

Indigenous Peoples' Territories and Local Communities on the Frontlines:

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

Executive Summary



“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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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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Acknowledgements: This report was co-authored by Earth Insight and the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GATC), with the close collaboration of its regional members—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). We are deeply grateful to the many federations, Indigenous leaders, and allies who shared data, knowledge, experiences, and perspectives. Their commitment, courage, and leadership made this work possible and continue to inspire collective action to defend territories, safeguard biodiversity, and advance climate solutions.

Suggested Citation:

Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GATC) and Earth Insight. (2025). Indigenous Peoples’ Territories and Local Communities on the Frontlines.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	07
At a Glance – Regional Summaries	09
Solutions Framework	14
Centering GATC’s Five Demands: A Roadmap from the Brazzaville Declaration	15
Conclusion	18
Endnotes	19

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 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.



Namblong tribe who live in the western region of the Jayapura Regency in Papua Province, Indonesia
Image credit: Courtesy of Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN)

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.
- **Waorani 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.



Fire in the Amazon rainforest.
Image credit: Wiki Commons



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 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 land supported by participatory mapping and legal reforms, securing recognition under new customary law regulations.
- **Persistent Resistance in Sumatra:** The Ompu Umbak Siallagan community won legal recognition of their Indigenous lands after decades of struggle against pulp concessions, supported by AMAN and allies.



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

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.

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.”

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)² 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

Endnotes

1. Global Alliance of Territorial Communities. (n.d.). Forging solidarity: Our 5 demands. <https://globalalliance.me/about/>
2. Tropical Forest Forever Facility. (n.d.). TFFF – Tropical Forest Forever Facility. <https://tfff.earth/>



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

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