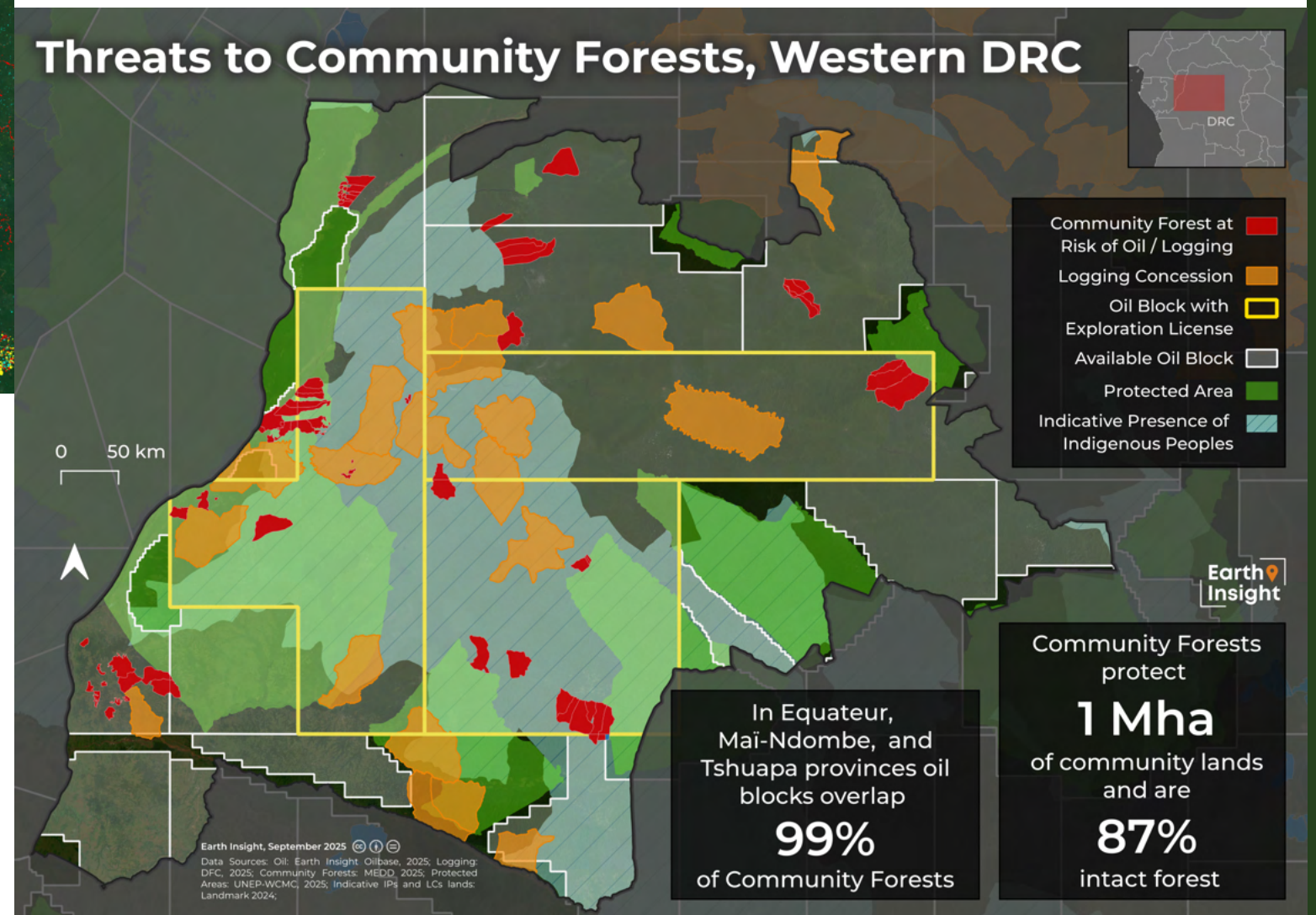
The TRIDOM landscape stands at a crossroads: while it remains one of the planet’s most intact forest regions, the rapid expansion of extractive industries threatens to unravel decades of conservation progress and jeopardize the rights and livelihoods of the people who call it home.



Logging truck transporting timber to the coast, in Southeast Cameroon. Image credit: Getty Images - Avalon

Community Forests in the Western DRC

The Cuvette Centrale, a vast mosaic of swamp forest and peatlands spanning the central Congo Region across the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo, is among the planet’s most carbon-dense landscapes. Amidst its tree canopy and rich rivers, the area stores roughly 30 billion tonnes of carbon, making it a globally important climate reservoir whose integrity is critical to avoid large-scale carbon emissions.⁸⁸



In 2025, a relaunch of a major national licensing round opened dozens of oil blocks that together extend across vast tracts of the DRC, explicitly including large parts of the Cuvette Centrale peatlands. Provinces including Equateur, Mai-Ndombe, and Tshuapa are caught in the crosshairs of these oil blocks, where both people and nature are threatened by extraction.



Bee house maintenance in the DRC forests.
Image credit: Axel Fassio/CIFOR-ICRAF

Community Forests: Local Stewardship at Risk

Community forests, locally managed forest areas that are legally or customarily governed by forest-dependent communities, sit at the intersection of livelihoods, culture, and environmental stewardship across much of the western DRC. New mapping shows that 99% of community forests in these provinces are now overlapped by oil blocks, putting customary governance and food security for local communities at risk.

The negative consequences of overlapping oil blocks and community forests are numerous and reinforcing. On the ground, seismic surveys, access roads, drill pads, and associated extractive activities can fracture forests and ecosystems that communities depend on, catalyze illegal logging and bushmeat markets, and contaminate waterways—directly undermining the resources that many communities rely on.

From a climate change perspective, the combination of vegetation removal, peat drainage, and the potential for accidental spills or fires risks releasing enormous amounts of carbon.

The overlap of oil concessions with community-managed forests in the western DRC’s Cuvette Centrale presents a convergence of ecological, climate, and social threats. Protecting these landscapes requires urgent attention to uphold community stewardship, safeguard carbon-rich peatlands, and prevent irreversible environmental and social harm. Without intervention, the consequences will extend far beyond provincial boundaries, threatening one of the world’s most critical reservoirs of biodiversity and carbon.

The Democratic Republic of Congo’s “Pygmy Law”

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is home to one of the world’s most biodiverse tropical forest regions, central to global climate stability and ecological health. Within these forests live countless species of plants and animals—as well as the Indigenous Mbuti, Baka, and Batwa peoples, who have relied on the forest for millennia. Traditionally hunter-gatherers, their communities are distinct from non-Indigenous populations, largely of Bantu origin, who migrated to the region later through agricultural and pastoral practices.

Today, however, Indigenous Peoples in the DRC face some of the country’s harshest living conditions. Limited access to healthcare, education, and subsistence opportunities reflects both systemic discrimination and the loss of access to forests that once sustained their livelihoods. For generations, they have been excluded from decisions concerning their ancestral lands, denied legal recognition, and left vulnerable to land grabs, resource exploitation, and human rights abuses.

A Historic Breakthrough

After decades of advocacy, the adoption of Law No. 22/030 in November 2022 represented a transformative milestone. Widely known as the Pygmy Law, the law formally recognized, for the first time in the DRC’s history, the country’s Indigenous Pygmy peoples as a distinct population with specific rights.⁸⁹ The law enshrines their access to basic services, cultural protections, political participation, and, critically, recognition of their ties to land and natural resources.

The Pygmy Law was the product of sustained grassroots organizing. Indigenous organizations, most prominently the Réseau des Populations Autochtones et Locales pour la Gestion des Écosystèmes Forestiers d’Afrique Centrale (REPALEAC), were instrumental in this success. REPALEAC mobilized communities across provinces, documented rights violations, and carried Indigenous voices into national and international arenas.

Implementation and Next Steps

Recognition on paper is only the beginning. In April 2025, the DRC government launched a national implementation framework that convened 118 entities—including Indigenous representatives, state ministries, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—to guide the law’s rollout.⁹⁰ The inclusion of Indigenous representatives marked a significant departure from past exclusion, ensuring that communities themselves help shape how the law is applied.

In July 2025, a complementary land-use planning law was passed, reinforcing the spirit of inclusion. This law emphasizes decentralized, participatory planning processes designed to empower Indigenous communities and improve land governance across the country. Together, the two reforms lay a foundation for more equitable decision-making and secure community land rights.

Significance and Future Opportunities

The Pygmy Law and its implementation framework represent a watershed moment for Indigenous rights in the DRC. They correct centuries of exclusion while embedding mechanisms for inclusive governance aligned with the country’s commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The law also carries profound implications for conservation. Global studies consistently show that forests under Indigenous management exhibit higher biodiversity and lower deforestation rates.⁹¹ By recognizing Indigenous rights, the DRC is not only advancing social justice but also reinforcing forest stewardship and strengthening the intersection of climate, biodiversity, and human rights.

The Pygmy Law stands as a landmark achievement for Indigenous Peoples in the Congo Region, advancing justice while reinforcing environmental stewardship. It demonstrates how Indigenous leadership, supported by persistent advocacy and inclusive governance reforms, can reshape national policy toward equity and sustainability. Implementation will require sustained political will, funding, and coordination across sectors. Civil society continues to stress that laws alone cannot end marginalization; systemic change requires accountability, monitoring, and grassroots capacity-building. Still, as implementation progresses, the DRC offers an important lesson for other nations about how conservation and climate resilience depend on recognizing and empowering the peoples who have safeguarded forests for generations.

A Model for Decolonized and Community-Led Conservation in Cameroon

For more than a century, most conservation in the Congo Region has been dominated by a model of fortress conservation—one that treats humans as threats and ecosystems as critical areas to be sealed off from access by people. From militarized park management to the forced displacement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, this model has been marked by exclusion, coercion, and violence. Increasing evidence shows the opposite is true: there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that IPs and LCs are some of the most effective custodians of biodiversity in the world, and retaining their authority over their territories leads to overwhelmingly positive outcomes for biodiversity.⁹² Increasingly, conservation actors are realizing that effective conservation cannot just be imposed from above—it must be entrusted to the people who live in and with these landscapes.

Advancing Community-based Conservation

This is the philosophy at the heart of Ajemalebu Self Help (AJESH), a civil society organization founded in 2006 and based in Nyasoso, Cameroon. Since 2014, AJESH has partnered with the Rainforest Foundation UK (RFUK) to develop an alternative model of conservation that is decolonized, community-led, and rooted in respect. Rather than displacing people to “protect” nature, AJESH works to ensure communities are recognized as the rightful leaders of conservation, blending Indigenous knowledge, modern science, and participatory governance to build durable solutions.

The AJESH creed captures this ethos:

We don’t just live beside people; we live with them. We don’t just teach them; we learn from them. People don’t just know us; they understand us. We are not all-knowing experts; we are committed participants. We are not a replacement; we are facilitators.

Replacing Colonial Processes Through Trust

Putting this vision into practice begins with trust. AJESH meets communities on their own terms, through local radio broadcasts, posters, and open days that spark dialogue and strengthen relationships. Building on their foundation of trust, AJESH supports participatory processes to reclaim traditional forms of natural resource governance and management. They support communities in documenting their lands through mapping, bringing together traditional knowledge of sacred sites, hunting grounds, and farming areas with modern tools like acoustic bio-monitoring to track forest health. These maps do more than secure tenure and defend against land grabs—they provide a shared language for dialogue with councils, ministries, and conservation authorities.

Capacity building is another cornerstone of putting community-led conservation models into action. Through education and peer-to-peer learning, communities gain tools to lead their own conservation planning processes. AJESH facilitates participatory land-use plans that balance ecological priorities with local needs, ensuring that conservation strategies also support livelihoods, food security, and cultural continuity. Collaborative governance based on local customs drives conservation initiatives, with councils, ministries, researchers, and NGOs all brought to the table to negotiate decisions transparently. Crucially, all of this aligns with national legal frameworks, ensuring that community leadership is not only respected but recognized in policy.



Members of AJESH monitoring deforestation and degradation in Cameroon.
Image credit: AJESH



Community land-use planning in Cameroon.
Image credit: AJESH

A Living Example and Scaling Successes

The results of centering community-based conservation speak for themselves across Cameroon. For example, in the Rumpi Hills and Mount Rata reserves, soon to be designated the Rumpi-Rata National Park, the Ngolo, Bima, and Balue peoples are co-shaping conservation plans for their ancestral lands. Their forest homelands harbor endangered chimpanzees, African forest elephants, and rare amphibians. Across southwestern Cameroon, AJESH has supported 49 participatory maps in the Ebo Forest, 13 community land-use plans, and freshwater conservation at Lake Barombi Mbo and Lake Bermin. Wildlife monitoring now takes place in Yabassi, Nlonako, Banyang Mbo, Bakossi, and beyond, with communities themselves leading the work.

This is more than a local success. AJESH’s approach demonstrates that community-led conservation is replicable wherever there is ecological urgency, community readiness, and political space for participation. In Cameroon alone, scaling this model could enable communities to help manage 37 currently unprotected Key Biodiversity Areas, including vast stretches of the Mone River Basin. Globally, it provides a roadmap for moving beyond fortress conservation and toward approaches that uphold both biodiversity and justice.

AJESH’s experience shows that when conservation is entrusted, not enforced, it flourishes. By dismantling the fortress and elevating community leadership, AJESH is helping to build a future where people and nature thrive together, urgently needed in the Congo Region and across bioculturally rich regions of the world.

