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Global Solutions Series Fact Sheet: Indigenous Climate Solutions

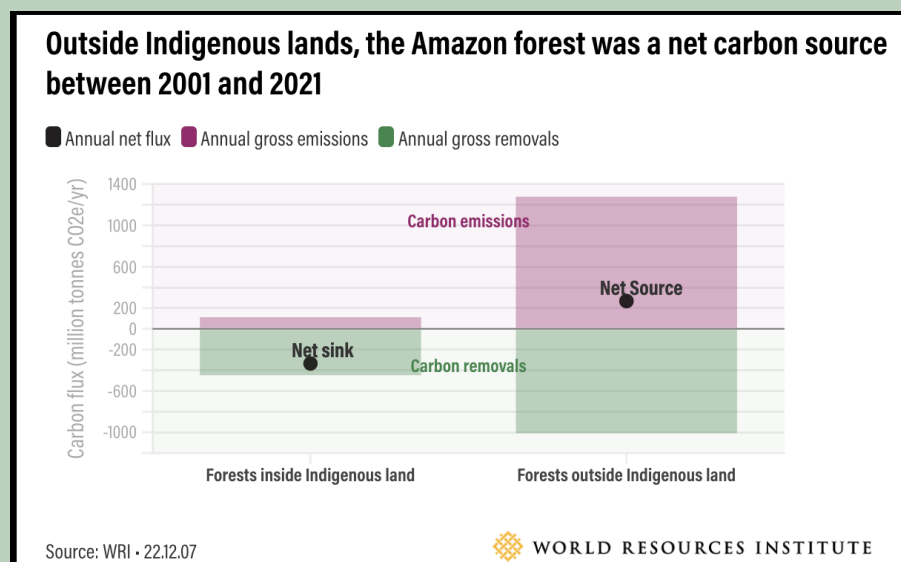
Indigenous peoples are often among the first to experience the effects of climate change, and their livelihoods are increasingly threatened by both climate change and land grabs and land poisoning by the expansion of carbon-intensive industries including agriculture, mining, and drilling.

Indigenous peoples also have a track record of safeguarding nature and embodying a clear vision for sustainability. Some examples in practice include:

- **Environmental Defense:** Indigenous populations protect about 36% of the world's remaining intact forests, and their lands are home to 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity, suggesting better methods of forest maintenance and biodiversity preservation. Analysis by WRI found that forests managed by Indigenous People in the Amazon were strong net carbon sinks from 2001-2021, collectively removing a net 340 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere each year (equivalent to the U.K.'s annual fossil fuel emissions) and outside Indigenous Lands, the Amazon Forest Is a Net Carbon Source.



- **Ecological Knowledge for Sustainability:** First Nations' ecological knowledge comes from a much longer history of observation than any modern scientific discipline, and Indigenous awareness of ecological conditions can help enhance the resilience of ecosystems and interpret and react to climate change in creative ways. Indigenous mental models place humans within the natural world, with land, water, and air as relatives rather than resources to exploit, and behave accordingly. Indigenous Peoples prioritize the laws of nature, respect for human relations, and then land and resource management, instead of a currently dominant understanding of resources as the priority which is leading to the acceleration of the climate crisis.



Source: [World Resources Institute](#)

It's important to keep in mind that indigenous groups worldwide are an extremely diverse group, but what they share is that:

1. They face relentless external pressure and have never been allowed to just be after settler contact.
2. They've been systematically excluded from development or not included in any meaningful way.
3. Their knowledge and value systems have historically been feared, derided, not respected, and not considered "valid," and exceptions have often been extractive and transactional, such as pharmaceutical development.

Some proposed climate solutions, such as carbon markets and nature-based solutions, pose this same threat.

How do we bring forward indigenous solutions?

Start by listening, suggests Ginnifer Menominee:

“It’s going back to listening to land, listening to our youth. Listening to our Elders. Where are they trying to take us? The land is telling us a whole bunch of things. Kids are telling us a whole bunch of things. Our Elders are telling us a whole bunch of things that are happening right now...”