Indonesia

Indonesia is one of the world's most critical countries for biodiversity, climate regulation, and Indigenous stewardship. Its vast rainforests, peatlands, and mangroves play an outsized role in absorbing carbon and sustaining planetary stability and its archipelago is home to extraordinary cultural and ecological diversity.



Coastal mangroves in Indonesia.
Image credit: Steven Lutz, GRID-Arendal



Our Indigenous territories—from the forests of Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, to Papua, the coast, and the sea—are a source of life rooted in ancestral traditions, the last bastion of biodiversity, and a pillar of global climate balance. However, the expansion of mining, palm oil, and development projects has taken more than 11.7 million hectares of Indigenous territories in a decade.

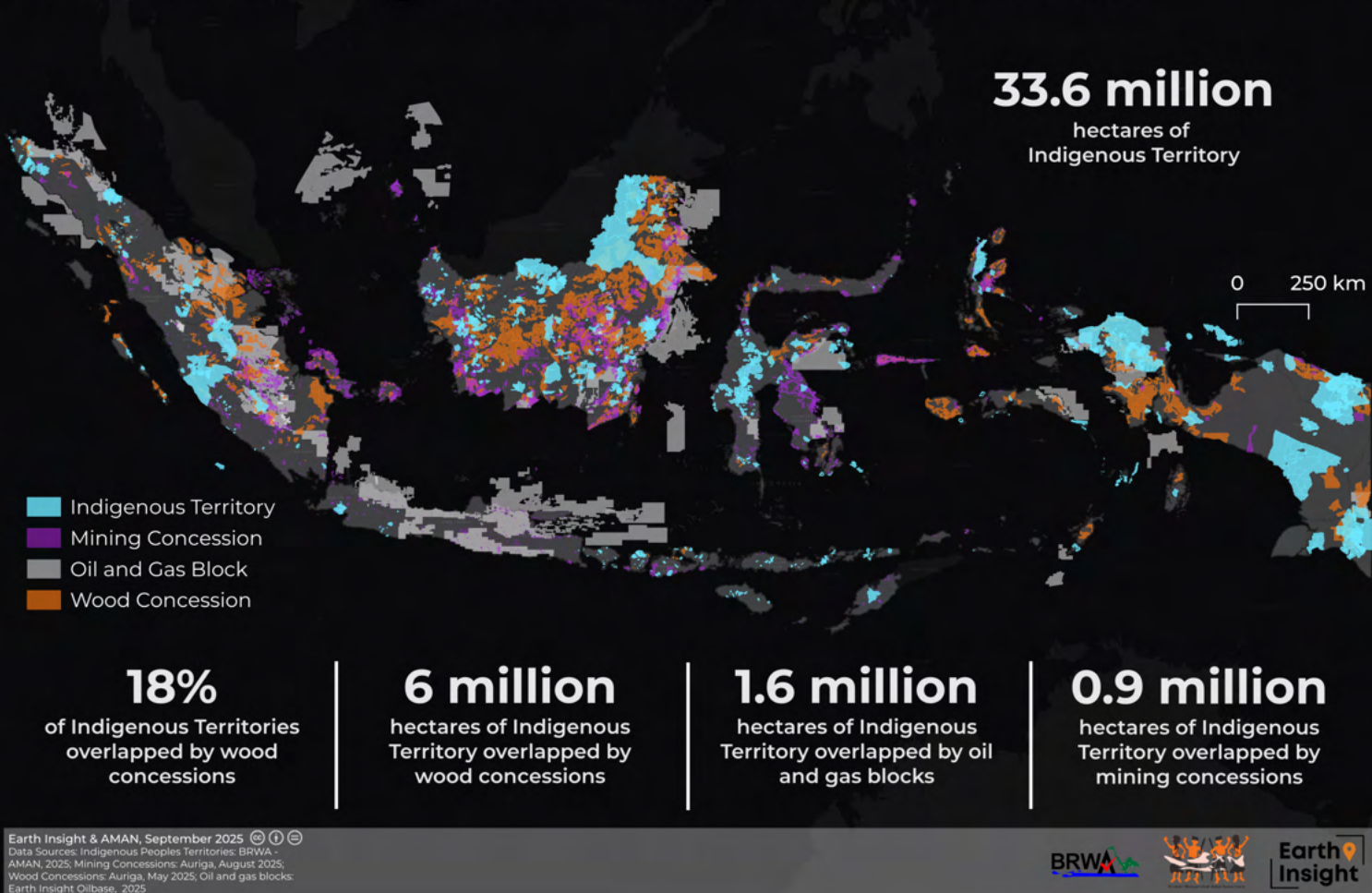
We are not standing idly by! We are rising up: mapping Indigenous territories, enforcing Indigenous laws, and strengthening self-governance. All for the sake of protecting our forests, coasts, and seas. Indigenous territories are our lives, and also the last bastion of the world's climate. More than 11.7 million hectares have been seized, but we will not give up. The world must know: sustainability can only be achieved through the sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples.

To the world we cry out: stop the land grabbing, stop the destruction of forests, oceans, and coastlines. Respect the sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples to save the climate and life. The Answer is Us! Jawabannya Adalah Kita!

- Rukka Sombolinggi, Secretary General of Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN)

While the Indonesian government has recognized less than 1% of more than 25 million hectares of Indigenous territories,⁹³ it has granted 23.8 million hectares of land to palm oil plantations, 18.8 million hectares to logging concessions, and 9 million hectares to mining companies.⁹⁴ From 2014–2024, Indigenous Peoples in Indonesia lost 11 million hectares of Indigenous territory, an area larger than South Korea, which has resulted in nearly 700 land conflicts.⁹⁵ Our analysis found 6 million hectares of Indigenous lands (18%) are currently overlapped by wood concessions, 1.6 million hectares (5%) overlapped by oil and gas blocks, and 0.9 million hectares (3%) overlapped by mining concessions. Through their struggles, at least 925 Indigenous people have faced criminal charges and 60 have suffered violence at the hands of authorities.⁹⁶ At the First Global Congress of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities from Forest Basins in May 2025, a delegation from the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN) briefed the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples about “a systematic and structured pattern” in which both the government and private sector suppress resistance to land seizures and resource extraction projects.⁹⁷

Threats to Indigenous Peoples in Indonesia





Nickel mining in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia.
Image credit: Courtesy of Auriga Nusantara/Yudi Nofiandi

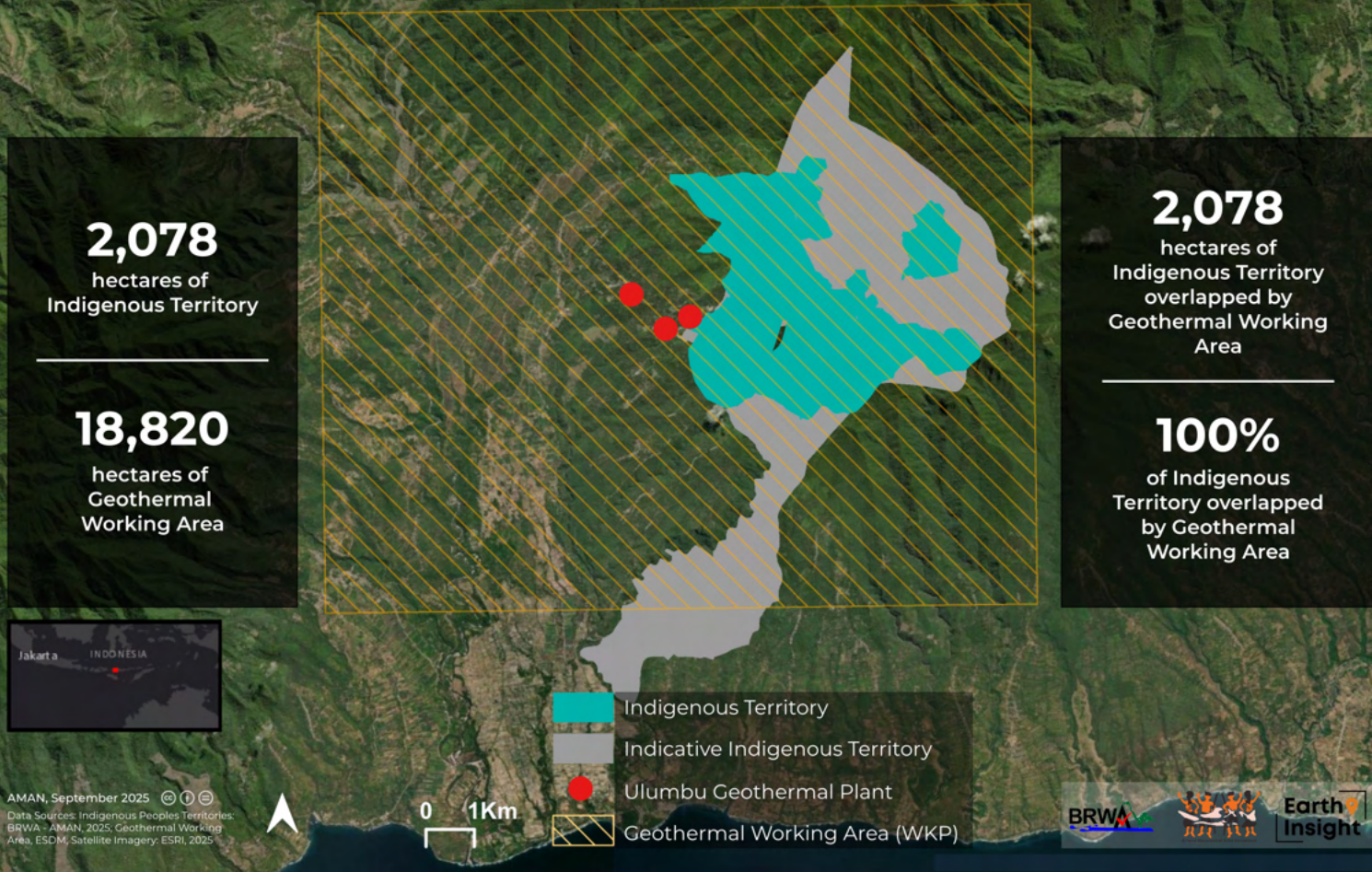
Threats posed by the Energy Transition

The energy transition and increasing demand for energy in Indonesia has accelerated the issuance of permits on Indigenous lands for national strategic projects, including coal-fired power plants, nickel mining and processing, and the production of biodiesel, bioethanol, and woody biomass.⁹⁸ However, when Indigenous communities raise the issue of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), Indonesian laws and military and police force are used against them. For example, mining laws that favor business interests are wielded as a “powerful weapon” against any resistance.⁹⁹ Recorded evidence has caught mining company representatives trying to undermine Indigenous authority.¹⁰⁰ As a result, these communities risk legal persecution simply by defending their territories.

The case studies below describe a violent pattern of corporate and state collusion to steamroll industry concessions, from geothermal energy to nickel mining to pulp and timber, on Indigenous territories. This pattern is repeated across industrial concessions. For example, an analysis of 150 community conflicts with palm oil companies across four Indonesian provinces tallied 16 fatalities and 195 injured villagers in an escalation of tactics that began with attempts to co-opt local leaders and authorities and resorted to oppressive tactics against protests and the criminalization of community leaders.¹⁰¹

Geothermal Development on Pocoleok Indigenous Territory

Threats to Pocoleok Indigenous Territory



Flores Island: Ensuring the Energy Transition Doesn't Cause More Problems

Flores Island, in Indonesia's Lesser Sundas and the Wallacea Archipelago, is in the heart of a volcanic ring of fire. Surrounded by deep ocean straits, Flores's lush monsoon forests and drylands provide habitat for its exceptional endemic biodiversity, including 17 endemic bird species, such as the endangered Flores Hawk eagle, and five endemic mammals including the critically endangered Flores shrew.¹⁰²

The island is also home to 14 traditional communities, or gendang, of the Pocoleok traditional territory in the Manggarai Regency of East Nusa Tenggara Province. In the Manggarai language, “poco” means hill, and “leok” means circular, making Pocoleok a reference to the surrounding hills including Golo Mompong, their original ancestral settlement where ritual altars, or compang, still remain.

Pocoleok culture is rooted in a value system called “Gendang One, Lingko’n Peang,” which centers village life around a traditional hall and territories. Since the Pocoleok regard the land as the giving mother of all life, harming it is tantamount to insulting a mother. Today, as for generations, the Pocoleok live from subsistence farming and processing tuak (palm sap).

This biocultural diversity is at risk from geothermal development on Flores Island.

Our spatial analysis shows that more than 2,000 hectares—representing 100% of Indigenous Territories—are within the geothermal working area where the Ulumbu geothermal plants operate.



The Sokoria geothermal power plant in Ende, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia.

Image credit: AJESH

An Island of Flowers

In 2017 the Ministry of Energy declared Flores a “Geothermal Island” to power electricity demand from 11 mining areas and manganese smelters in the Manggarai district.¹⁰³ Seven years later, in 2024, the Pocoleok learned their traditional territory was designated as the site for a proposed geothermal plant. They rejected the project due to a lack of transparency in the policy-making process and a failure to follow free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC).¹⁰⁴

Their opposition to the project spanned 10 villages that staged more than 27 mass protests, with growing support from civil society and churches. At one rally, residents held signs proclaiming, “Flores is an island of flowers, not a geothermal island.”¹⁰⁵ The Pocoleok residents have advocated to human rights institutions at both the national and international levels, including sending a letter to the German Development Bank (KfW) demanding it cease funding the geothermal project. In response, in November

2024, an independent KfW review team recommended suspending funding due to the project’s failure to meet international environmental and social standards. Following this recommendation, the Pocoleok reiterated their call for a permanent end to the project, not merely a temporary pause.

In March 2025, the Archdiocese of Ende issued a statement rejecting the geothermal project given its potential impact on both the environment and Indigenous lives, noting: “For a project of this scale, transparency and community involvement are crucial.”¹⁰⁶

Fraying the social fabric

For the Pocoleok people, the appropriation of their ancestral lands for the geothermal plant poses a threat to their cultural identity, livelihood, and food security, which are inseparable from their land, territory, and natural resources. Because the geothermal exploration sites overlap with sacred areas, drilling and construction risk desecrating these places, with profound cultural and spiritual impacts.¹⁰⁷

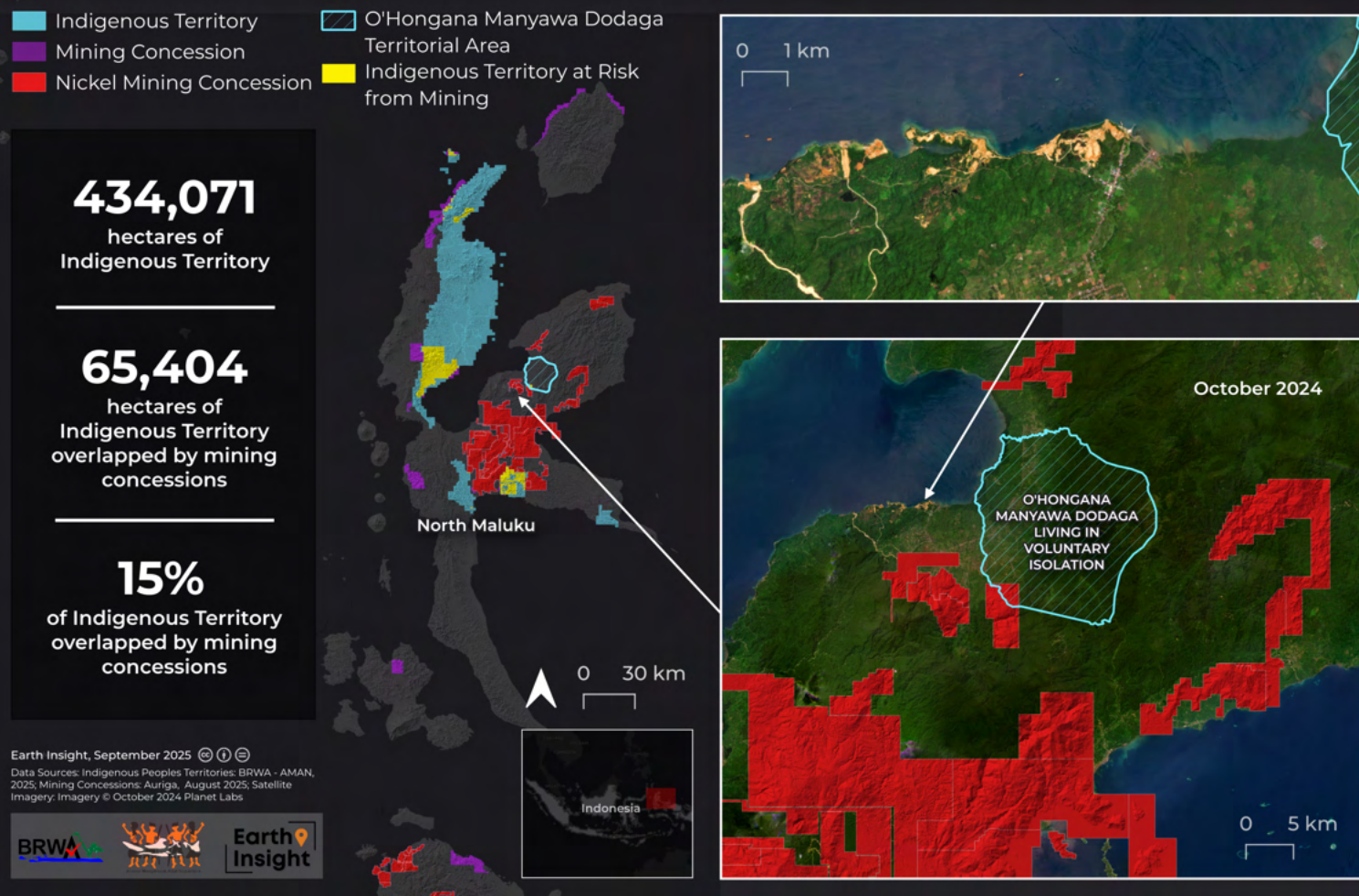
The proposed geothermal project has also eroded the Pocoleok’s social fabric by fomenting unprecedented internal division. These tensions now permeate daily life: Neighbors no longer exchange greetings. Customary seats are empty during communal rituals at the village hall.¹⁰⁸

Criminalization of Indigenous Peoples and their Allies

Since October 2023, 17 Pocoleok Indigenous defenders and one journalist have faced criminal charges for protecting their community’s rights. Dozens more have endured violence and intimidation by authorities while peacefully opposing the geothermal development. Last year, officials from the State Electricity Company (PLN) and the Manggarai Regency government forced their way onto the territory to measure residents’ land and identify access roads to geothermal well pads.¹⁰⁹ When villagers refused the officials entry, the Indonesian National Armed Forces, the Indonesian National Police, and the Civil Service Police Unit were called in and attacked the villagers, leaving dozens of people injured, some of them left unconscious.

The risks escalated in September 2025 when Vian Ruma, a 30-year-old activist and prominent critic of the project, died under suspicious circumstances, deepening fears for the safety of those resisting the project.¹¹⁰

The ongoing Indigenous resistance makes it very clear that geothermal exploration sites should not overlap with sacred landscapes given the intangible worth of the Pocoleok’s natural and cultural heritage, as well as their human rights.



Threats to Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation: The O'Hongana Manyawa

Threats to Peoples in Voluntary Isolation: The Souls of the Forest

The O'Hongana Manyawa, or Tobelo Dalam, who call themselves the "People of the Forest" are one of the last nomadic, hunter-gatherer peoples in Indonesia.¹¹¹ Out of an estimated total of approximately 3,500 O'Hongana Manyawa people, around 500 remain in voluntary isolation in Indonesia.¹¹² They continue to live in close reciprocity with their forests in Halmahera, North Maluku Island, sustaining themselves through gathering, hunting, shifting cultivation, and fishing. Their subsistence economy is guided by an ancestral belief in the unity of the forest as a life-giving mother, Manga Wongango, who guides every aspect of daily survival and well-being. A central focus on respecting ancestral spirits, or gikiri, means their forest management practices are considered a form of devotion.¹¹³

At each birth, families plant trees—five seedlings for a girl and ten for a boy—so a child grows up with the trees, symbolizing gratitude and continuity.¹⁴ Protecting the forest is understood as protecting the family and honoring ancestral spirits, which remain present in the surrounding landscape. Their social cosmology, transmitted through oral traditions, views their own souls, home, settlement, and forest as one indivisible entity.

Mounting Threats

The O'Hongana Manyawa face escalating threats from industrial mining, land seizures, and cultural marginalization. Nickel and other extractive projects encroach on Indigenous territories, while limited legal protections and widespread exclusion from public decision-making heighten their vulnerability.

In this region, more than 65,000 hectares of mining concessions overlap with Indigenous territory (15% of Indigenous territories). Nickel and cobalt mining and processing in Central and East Halmahera overlap with the forest homeland of the O'Hongana Manyawa. At least 19 mining companies operate on the territory of uncontacted O'Hongana Manyawa.¹¹⁵

Nickel mining activities on Halmahera Island have so far destroyed more than 5,000 hectares of forest.¹¹⁶ Clearing forests for company camps, mining roads, and extraction sites has erased vital living space and undermined the ecological foundation of their nomadic way of life, which depends entirely on intact forest ecosystems.

The destruction of natural sago groves; the loss of deer, pigs, and shellfish; and even discolored river waters from heavy machinery have led to hunger and forced displacement of O'Hongana Manyawa communities. As one nomadic O'Hongana Manyawa woman testified, these impacts amount to violation of their fundamental right to life and livelihood.¹¹⁷

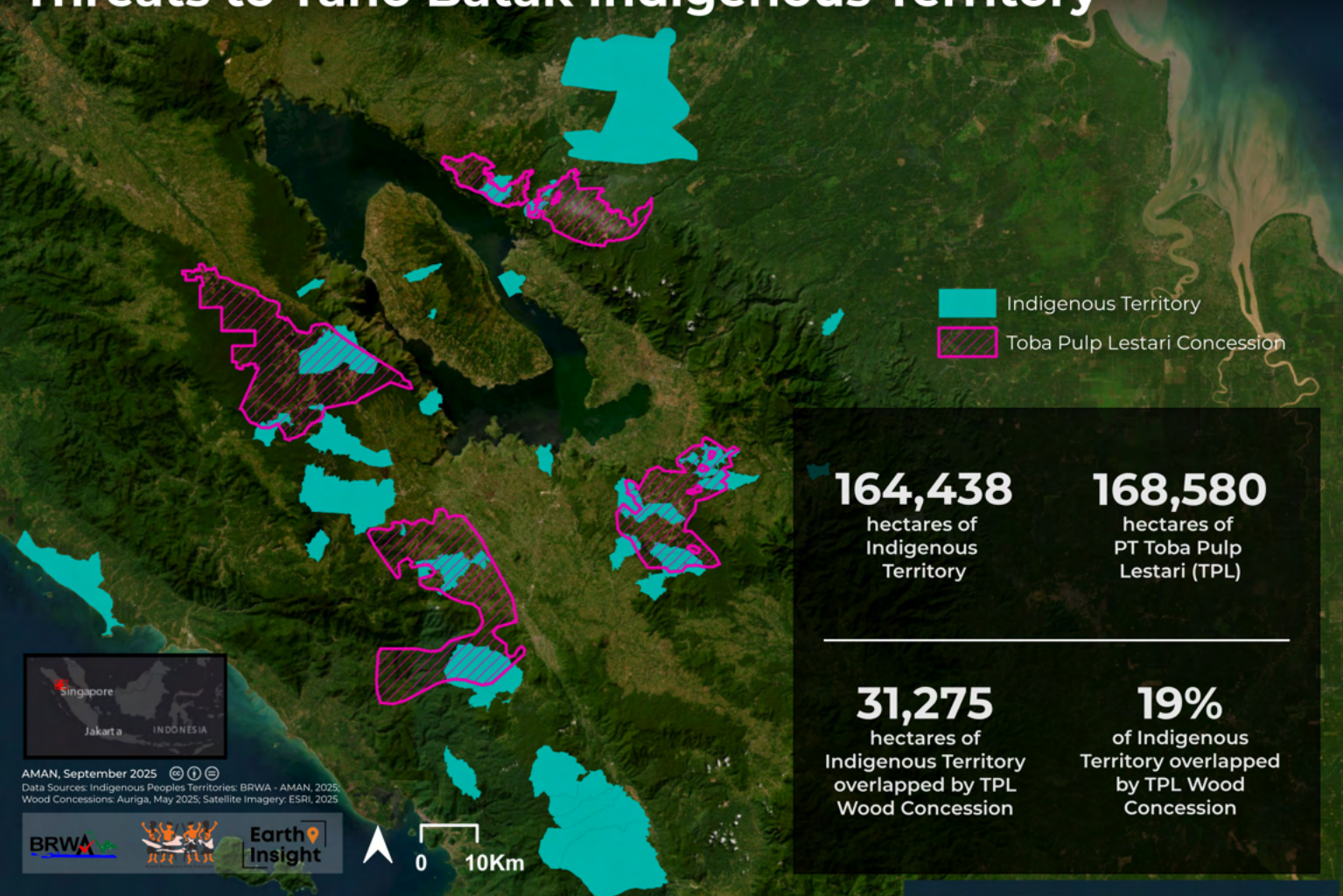
State Assimilation Policies

Beginning in the late 1970s, Indonesian government initiatives started to resettle nomadic groups into fixed villages. While framed as “civilizing,” these programs have eroded traditional mobility and conservation practices, accelerating cultural loss. While some groups were transferred to a fixed village, they found it difficult to maintain their ways of life and returned to their ancestral forests.¹¹⁸

Existential risk

Today, the O'Hongana Manyawa are among Indonesia's most imperiled Indigenous Peoples, their very survival tied to safeguarding the forests that embody their history, culture, and future. The Halmahera nickel boom on the ancestral territory of the O'Hongana Manyawa in voluntary isolation threatens biodiversity and forests and risks cultural extinction. There is an urgent need for immediate legal recognition and demarcation of their land, a complete halt to mining within it, and the creation of a strictly enforced no-go zone to safeguard their survival.

Threats to Tano Batak Indigenous Territory



Threats to Tano Batak Indigenous Territories

The forests surrounding Lake Toba in North Sumatra form one of Indonesia’s most ecologically significant landscapes, anchoring both regional biodiversity and vital ecosystem services. Rising from volcanic soils and nourished by the world’s largest volcanic lake, these montane and lowland forests are the habitat for such iconic biodiversity as Tapanuli and Sumatran orangutans, Sumatran tigers, pangolins and elephants.¹¹⁹ These forests sustain both the lake’s hydrological system and the well-being of the Indigenous communities who both nurture and depend on them in an ancestral relationship of reciprocity.

Aggregate Concessions

The accelerating expansion of monocultivated tree plantations threatens this biocultural landscape. In particular, local and international groups claim that the government has awarded concessions to pulp company PT Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL) on more than 31,000 hectares of Indigenous territories belonging to 26 villages in North Sumatra.¹²⁰⁻¹²¹

According to an extensive investigation conducted by Koalisi Indonesia Memantau, an environmental NGO network,¹²² the Indonesian government awarded TPL (under its first name, PT Inti Indorayon Utama) its first 150,000-hectare concession in North Sumatra for selective logging in 1984. The concession stipulated tree replanting, which was never enforced. In 1992 the government reclassified the concession for industrial timber plantation (HTI) and expanded it into more than 269,000 hectares. The HTI license allowed clear cutting and reforestation with eucalyptus plantations. Eight further revisions resulted in aggregate concessions covering more than 291,000 hectares, or 4% of the province’s total land area, including in protected areas meant to guarantee the hydrological function of the forests. However, in 2020, the Ministry of Environment reduced the concession to approximately 167,000 hectares in recognition of some overlap with Indigenous lands.¹²³

But according to local groups, in 2023 TPL concessions continued to encroach on some 25,000 hectares of Indigenous Peoples’ lands and community forests.¹²⁴ Indigenous communities maintain that these concessions were granted in violation of their free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC).

Systemic Oppression

According to multiple reports, TPL has a long history of conflict with Indigenous Peoples who refuse to cede their territories to its forestry concessions.¹²⁵ Last year, five members of an Indigenous community who opposed a TPL concession were abducted by people driving company security cars.¹²⁶ This year, an anonymous package containing a bloodied dead bird¹²⁷ was delivered to the home of Indigenous rights activist and Goldman Environmental Prize winner Delima Silalahi, whose campaign against TPL supported more than 7,000 hectares of forest for six Indigenous communities in North Sumatra.¹²⁸

Indigenous Women as the Vanguard

The biocultural impacts of these conflicts are illustrated by Sihaporas Village in a region known as Tano Batak in reference to the ancestral lands of the Batak people, who have resisted TPL since 1998.¹²⁹ TPL’s concession covers some 1,500 hectares of Sihaporas Indigenous forests, including sacred landscapes where rituals are performed and herbal plants are gathered for ceremonies. Deforestation threatens these rituals to their ancestors, as well as the entire community’s social cohesion.

When a TPL employee claimed these forests had no ancestral ties, women from Sihapora emerged as the vanguard of resistance. They blocked roads, organized protests, and stood up to confirm their community identity and ancestral rights.¹³⁰ In defending their forests, they stood up for both their cultural survival and the spiritual lifeblood of their people.



Indigenous communities gather in a peaceful demonstration to speak out against TPL's impacts on their land and livelihoods.
Image credit: Image credit: Courtesy of AMAN

Centuries of Resistance, Decades of Legal Precedents in the Wallacea Archipelago

Nestled between the Asian and Australasian continents, the Wallacea Archipelago is one of the world's richest biodiversity hotspots and home to deeply rooted Indigenous communities whose customary lifeways are inseparable from the forests and lands they steward. On Flores Island, the Gendang Ngkiong communities embody this relationship, maintaining cultural traditions, governance systems, and livelihoods tied to their ancestral territories. Yet, like many Indonesian peoples in Indonesia, they have faced state classifications of their Indigenous territories, which makes their traditional rituals and agriculture illegal.

According to the Gendang Ngkiong's origin story, when their ancestors first arrived in the East Manggarai region of Flores Island, they heard birds chirping "Ngkiong-Ngkiong." They gave that name to this sacred forest, making them the people of Ngkiong.¹³¹ Under Dutch colonial rule in 1936, Ngkiong territory was declared the Ruteng Forest. Sixty years later, the Indonesian forest ministry designated it as a 32,000-hectare "Nature Tourism Forest" with a 56,000-hectare buffer zone¹³² that includes 57 villages and Indigenous lands, including Ngkiong. There was no prior

consultation to inform the Ngkiong that their rituals, livelihoods, and agricultural practices in the forest would now be illegal.¹³³

Despite their longstanding ties to the forest, the Gendang Ngkiong found themselves unable to practice their cultural lifeways, expressed in the phrase "Gendang One, Lingko Peang"—a concept that binds together the village longhouse with the surrounding territories. Gendang One, Lingko Peang speaks to an inseparable relationship between the village/traditional house as the community's home and the Indigenous territory as its source of life.

To these Gendang Ngkiong Indigenous communities, this state-sponsored land grab of their Indigenous territory was tantamount to a systematic effort to destroy their culture and starve their people.

Reclaiming the Land

Gendang Ngkiong community structure and institutions, as well as cultural rituals and laws, have survived for hundreds of years. They manage a traditional area of more than 892.23 hectares in ten Lingko (customary areas).

Given the new "tourist forest" designation, forest patrols regularly pulled up the community's coffee plants and burned their huts. By 2012, the community decided to organize and joined the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN), asking for support to help them document the origins and history of their Indigenous territory and to serve as an intermediary with Ruteng officials.¹³⁴ AMAN initiated participatory mapping and convened the first multistakeholder meeting in 2015 to ultimately return Gendang Ngkiong communities to their Indigenous territories.

The Gendang Ngkiong groups joined forces with other Indigenous communities to campaign for legal reforms to protect their rights and lands. Three years later, East Manggarai's first Indigenous law regulation instructed officials to identify and validate Indigenous law communities.

Persecution of Indigenous Farmers

The government's 1993 decree changed more than the status of Indigenous Peoples' lands on Flores Island: It opened an era of legal persecution of Indigenous farmers. This culminated in the 2004 "Bloody Wednesday" massacre in which police opened fire on a crowd protesting the arrest of seven farmers for allegedly encroaching on state forests. Six farmers were murdered, 30 injured, and three left permanently disabled.¹³⁵

Indigenous Territories and Local Communities on the Frontlines:

More than ten years of arrests and imprisonment endured by elder Ngkiong Tua Teno (traditional land custodian) Mikael Ane exemplify this pattern of persecution.¹³⁶ In 2013, he was arrested for cutting down trees in the community’s territories that were inside the tourism forest. In 2022, Ane was arrested and accused of trespassing within the Ruteng Nature Tourism Reserve. A year later security officers ordered him to report, without legal counsel, to a distant police station. A court later sentenced him to 18 months in prison for illegally building a house on a plot of land that the government claimed was part of the Ruteng Natural Tourism Park.¹³⁷ Two years after his sentence, with the assistance of AMAN, the Supreme Court of Indonesia acquitted Ane of all charges. Now he is suing for compensation for loss of his livelihood and impacts on his family during those two years.¹³⁸

Creating Precedents

In challenging the criminalization of Indigenous leaders, advocates, and territorial defenders, AMAN has helped create important legal precedents by winning appeals of convicted Indigenous leaders, advocates, and territorial defenders, such as in the case against Mikael Ane. His legal victory reflects not only a growing sophistication in legal strategies to secure Indigenous land rights, but also the determination of rural Indigenous farmers to mobilize, protest, and defend their lands and communities. In the case of Gendang Ngkiong, AMAN is currently leading a process to verify and validate the community’s land as a Indigenous law area, which would mean that any arrests filed for customary activities would be a violation of Indigenous and human rights.¹³⁹ The model in which a national, professional Indigenous umbrella group meaningfully supports grassroots resistance, notably by bringing local cases of criminalization before higher courts, is an important story of Indigenous legal strategy.

Persistent Resistance in Sumatra¹⁴⁰

Sacred Forests in North Sumatra

The Bata Toba Indigenous community of Ompu Umbak Siallagan on Sumatra Island can trace the origins of their territories to the 1700s, when King Ompu Umbak Siallagan founded Dolok Parmonangan village near Lake Toba, the largest volcanic lake in the world.¹⁴¹ Guided by their ancestors, this community has managed its territories for more than 250 years. While Dutch colonists first established pine plantations on their lands in the 1900s, it was the newly-independent Indonesian government who declared their land as state property.¹⁴² Over time, they were reclassified as “protected forests,” which, in effect, denied the existence of both ancestral lands and sacred burial sites, including the grave of King Ompu Umbak Siallagan. By the 1980s, some of their lands were under a 200-hectare pulp concession, which was later increased to 427 hectares.¹⁴³⁻¹⁴⁴

Mapping Threats and Solutions Across the World's Largest Tropical Forests



Concessions and Criminalization

The history of pulp company PT Toba Pulp Lestari (TPL) in North Sumatra is marked by conflicts with communities.¹⁴⁵ By 2021, 23 Indigenous communities across seven districts around Lake Toba were in conflict with the company.¹⁴⁶⁻¹⁴⁷

In 2022, TPL reported Dolok Parmonangan’s leader, Sorbatua Siallagan, to the police for arson (burning grass) and forest encroachment (growing ginger, chili peppers, avocado, and corn) in its concession area. While that case did not result in a conviction, two years later, Siallagan and his wife were buying fertilizer when he was forced into an unmarked car. Plainclothes police, who did not identify themselves, brought him to a station more than 100 kilometers away.¹⁴⁸ The 65-year-old grandfather spent seven months in prison before receiving a two-year sentence and a fine of more than \$60,000 for “Occupying Forest Areas.” The court decision catalyzed awareness about the pattern of criminalizing Indigenous forest defenders in this region.¹⁴⁹

Appeal and Advocacy

With AMAN’s support, Siallagan’s conviction was overturned on appeal, with the decision confirmed by Indonesia’s supreme court.¹⁵⁰ The case established an important precedent that Indigenous occupation of forests—even within a company concession—is not a criminal offense.¹⁵¹ It also confirmed AMAN’s legal argument that Indigenous rights are guaranteed by the country’s constitution and human rights statutes.¹⁵²

With AMAN’s legal support, student solidarity, and advocacy from regional and global groups, Dolok Parmonangan transformed from news stories over decades of loss and persecution to a symbol of strength forged by centuries of customary practice.

The struggle of Dolok Parmonangan demonstrates that in the face of intimidation and violence, the persistence of resistance carries power across generations, rooted in an ancestral origin story and a collective vision for the future.

Mesoamerica

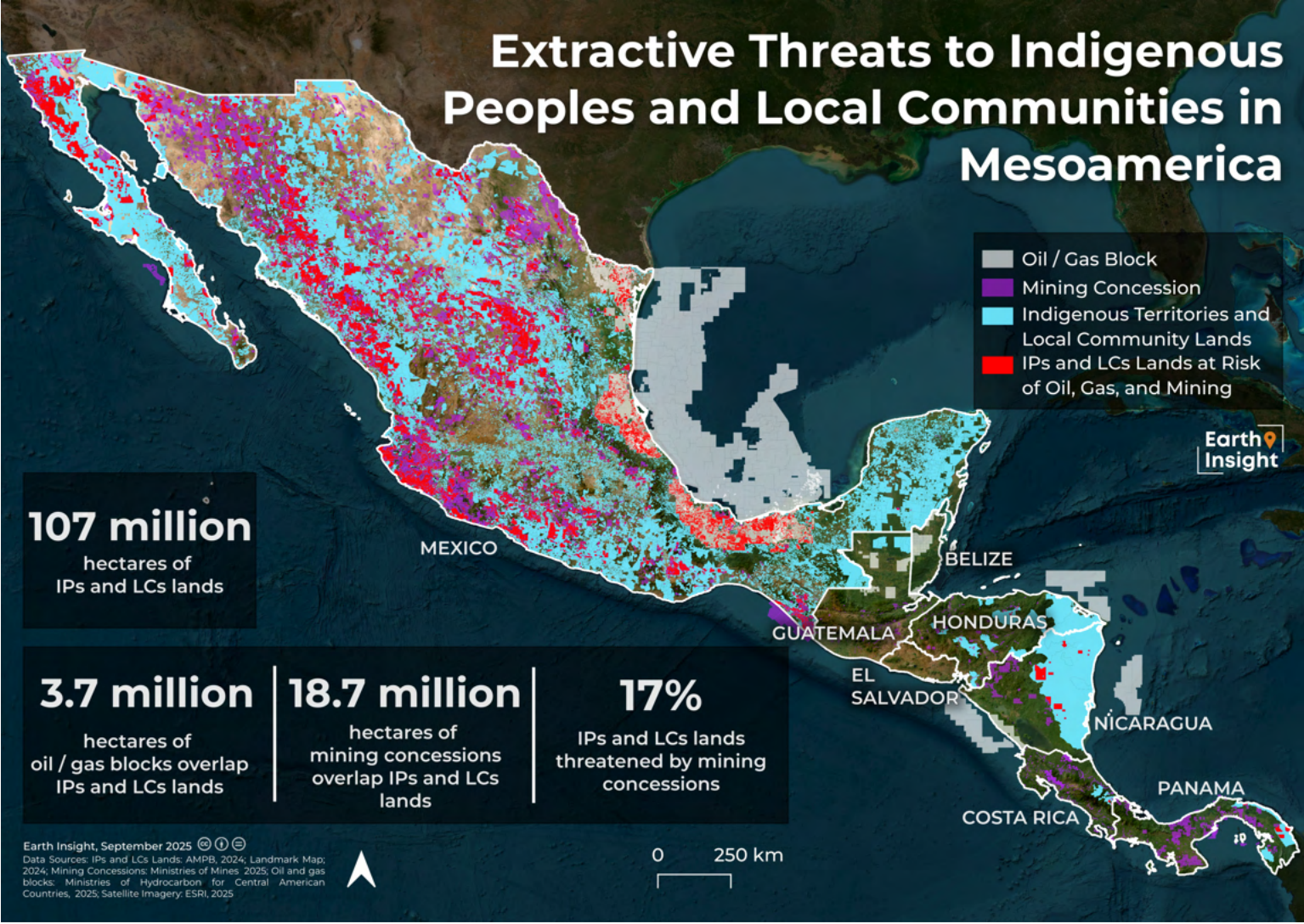
With close to 7% of global biodiversity on just 0.5% of Earth’s land, Mesoamerica is one of the world’s great biodiversity hotspots.¹⁵³ Yet agricultural expansion, logging, oil and gas, infrastructure development, mining, and narcotrafficking are driving some of the highest deforestation rates in the tropics.

The first comprehensive assessment of Mesoamerican trees found that almost half (46%) of some 4,000 endemic species are at risk of extinction.¹⁵⁴ Two thirds of key forest habitats for birds in Central America are at risk from deforestation associated with land-use changes related to narcotrafficking.¹⁵⁵

Against these mounting threats, Indigenous and community-led forest governance has proven to be one of the region’s strongest lines of defense. Over the last 25 years, research has shown that forests under community management fare better than those under state or private control.

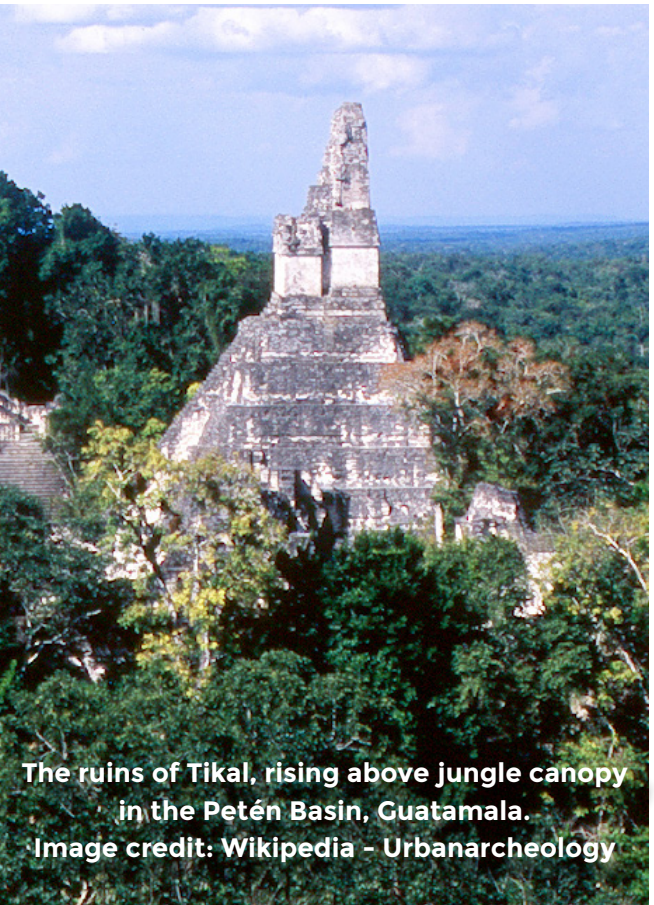
Mesoamerica is a strategic corridor linking the Americas, where tropical forests, mountains, coastlines, and coral reefs converge in one of the most biologically and culturally rich regions on the planet. These lands and waters are also home to a wide diversity of Indigenous Peoples and local communities whose traditions, governance systems, and care practices have maintained the balance of ecosystems for centuries. Today, this balance is under siege. Agro-industrial plantations, mining, logging, infrastructure megaprojects, and organized crime are fragmenting our territories, threatening our livelihoods, and undermining our rights. The Mesoamerican Alliance brings together Indigenous and community organizations from across the region to defend our territories in their broadest sense, restoring degraded areas and promoting solutions rooted in our cultures and knowledge. A just and sustainable future depends on recognizing our leadership and securing the resources to protect Mesoamerica’s living heritage—not as a favor, but as a shared responsibility with the planet.

- Levi Sucre Romero
Leader, Mesoamerican Forest Peoples Alliance

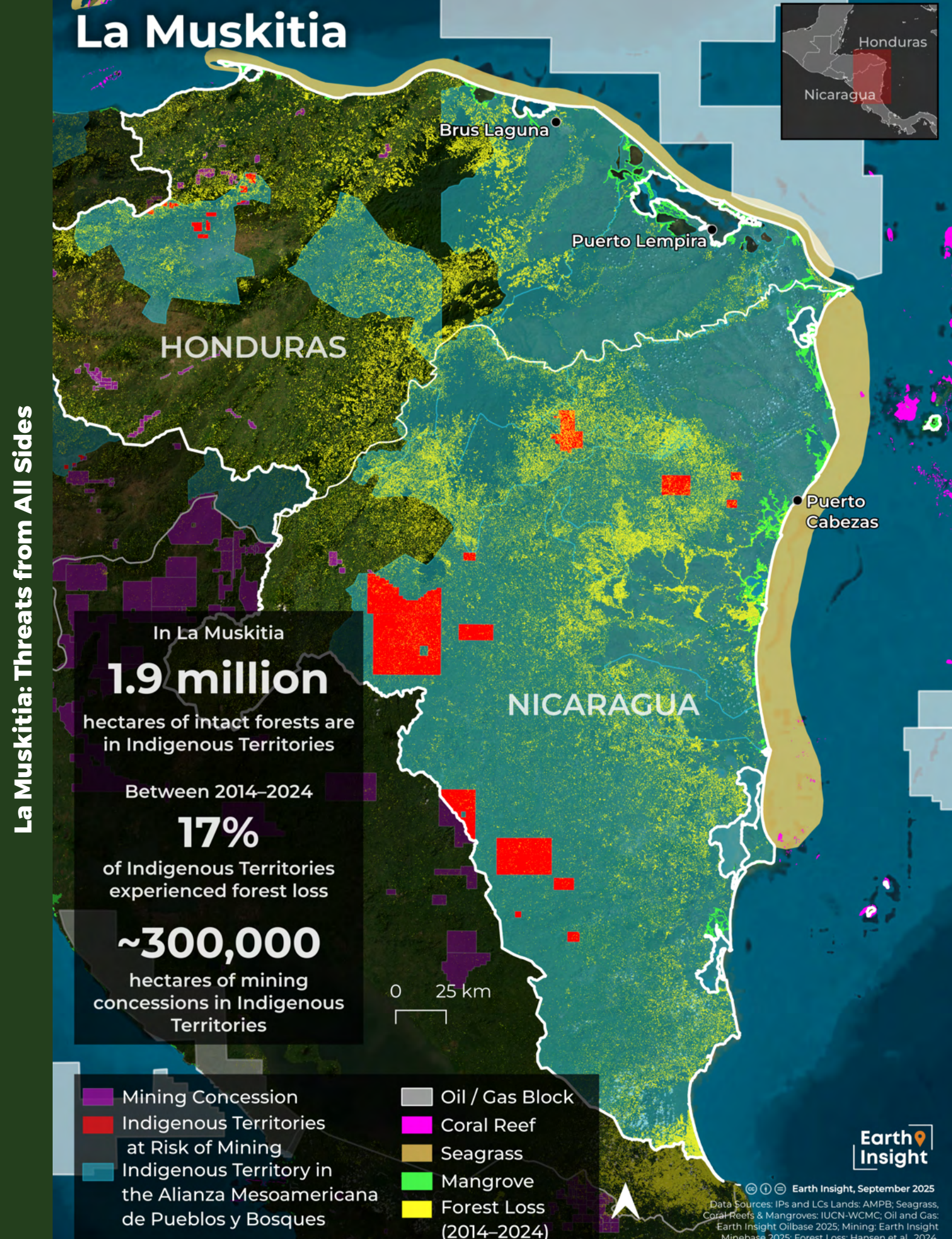


For example, in Guatemala’s Maya Biosphere Reserve, community forest concessions have maintained near-zero deforestation (just 1.5% between 2014 and 2024) and account for less than 2% of all forest fires in the reserve.¹⁵⁶ Community forest governance is a proven strategy for not only safeguarding the region’s biodiversity, but also the cultural heritage and traditional knowledge systems that have sustained it for millennia.

The case studies that follow illustrate these dynamics on the ground, showing how communities confront threats, defend their territories, and maintain forests under constant pressure. They reveal both the stakes and the strategies that make Mesoamerica’s Indigenous governance a model for resilience and conservation.



The ruins of Tikal, rising above jungle canopy in the Petén Basin, Guatemala.
Image credit: Wikipedia - Urbanarcheology



La Muskitia: Threats from All Sides

Trouble in Little Amazon

La Muskitia, the second largest tropical rainforest in the Americas, is sometimes referred to as “Little Amazon.”¹⁵⁷ This network of conservation areas, including the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), the Tawahka Asangni Biosphere Reserve, the Patuca National Park in Honduras, and the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve in Nicaragua, form the largest contiguous forest area in Latin America north of the Amazon.¹⁵⁸ La Muskitia in Honduras is home to the second-largest Indigenous population (80,000) in the country, with close to 200,000 Indigenous Peoples living there in Nicaragua.¹⁵⁹⁻¹⁶⁰

The region provides the last expanses of intact forest necessary to sustain populations of wide-ranging mammals, especially jaguars. In Honduras, as much as one fifth of potential land for a jaguar conservation corridor has been identified on Muskitia Indigenous territory.¹⁶¹ At least 30 medium and large mammal species have been documented in a core region of the Rio Plátano reserve.¹⁶² In both countries, these forests are considered the last strongholds for the white-lipped peccary (*Tayassu pecari*), which has been eliminated from more than 80% of its historical range in Honduras.¹⁶³ In 2019, the northern subspecies of the scarlet macaw of Central America (*A. macao cyanoptera*), which the Muskitia people call “apu pauni,”¹⁶⁴ was listed as “likely to become in danger of extinction within the foreseeable future.”¹⁶⁵⁻¹⁶⁶ This rich biodiversity is not only globally significant, but essential to Indigenous communities in La Muskitia who rely on more than 200 forest species alone for their diets, medicine, and ways of life.¹⁶⁷

Oil Threats to Indigenous Coastal Communities

Proposed offshore oil blocks in the region threaten coastal mangroves and coral reefs, as well as eight of Honduras’ ten Ramsar wetlands sites of global importance.¹⁶⁸ The oil blocks overlap Honduras’ Mosquito Keys and pose a risk to the nearby Cayo Miskito Important Marine Mammal Area (IMMA) to the south off the coast of Nicaragua.

The Miskito Keys is an archipelago of 49 cays known for 24 coral species (including two classified at high risk of extinction), expansive seagrass beds, and five mangrove species, including the country’s only site of the rare tea mangrove (*Pelliciera rhizophorae*).¹⁶⁹ The Keys are also an artisanal fishing zone.¹⁷⁰ The Cayo Miskito IMMA is the habitat for one of the only two known small populations of Guiana dolphins (*Sotalia guianensis*) in Central America and the endangered greater Caribbean manatee (*Trichechus manatus manatus*).¹⁷¹

Mining

Mining presents an existential threat to Indigenous communities of the Muskitia forests, from land invasions from settlers, known as colonos, to violent gangs of illegal gold prospectors and official concessions that cover vast tracts of Indigenous territories. In Nicaragua, mining concessions have jumped more than 500% with announced availability of more that could cover 40% of the country.¹⁷² Four mining concessions are only 100 to 200 meters from the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve. Our analysis shows more than 300,000 hectares of mining concessions overlap Indigenous territories in La Muskitia.¹⁷³

Unprecedented Colonization

The promise of a landmark legal precedent initiated in 2001 by Indigenous communities in Nicaragua’s Muskitia rainforest is fading fast. In Mayangna (Sumo) Community of Awas Tingni v. Nicaragua (Awas Tingni), for the first time, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights recognized Indigenous collective land rights and required a state to demarcate and title Indigenous communal lands.¹⁷⁴ Instead, Indigenous communities in this region have been subjected to “continuous, large-scale colonization” and forced displacement¹⁷⁵ from the combined forces of cattle ranching, narcotrafficking, and illegal logging.¹⁷⁶ Last year, Nicaragua had the highest rate of primary forest loss in the world: 78% occurred in the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve, home to the Indigenous community who first brought the case to court.¹⁷⁷

In Honduras, Indigenous communities in the Gracias a Dios department are mobilizing against criminal groups behind what has been characterized as an “unprecedented wave of deforestation and colonization.”¹⁷⁸ Given up to 15% forest loss, some communities have proposed a different type of protected area: a 65,369-hectare Indigenous “anthropological” reserve with a multiple-use zone for community use.¹⁷⁹

In Nicaragua the violence has resulted in more than 1.5 million hectares of Indigenous lands invaded, more than 3,000 families displaced, 77 Indigenous people assassinated, and at least half the forests degraded.¹⁸⁰

“The Muskita people were never colonized, but they are trying to do it now. That’s why forced displacement is happening. The threats are as much historic and political as they are economic.”

– Nicaraguan Muskita leader¹⁸¹

Threats to Community Forest Management in the Sierra Norte de Puebla

For almost forty years, the ejidos and communities of Mexico’s Sierra Norte de Puebla have designed a vision of community forest management that has maintained, and in some cases increased, forest cover, while creating income and environmental services.

These communities follow a form of collective management of private property first developed under the agrarian reforms of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) and expressed in the Zapatista cry of “Land and Liberty.” While these reforms recognized the principles of collective land management, in practice, the following decades (particularly from the 1950s through the 1980s) were marked by government forest concessions on their lands. By the 1980s a “socio-production” forestry policy sought to organize ejidos and communities into producers of timber and resin under state technical supervision with “peasant” participation. The Forestry Law (1986) was reformed to recognize ejido and community rights to manage their forests, within limits to ensure forest conservation.

As one of the pilot regions for socio-production, Sierra Norte of Puebla communities prepared their system of collective management for resin and sustainable timber production.

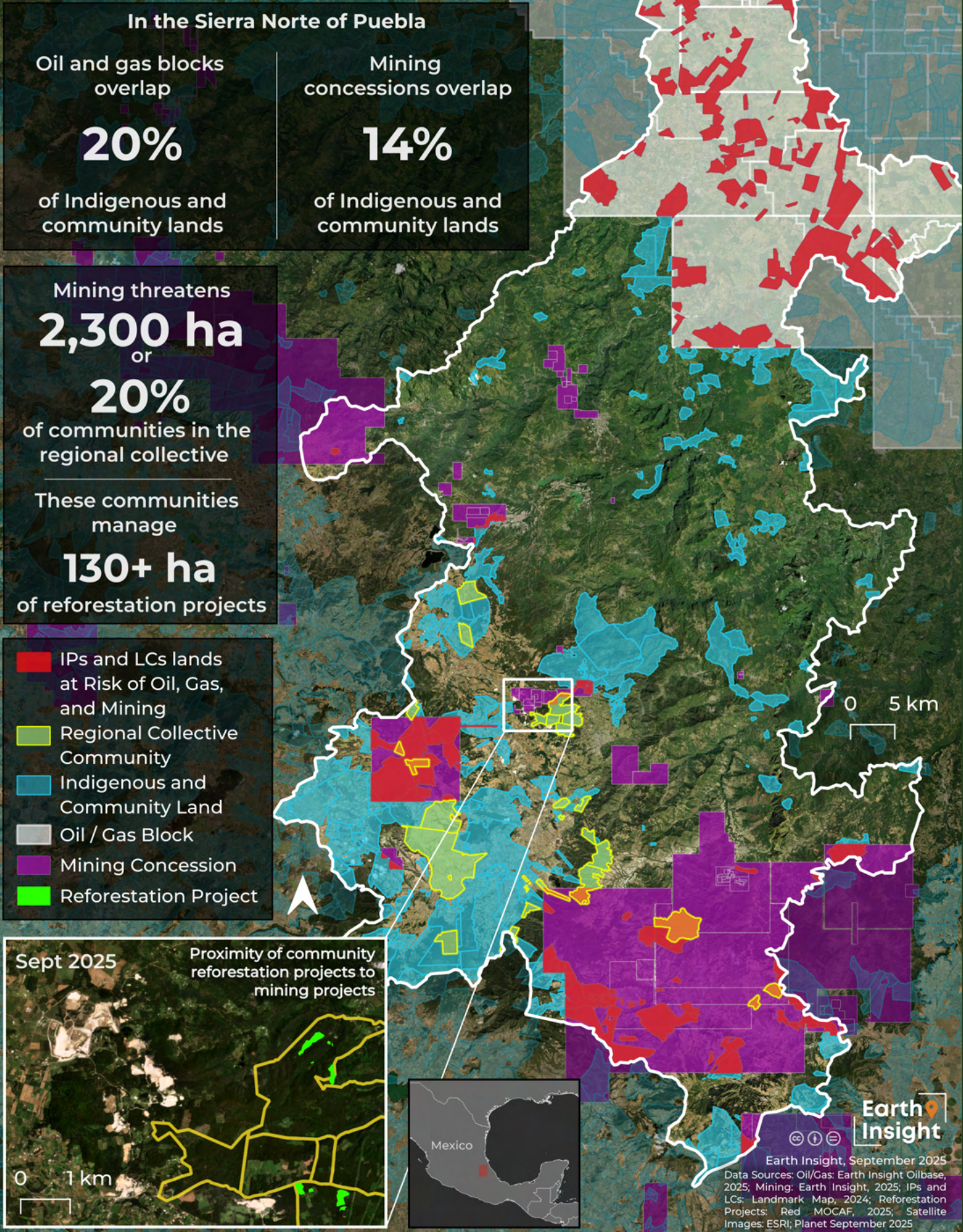
Formidable Challenges

However, their progress was not in isolation: At the same time, they had to protect their lands from more than 90 mining concessions across 113,000 hectares in 31 municipalities.¹⁸² Roughly half were for gold, silver, lead, copper, and zinc mining; the rest included lead, manganese, feldspar, silica, and non-metallic minerals. Additional concessions included hydroelectric dams to provide energy for mining and fracking operations.

Self determination, land rights, and the diversion and contamination of water sources became central concerns, especially as both mining and fracking activities already reduced community water access, contaminated drinking water, and caused water shortages for traditional farming.¹⁸³

Although mining in the region predates the colonial period, even at its 18th-century peak mining was artisanal and mercury-free. Between 2000 and 2012, the Mexican government granted mining and electricity megaproject concessions in the Sierra Norte de Puebla, including open pit mines, fracking, and hydropower dams, that communities called “death projects.”

Extractive Threats and Community Forestry in the Sierra Norte of Puebla



Our new mapping and analyses show that oil and gas concessions overlap with 20% of forest community lands in the region; mining concessions overlap with 14%.

These communities have consistently organized regional initiatives for territorial defense with such groups as the Mexican Network of Community Forest Organizations (MOCAF Network), along with other NGOs that specialize in strategic litigation, communication, and outreach. So far, community reforestation projects cover more than 160 hectares in ten ejidos and communities.

Megaprojects in the Sierra Norte

Two gold and silver mining concessions that threaten an 800-hectare ejido forest illustrate community organizing across the region.¹⁸⁴ As an ejido, Cruz de Octote manages their community forest through consensus reached in assemblies. Members had long ago agreed on forestry practices that balance ecological integrity with livelihoods. The mining concessions cover more than 14,000 hectares, with plans for an open-pit mine.¹⁸⁵ When Cruz de Octote learned that nearly two thirds of their lands had been included within the mining concession, the ejido assembly decided to mobilize with neighboring communities to resist the project. Their campaign was also amplified by the Regional Collective for the Defense of the Forests and Territory of the Sierra Norte de Puebla, a coalition of 19 ejidos spanning five municipalities (shown in yellow on the map) and including the MOCAF Network.¹⁸⁶ As a result, the mining project has been temporarily suspended due to ongoing legal battles centered on the lack of free, prior, and informed consent.

Looming Toxic Threats

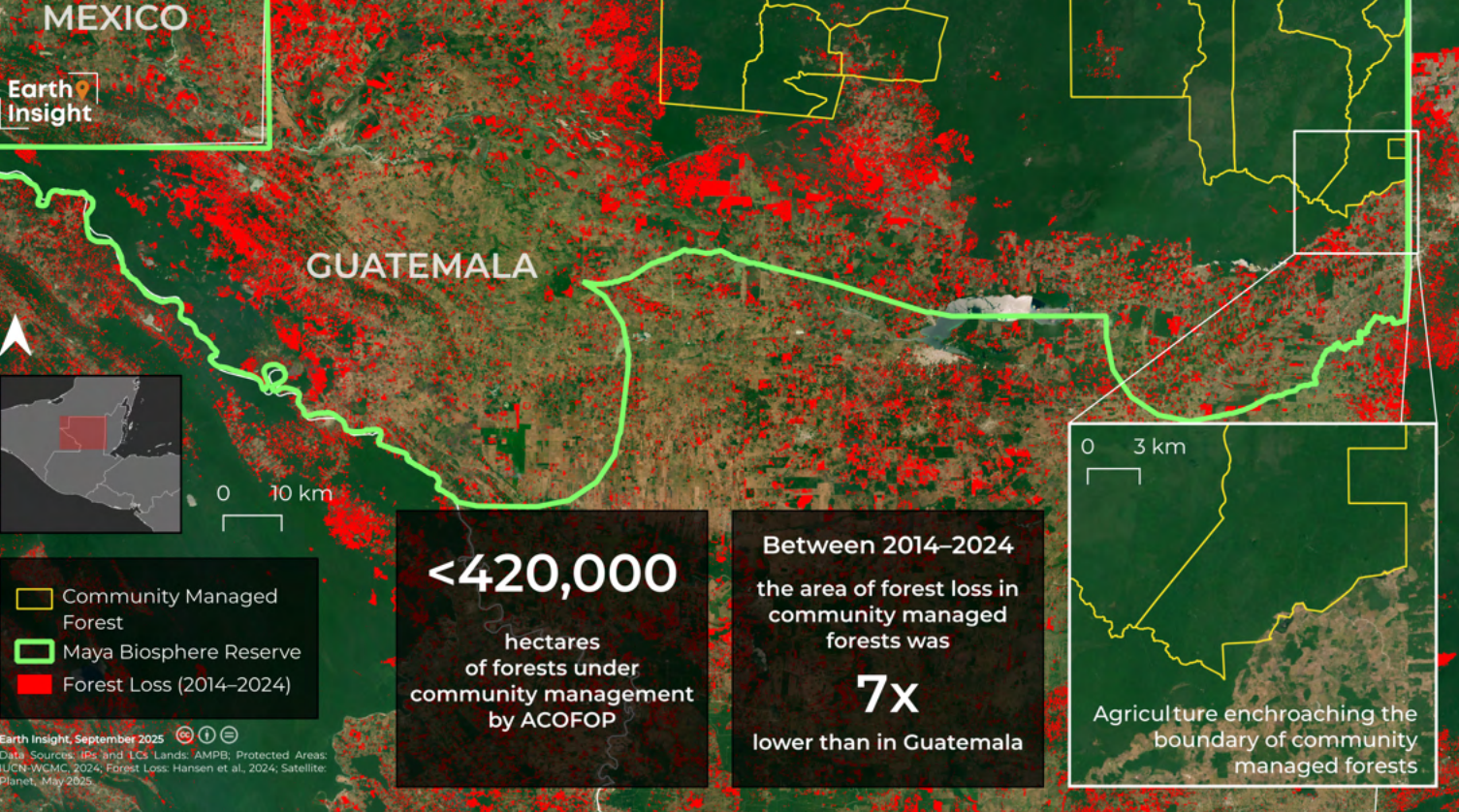
A recently-released strategic government energy plan for the next ten years indicates that fracking could return to the Sierra Norte de Puebla.¹⁸⁷ Of more than 1,300 fracking wells built across the region ten years ago, close to 300 still pose environmental threats to nearby communities, including exposure to gas fumes and toxic chemical contamination.¹⁸⁸ A recent field investigation found wells in operation posed environmental harm to communities, as well as others abandoned but left unsealed.

Projects for Livelihood and Resilience

Although government subsidies for the management and use of community forests have been declining since 2016 and are expected this year to drop to their lowest point in 25 years, ejidos and communities continue to protect their forests and livelihoods. Between 2024 and 2025, with support from the Mesoamerican Territorial Fund (FTM) and the Community Land Rights and Conservation Finance Initiative (CLARIFI), they restored 200 hectares of degraded land in 10 ejidos and communities, developed income projects with youth and women's groups, and piloted a community banking project.

The best community resilience strategy against all threats is strong coordination between and within ejidos and communities, local economies rooted in sustainable forest management and value-added diversification, and the creativity of youth and women.

Community Forest Management, El Petén, Guatemala



Community Forests in Petén, Guatemala

From 2002 to 2024, El Petén in northwestern Guatemala lost more than a million hectares of tree cover.¹⁸⁹ Land-use changes have been driven in large part by cattle ranches, often established as fronts for narco-trafficking money laundering (dubbed “narco-cattle”) that results in a phenomenon called “narco-deforestation.”¹⁹⁰

Yet research has shown how strategies that strengthen Indigenous and local community capacity to protect their lands, secure land tenure rights, and create forest-based income streams can serve as effective bulwarks against narco-trafficking and associated environmental crimes.¹⁹¹ The evolution of the Association of Forestry Communities of Petén (ACOFOP) within the Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala stands as a replicable model of such strategies.

The Maya Biosphere Reserve

Covering two million hectares, the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) is one of the largest biological corridors in Mesoamerica. Established in 1990, it delivered a top-down series of management regimes, including a core protected area where extractive activity is prohibited, a multiple-use zone where some extraction is allowed in certified forest concessions, and a buffer zone where agriculture and private tenure are permitted.

Without community input, these land-use rules and prohibitions generated social conflicts, spurring the creation of the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP).¹⁹² Founded to improve the well-being of forest communities through sustainable community forest management in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, ACOFOP now represents 24 Indigenous and local communities within the MBR. Its natural resource governance system manages concessions that cover more than 480,000 hectares of natural forest under 13 management units. Our analysis found deforestation rates of 1.5% in community-managed forests, over seven times lower than the forest loss rate in Guatemala (11%) on average for the same 2014–2024 time period.

Democratic Structure and Community Training

ACOFOP’s internal organization starts from the ground up, with a General Assembly composed of community representatives that hold decision-making authority. A nine-member Board of Directors, elected every two years, is responsible for implementing the assembly’s decisions. An Audit Commission ensures that the Board of Directors and executive management carry out their activities in accordance with General Assembly decisions. Finally, an Executive Directorate coordinates with the Board of Directors to guide a technical team with various divisions.

Each technical division first develops a work plan based on community training needs. For example, groups in non-timber regions are educated in non-timber value chain production, while forestry regions receive ongoing training for forest certification. There is also continuing education in related areas, such as the use of technology, administration, and finance, with specialized gender and youth education.

A social management division provides ongoing education on the governance documents of each organization within ACOFOP. Youth are provided a wide spectrum of training opportunities, including forest monitoring, drone use, tourism, legal advocacy, and communications.

A food security division trains both youth and women in regenerative agriculture, while a fire prevention division offers annual workshops in fire prevention, firefighting, and first aid. Finally, the land management division offers regular education in forest restoration.



The hill on the left is El Tigre and the one on the right is La Danta. El Mirador Maya Site, Guatemala.
Image credit: Flickr (Dennis G. Jarvis)

Systemic Planning

Each ACOFOP community administers a state forestry concession under a contract that includes both timber extraction and value-added production. To guide this process, communities prepare a five-year general management plan that sets out sustainable economic strategies for timber and non-timber resources. ACOFOP adopted this five-year planning model to ensure consistent operations and revenues. From each general plan, communities then develop an annual forestry operational plan, specifying yearly timber-use activities, which are jointly supervised by a state forestry agent and an ACOFOP forestry manager.

Community-Run Business

In 2003, nine of ACOFOP's community enterprises in the MBR's Multiple Use Zone formed the Community Forest Services Company (FORESCOM), a community-owned forest services company that currently oversees 11 community forest concessions. From 2013 to 2025, FORESCOM generated more than \$8 million from timber sales, products, and services for the benefit of all ACOFOP's members.

The experience of ACOFOP and the MBR demonstrates how community-led governance, capacity building, and sustainable forest enterprises can protect vast landscapes from deforestation and illicit activities as they generate meaningful social and economic benefits, in a replicable model for forest conservation across the region and beyond.

Gunayala: A Century of Autonomy and Rights-Based Stewardship

Along Panama's Caribbean coast, the Indigenous territory of Gunayala, an archipelago of more than 300 islands, is home to the Indigenous Peoples known as Gunas. Nearly the entire population is Indigenous in this self-governed territory where ancestral governance, land, and culture are inseparable. For 100 years, the Guna people have maintained one of Latin America's most enduring examples of legally recognized Indigenous autonomy. At a moment of accelerating climate and biodiversity crises, Gunayala demonstrates how ancestral governance systems and collective stewardship can sustain both people and planet, while mitigating climate change.¹⁹³



Indigenous man's daily commute home in Gunayala.
Image credit: Iniquilipi Chiari - Tv Indígena

Historical Roots and Indigenous Governance in Practice

Gunayala’s autonomy was secured in 1925 through the Guna Revolution, an act of resistance by Indigenous Peoples rising against forced assimilation by the Panamanian State. The historic agreement that followed affirmed the rights of Guna people to their territory and self-governance. In 2025, the Guna people mark 100 years of this achievement, celebrating both the endurance and relevance of their model of governance today.

Central to the enduring success of the Guna people’s autonomy is the General Guna Congress, a democratic and spiritual institution that oversees decision-making on land use, natural resources, education, traditional knowledge, and external relations. Embedded within their governance structure are Guna values of collective care, cultural continuity, and a deep respect for the natural world.

Decisions in Gunayala are made collectively, guided by Indigenous law and cosmovision. No project, touristic, commercial, or otherwise, can enter without the community’s free, prior, and informed consent. Fishing, farming, and tourism are regulated by Guna norms to ensure harmony between development and tradition.¹⁹⁴

This approach has protected coastal ecosystems, forests, and coral reefs, while preserving political cohesion and cultural vitality. Unlike many regions where Indigenous lands are threatened by extractive industries, Gunayala has remained firm in excluding them, by choice and by law.¹⁹⁵

Gunayala’s governance system ensures intergenerational strength. Youth are trained in leadership and conservation grounded in Guna values, maintaining continuity of culture and political cohesion. Even Guna people living in Panama City or abroad sustain close ties to their territory, returning frequently for ceremonies and collective decision-making.¹⁹⁶ This ability to maintain culture across distances reinforces the resilience of Guna identity.



“Our Elders have known for a long time about the natural resources that we could exploit; but it’s not part of our culture. Where other people may see mineral riches, we see life.”

- Iniquilipi Chiari-Lombardo
Indigenous Advocate, Gunayala



Guna Indigenous women marching outside the National Assembly to protest against a copper mine project in Panama. Image credit: AP Photo/Arnulfo Franco)

A Thriving Nature-Based Economy

The Guna do not separate economy from culture or territory. Instead, they sustain a nature-based economy rooted in ancestral knowledge and collective benefit. Tourism in Gunayala operates under community agreements that honor ecological and cultural protocols. Visitors are welcomed on Guna terms, with benefits distributed according to decisions made by traditional governance systems. The mola, an intricate hand-sewn textile, represents both an artistic tradition and a primary source of income for Guna women. Alongside sustainable fishing, small-scale traditional agriculture, and coconut cultivation, these practices embody ecological principles passed through generations. Seasonal rhythms guide cultivation and marine management, ensuring resilience for people and ecosystems alike.

Gunayala is not only a protected territory; it is a holistic system where culture, governance, and nature coexist. For Indigenous Peoples worldwide, it is a source of inspiration and proof that autonomy can be sustained across generations. For the broader world, it offers a living example of rights-based resilience, where thriving ecosystems and cultural vitality flow from Indigenous governance. This territory stands as both a celebration of what has been achieved and a call to action. It reminds the world that true sustainability requires honoring Indigenous autonomy and supporting the systems that have long sustained life.

Solutions Framework

“[The Brazzaville Declaration] is a unique and historic moment... It connects with our territorial realities and our communities, and sending a message to the international system is powerful because sending a message to the international community reflects all of the contributions that we have upheld, fought for, defended, protected, dreamt of, contributed to, and it draws attention to our experience to the international community and to decision-makers, that we are part of the solution. Let them work with us. Let them listen to us. Let us be allies, not simply beneficiaries. Let us be allies in this process and let us be recognized, with justice and equality for future generations of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, for Mother Earth, for the rights of nature.”

-Juan Carlos Jintiach
Executive Secretary of the Global Alliance
of Territorial Communities (GATC)



Juan Carlos Jintiach, Global Alliance of Territorial Communities.
Image credit: Courtesy of IISD/ENB/Mika Schroder

Centering GATC’s Five Demands: A Roadmap from the Brazzaville Declaration

The findings of this report reaffirm what Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPs and LCs) from the world’s forest basins have long declared: **urgent, rights-based action is needed to safeguard territories, halt destructive activities, and secure the leadership of those who have protected nature for generations.** The Brazzaville Declaration captures this vision, offering “a roadmap the world must follow toward a just future” that overcomes global ecological and climate crises. Its commitments echo the GATC’s Five Demands, which provide a clear blueprint for action.

While this solutions framework offers important global guidance, its recommendations should not be treated as one-size-fits-all solutions. Global frameworks can guide, but they cannot substitute for grounded, place-based approaches. The Brazzaville Declaration should be referred to for more specific, regional-scale demands for the regions discussed in this report.

1) Land Rights–Recognizing Territories and Governance

“We, the Indigenous Peoples and local communities, maintain profound spiritual, cultural, social, and economic bonds with our lands, territories, and resources.”¹⁹⁷

The Brazzaville Declaration calls on governments to:

- Ratify and implement international human rights instruments (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, ILO Convention 169, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) and fulfill Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women obligations, including **General Recommendation No. 39 on the rights of Indigenous women and girls.**
- Secure IPs and LCs’ collective rights to lands, territories, and resources, ensuring their inclusion in governance and their right to benefit from them.
- Prioritize the legal recognition and protection of Indigenous and traditional territories in climate and biodiversity frameworks—**NDCs, NBSAPs, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF)**—as a core strategy to achieve Target 3 (30x30).
- Guarantee protection of territories of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact (PIACI) in all climate actions, recognizing their immense importance and vulnerability.

2) Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)–Nothing About Us Without Us

“Nothing about us can happen without us.”

This demand requires governments and international bodies to:

- Ensure full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in the United Nations Decade for Afforestation and Reforestation 2027–2036 and other global policy processes.
- Embed Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in all decisions affecting IPs and LCs territories, including halting fossil fuel extraction, mining, industrial agriculture, and other destructive activities.
- Reform laws and policies to close loopholes that allow extractive concessions in protected areas, Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), and IPs and LCs territories, while reversing rollbacks of protections (protected area downgrading, downsizing, and degazettement [PADDD]).
- Take urgent action to end deforestation and forest degradation by 2030, in line with the Glasgow Leaders’ Declaration on Forests and Land Use and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).

3) Direct Financing–Investing in Self-Determined Solutions

“Investing in our territories is crucial to combat climate change, desertification, and biodiversity loss for the whole of humanity.”

The Declaration urges governments, donors, and allies to:

- Guarantee that at least 40% of climate, biodiversity, and environmental finance reaches IPs and LCs directly, through their own representative organizations and mechanisms.
- Ensure climate finance does not stem from rights violations or fund harmful projects (land grabbing, fossil fuels, plantations, mining, agribusiness, or logging).
- Strengthen IPs and LCs organizations’ capacity to manage direct finance, and establish transparent systems to track and monitor funding flows.
- Expand initiatives like the Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Forest Tenure Pledge and support IPs and LCs participation in the design of the Tropical Forests Forever Facility (TFFF)¹⁹⁸ to ensure at least 20% of its funding flows directly to their territories.

4) Protection of Life–Ending Violence and Criminalization

“We demand an end to the violence and unjust criminalization we endure while safeguarding our territories. It is our collective voice that calls for the respect of our rights.”

The Declaration urges governments to:

- Enact a global convention to protect Environmental Human Rights Defenders, including Indigenous and local leaders.
- Take urgent action against corruption, impunity, threats, and violence, and support communities’ collective protection measures including territorial monitoring and early-warning systems.
- Support the production of global data and maps on the state of forests, ecosystems, and Indigenous land rights to underpin accountability and protection.

5) Traditional Knowledge–Respecting Knowledge and Cultural Rights

“The core of our cultural identities and livelihoods lies in our shared traditional knowledge and innovation.”

The Declaration calls on the world to:

- Recognize Indigenous Peoples as knowledge holders and custodians of biodiversity, in line with the Geneva Declaration and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) initiatives. Decolonize intellectual property systems to prevent the exclusion or exploitation of traditional knowledge and science without consent.
- Ensure that all policies within our territories proactively integrate our knowledge, and elevate the leadership, experience, and ancestral knowledge of Indigenous women and youth as central to climate and biodiversity solutions.

Toward a Just Future

Together, these commitments express the GATC’s collective vision: a future where Indigenous Peoples and local communities are recognized as rights-holders and decision-makers, with secure lands, self-determined governance, and direct support to continue protecting the world’s last standing forests and vital ecosystems. The answer is us, all of us.

Conclusion

This report underscores a single, undeniable truth: the future of the world's tropical forests and beyond is inseparable from the rights, governance, and stewardship of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Across every region and case study, the evidence is clear that where Indigenous territories are respected and secured, ecosystems thrive; where they are undermined, destruction follows.

The Brazzaville Declaration, adopted at the First Global Congress of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities from the Forest Basins, emerges as both a political milestone and a forward-looking model for natural resource management. It articulates a clear pathway out of the cycle of dispossession and ecological collapse: recognition of Indigenous land rights; genuine implementation of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent; direct financing to communities; protection of life in all its forms; and respect for traditional knowledge. These demands are not abstract, they are grounded in lived experience, territorial defense, and generations of proven stewardship.

What is needed now is not more acknowledgement but decisive action. Governments must align national policies with these commitments, ensuring that biodiversity and climate strategies—whether under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Paris Agreement, or national development plans—center Indigenous leadership. Financiers must redirect flows away from extractive industries and into Indigenous-led conservation and governance. International institutions must move beyond symbolic recognition to enforceable standards that protect rights, territories, and defenders.

GATC's "[The Answer Is Us](#)" campaign reminds the world that Indigenous leadership is the solution to biodiversity loss, climate change, and cultural survival. The path forward is clear: secure rights, shift power, and support the millennia of stewardship from Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Doing so cannot be symbolic solidarity—we need to recognize it as the most effective, just, and scalable solution to the intertwined crises of biodiversity loss, climate change, and cultural survival.

There will be no preservation of life on a planet in flames. The climate crisis is also a crisis of leadership and values. Science confirms what ancestral knowledge has always known: climate justice will only be possible if there is also territorial, social, and popular justice.

- The Answer Is Us Campaign

Waorani indigenous women walk in Gareno, Ecuador on December 7, 2015.
Image credit: Pablo Cozzaglio/AFP via Getty Images)

Methodology

Report Creation, Consultation, and Validation

This report would not have been possible without the partnership of the Global Alliance for Territorial Communities, Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN, Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago, Indonesia), the Alianza Mesoamericana de Pueblos y Bosques (AMPB, Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests), Articulação Dos Povos Indígenas Do Brasil, (APIB, Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil), the Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica (COICA, Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin), and the Réseau des Populations Autochtones et Locales pour la Gestion Durable des Écosystèmes Forestiers d’Afrique Centrale (REPALEAC, Network of Indigenous and Local Communities for the Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa).

The content of this report is the product of over 18 months of formal and informal conversations, meetings, and consultations during which we defined the scope and structure of the report, identified case studies, interviewed Indigenous and community leaders, and validated the contents of the report. Key moments of in-person consultation have included the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (April 2025), First Global Congress on Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities from the Forest Basins in Brazzaville (May 2025), and New York Climate Week (September 2025).

Case Studies

The territorial threat and territorial solution case studies included in this report are an effort and opportunity to highlight the current and future extractive threats to Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPs and LCs), as well as the range of ways that communities and the Indigenous movement have responded to these threats to effectively steward their territories. These case studies were chosen in consultation with GATC, its member organizations, and local partners. The content of the case studies was informed by interviews conducted over zoom, or where necessary over email, and supplemented with desk research. Case studies were reviewed and validated by regional and/or local partners.

Amazon

The case study on the Yavari-Tapiche corridor is based on a series of conversations with The Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest (AIDSEP), The Regional Organization of Indigenous Peoples of the East (ORPIO), Center for Indigenous Work (CTI), and Rainforest Foundation Norway. The case study on threats to the Waorani Territory in Ecuador was developed in collaboration with the Waorani Nationality of Ecuador (NAWE). The case study on Indigenous Territorial Entities in Colombia was validated by COICA and the National Organization of the Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon (OPIAC). The case studies on threats to Indigenous peoples in Mato Grosso do Sul,

Indigenous-led financing, and Brazil’s Indigenous NDC were all validated by APIB.

Congo

The case studies on the TRIDOM landscape, community forests in the DRC, and the DRC’s Pygmy law were based on conversations with and were validated by REPALEAC. The case study on community-led conservation in Cameroon was developed in collaboration with Ajemalebu Self Help (AJESH).

Indonesia

Both the territorial threat and territorial solution case studies were written and validated by AMAN.

Mesoamerica

The case study on La Muskitia is based on interviews with Indigenous leaders from the MASTA and Inwanka Raya in the Honduran and Nicaraguan Muskitia. The case study on community forest management in the Sierra Norte of Puebla is based on an interview with and was written in collaboration with Gustavo Sanchez, the President of the Mexican Network of Community Forest Organizations (Red MOCAF). The case on community forest management in Guatemala is based on answers from ACOFOP. The case study on Gunayala governance was validated by Iniquilipi Chiari-Lombardo, technical liaison of the youth movement with GATC and founder of the Guna Youth Congress. Case studies were also reviewed by AMPB.

Spatial Analysis Methodology

Data Disclaimer:

The geospatial analyses in this report are an attempt to capture potential extractive threats to IPs and LCs lands using the most recently available and most accurate and precise data and methods available. As such, the results of these analyses may change between reports as data and/or methods are updated. The World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas (WDKBA) releases regular updates based on national assessment processes. The World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) has known data inconsistencies due to national government data reporting. We have accounted for these inconsistencies wherever possible.

Earth Insight takes a precautionary approach to estimating the potential area under oil, gas, mining, and logging threats. Oil and gas data used in the analyses in this report include active production blocks and areas under multiple stages of exploration and permitting. This approach provides the most expansive view of areas under threat of extractive industries.

There are places where the oil and gas blocks, mining concessions, and logging concessions overlap. Given the distinct threat each industrial activity poses, the overlaps with ecosystems and communities have been calculated separately for each and should not be

combined. There is inconsistency in the documentation and tenure status of IPs and LCs lands, data availability, and political context across regions and between countries, and our approaches to local and regional-level maps have been adapted accordingly. Spatial data on recognized IPs and LCs lands were used where available, while community resource rights, unrecognized IPs and LCs lands, and proxy indicators have informed the analysis in areas with limited data. Areas without data on maps in this report may have uncollected, unrecorded, or unrecognized IPs and LCss lands and should not be interpreted as having no IPs or LCs presence or claims to land.

The “Amazon Region” boundary from Amazonian Network of Georeferenced Socio-Environmental Information (RAISG) was used to define the Amazon boundary in the analysis. Note that this differs slightly from other commonly used Amazon Basin and Amazon Biome boundaries.

Extractive Threat Analysis

Oil and Gas Blocks

The extent of oil and gas blocks was compiled by Earth Insight based on recent official publications by the Ministries of Natural Resources or Energy and the national petroleum companies of Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize, Mexico, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Gabon, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Indonesia.

Mining Concessions

The extent of mining blocks was compiled by Earth Insight based on recent official publications by the Ministries of Mines and Natural Resources of Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize, Mexico, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Gabon, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea. Mining concession data for Indonesia is from Auriga Nusantara; concession data for Venezuela, Guyana, and Suriname is from the RAISG (2023); and data for the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Gabon, and Cameroon is supplemented by data from Global Forest Watch (2015).

Industrial Logging Concessions

The extent of industrial logging concessions was compiled by Earth Insight based on recent official publications by the Ministries of Forestry and Environment of Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Guyana, Suriname, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Gabon, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Indonesia. Logging concession data for Indonesia is from Auriga Nusantara, and data for the Democratic Republic of Congo,

the Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Gabon, and Cameroon is supplemented by data from Global Forest Watch (2015). Logging concession data is not available for Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and French Guiana; therefore, these countries are excluded from our analysis in the Amazon.

Regional Extractive Threat Maps:

Layer Processing

Prior to calculating the areas of Indigenous territories, local communities, indicative Indigenous Territories, Protected Areas, Key Biodiversity Areas, PIACI reserves, oil and gas blocks, mining concessions, logging/wood concessions, reforestation projects, and community forest concessions, duplicate and overlapping features were removed.

Threat Analysis

The areas of social and environmental layers overlapped by oil and gas blocks, mining concessions, and logging concessions were calculated by intersecting these respective value layers with the oil and gas, mining, or logging layers. The resulting areas of overlap were summed by region.

Case Studies:

Amazon

Threats to the Yavarí-Tapiche Corridor

The proposed boundary of the Yavarí-Tapiche Corridor was provided by ORPIO and serves as the study area for this analysis. PIACI reserves were provided by AIDSEP, based on data from the Peruvian Ministry of Culture. The Yavarí-Tapiche Corridor and PIACI reserves were intersected with oil and gas blocks, mining concessions, and logging concessions to calculate the areas under risk of extractive areas. Intact tropical moist forest under threat of oil and gas blocks and logging concessions within the corridor was calculated by intersecting the JRC Tropical Moist Forest (TMF) cover product (Vancutsem et al., 2021) with the extractive layers using Zonal Histogram, and then summarizing the number of pixels. This map has been created in consultation with ORPIO, AIDSEP, and CTI.

Threats to Waorani Territory

The Yasuní Biosphere Reserve is the study area for this case study. Oil and gas blocks were intersected with the Waorani territory to calculate the area overlapped by oil and gas, and results were summed by block status. Oil and gas blocks were also intersected with the Yasuní National Park to calculate the Protected Area overlapped by oil and gas, given that many Waorani communities live within the national park. Oil contamination points shown on the map include only official reports of contamination reported between 2008 and 2017. This map has been created in partnership with the NAWE.

Threats to Mato Grosso do Sul

The study area for this case study is the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. The area of farmlands was calculated using the Collection 10.0 Land Cover and Use of Brazil dataset from MapBiomas. The “Farming” category was used to define farmlands in the analysis, and consists of agriculture, pasture, and forest plantation land-use types. The area of deforestation was calculated using the Collection 9.0 Deforestation of Brazil from MapBiomas. The area of farmland and deforestation in Indigenous territories was calculated by intersecting the farmlands and deforestation raster layers with the Indigenous territories layer using Zonal Histogram, and then summarizing the number of pixels. This step was repeated for the boundary of Mato Grosso do Sul.

Congo

TRIDOM Landscape

The study area for the TRIDOM landscape uses a boundary from the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF). The Community Forest layer for Gabon, Cameroon, and the Republic of Congo was intersected with logging concessions and mining concessions to calculate the area of Community Forests under threat of each extractive activity. The Indicative Presence of Indigenous Peoples layer shows administrative areas known to have the presence of Indigenous Peoples.

Forest Loss in TRIDOM

This case study map combines Planet Labs satellite imagery from May 2025 with forest loss year data (Hansen et al., 2024) to show the spread of forest loss over three time periods in the north of the Republic of Congo, on the border with Cameroon.

Community Forests, Western DRC

The study area is defined as Equateur, Maï-Ndombe, and Tshuapa provinces in the Western DRC. The Community Forest layer was intersected with logging concessions and oil blocks to calculate the area of Community Forests under threat of each extractive activity. Intact tropical moist forest in Community Forests was calculated by intersecting the JRC Tropical Moist Forest (TMF) cover product (Vancutsem et al., 2021) with the Community Forest layer using Zonal Histogram, and then summarizing the number of pixels. The Indicative Presence of Indigenous Peoples layer shows administrative areas known to have the presence of Indigenous Peoples.

Indonesia

Threats to Pocoleok Indigenous Territory

The study area of this case study is the Geothermal Working Area (WKP) of the Ulumbu Geothermal Plant on Flores Island. The Geothermal Working Area polygon is defined by the Indonesian Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM). The Indigenous territories layer from AMAN was intersected with the Geothermal Working Area to calculate the area

under threat. This area does not include indicative Indigenous territories. This step was repeated with a forest cover polygon layer from the Ministry of Forestry to calculate the area of forest within Indigenous territories. This map was made by AMAN in collaboration with Earth Insight.

Threats to O’Hongana Manyawa Indigenous Territory

This case study analyses the threat to Indigenous Peoples, specifically the O’Hongana Manyawa, in North Maluku. The Indigenous territories layer from AMAN was intersected with the mining concessions to calculate the area under threat of mining. This map includes satellite imagery from October 2024 by Planet Labs. This map was made by Earth Insight and spatial analysis was conducted by AMAN.

Threats to Tano Batak Indigenous Territory

The study area of this case study covers the Toba Pulp Lestari Forestry Concessions in North Sumatra. The Indigenous territories layer from AMAN was intersected with the forestry concessions to calculate the area under threat of forestry. This area does not include indicative Indigenous territories. This step was repeated with a forest cover polygon layer from the Ministry of Forestry to calculate the area of forest within Indigenous territories. This map was made by AMAN in collaboration with Earth Insight.

Mesoamerica

La Muskitia

The study area is defined as Colón, Gracias a Dios, and Olancho departments in Honduras and the North Caribbean Autonomous Region, South Caribbean Autonomous Region, and Jinotega department in Nicaragua. The IPs and LCs territories layer from AMPB was intersected with mining concessions to calculate the area under threat of each extractive activity. Intact tropical moist forest in IPs and LCs lands was calculated by intersecting the JRC Tropical Moist Forest (TMF) cover product (Vancutsem et al., 2021) with the IPs and LCs land layer using Zonal Histogram, and then summarizing the number of pixels. Forest loss between 2014 and 2024 was calculated by intersecting the Hansen Forest Loss Year product (Hansen et al., 2024) with the IPs and LCs layer using Zonal Histogram, and then summarizing the number of pixels for the years 2014–2024. This map has been created in consultation with AMPB and Indigenous leaders in Honduras and Nicaragua.

Extractive Threats and Community Forestry in the Sierra Norte of Puebla

The Sierra Norte of Puebla study area includes the following municipalities in the Mexican state of Puebla: Ahuacatlán, Ahuazotepec, Amixtlán, Aquiztla, Camocuautla, Chiconuautla, Chicnahuapan, Coatepec, Ciiaitempan, Fransisco S Mena, Hermenegildo Galeana, Honey, Huauchinango, Iztacamazititlán, Jalpan, Jopala, Juan Galindo, Naupan, Olintla, Pahuatlán, Pantepec, San Felipe Tepatlán, Tepango de Rodríguez, Tepetzingtla, Tetela de Ocampo, Tlacuilotepec, Tlaola, Tlapacoya, Tlaxco, Cenustiano, Carranza, Xicotepex, Xochiapulco, Zacatlán, Sihuateutla, and Zongozotla. The Regional Collective Communities include the

19 Ejido communities that have joined the Regional Collective in Defense of Forests and Territories: Ajolotla, Acolihua, Cruz de Ocote, Poxcuatzingo, Tecoltemic, Tlacuitlapa, Atexca, San Francisco Terrerillos, Sebastopol, El Manantial, Tenejac, Eloxochitlán, Jicolapa, Tulimán, Río Blanco, Atotonilco, Ixtlahuaca, Mesa Chica and El Terrero. The IPs and LCs territories layer was intersected with mining concessions and oil and gas blocks to calculate the area under threat of each extractive activity. This step was repeated with the Regional Collective Communities layer. Red MOCAF provided polygons for community reforestation projects. This map has been created in consultation with AMPB and Red MOCAF.

Community Forest Management, Maya Biosphere Reserve

The study area for this case study is the community forests managed by ACOFOP (the Association of Forest Communities in Peten) in Petén, Guatemala. Forest loss between 2014 and 2024 was calculated by intersecting the Hansen Forest Loss Year product (Hansen et al., 2024) with the community-managed forests using Zonal Histogram, and then summarizing the number of pixels for the years 2014–2024. This step was repeated for the whole of Guatemala to calculate the forest loss for the country for the same time period. This map has been created in consultation with AMPB and ACOFOP.

Killed and Disappeared Environmental Defenders

This analysis uses the Global Witness dataset on missing and murdered land and environmental defenders, which has tracked environmental defender deaths between 2012 and 2024. For a full methodology, please see Global Witness (2025). The dataset was filtered and re-categorized by the GATC region (Amazon, Congo, Indonesia, Mesoamerica) based on the country associated with the event. Using this filtered dataset, we also filtered where the event driver was linked to extractives or logging industries and by characteristics of the killed or disappeared defender. Not all entries include attributes on event drivers or characteristics, so these numbers are only illustrative.

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