Source: [Gustavo Moreno](#)

Support young people to restore their relationships with the land, invites Indigenous Climate Action:

“This restoration entails the reclamation of languages, ceremonies, and food sovereignty practices, as well as a reimagined education system where curriculums are rooted in the land and purpose-driven to empower young people to respect, honor, and share their gifts rather than exploit them within a capitalist system.”

Practice Reciprocity and Humility, ICA continues:

“Humble yourself, knowing that your worldview, your ways of knowing, and your assumptions of what is possible are rooted in and likely perpetuating colonial capitalism which is driving the climate crisis...think about how your life and your work would be different if you....opened yourself up to being transformed by learning from other ways: other ways of relating to the Earth, other ways of making decisions, other ways of learning and hearing. This is where your real work on climate action can begin.”

Protect Land Tenure:

Nearly 1 billion people around the world consider it likely or very likely that they will be evicted from their land or property, according to the [Prindex 2020 Comparative Report](#). This is not misguided: 91% of assessed companies in Global Canopy’s [Forest 500 report](#) did not have a single publicly available commitment to refrain from any land developments or acquisitions until any conflicts relating to customary rights to land, resources, and territory in their supply chains/sourcing regions have been resolved.



Source| [Allan Lissner, Indigenous Climate Action](#)

Don't push false solutions, argues Climate Justice Taranaki in Aotearoa:

Indigenous populations are “not only the most affected by climate change, but also the most affected by false solutions to climate change such as agrofuels (that replace food crops and further deforestation) / biofuels (notably tree crops that release isoprene and forms ozone), mega-dams (that flood ecosystems and displace communities), genetic modification (that leads to privatisation and bio disasters), tree plantations (that displace Indigenous tribes and destroy natural ecosystems), carbon offset schemes (which actually increase greenhouse gas emissions) and geoengineering (quick fixes with unmanageable side-effects).”

What does listening look like?

Engaging in dialogue with indigenous peoples is vital to seeing other perspectives and considering other values. Let's then take a moment to listen to stories excerpts collected from Amazonia by the team at Operação Amazônia Nativa.

Indigenous climate science is different:

“An indigenous perception of changes to the climate is based on the close daily relationship with and regular observation of nature indigenous people engage in to continue their ways of life and guarantee the future of their people and culture. This is made possible by the knowledge that indigenous peoples have acquired on the weather and the relationships between everything in their environment (fauna, flora, rain, cold, heat) to know where and when these resources will be available for nutritional, medicinal, cultural, or architectural uses, as well as the production of domestic artifacts, hunting, and fishing.

Non-indigenous peoples' perceptions of changes to the climate are based on, in a very general and summarized manner of speaking, the development of mathematical and computational climate forecast models that employ historical data on precipitation, temperature, atmospheric pressure, and cloud cover. The many different components of the environment are not, however, packaged in neat little distinct boxes, but intimately interconnected. For example, the current patterns of distribution, density, flowering, and fruiting of many species of plants evolved in interaction with one another, as well as animals, the rains, winds, and temperature, which all play essential roles in determining the seasons of the year.”

— TARCÍSIO DA SILVA SANTOS JÚNIOR AND LUCIANA REBELLATO

If we had been listening, we would have known sooner:

“They didn’t understand the alerts our ancient ones have always given, about stepping carefully on Earth, this immense garden of creation, where everything is interconnected, from the highest mountain to the smallest organism that thrives in lichens and stems of small herbs. Long before white’s complex systems of measurements and monitoring signal danger, our grandparents showed how our hunt was moving away from our villages, and medicinal plants were disappearing from their habitats.”



— AILTON KRENAK

The world is changing fast:

“Due to public policies that favor agribusiness, hydroelectric power plants, deforestation, excessive use of agrochemicals, and uncontrolled slash and burn practices, or rather, various kinds of environmental degradation, it is becoming more and more difficult to control or understand the climate situation. Our pajés and elders, who know natural phenomena very well, believe that the current way of thinking about and using the environment will lead nature herself to bring irreversible consequences to the entire population of planet Earth.”

— JUAREZ PAIMY

There are strategies waiting for us:

“It’s simple for us: we need to reduce forest burning, respect indigenous territories – where the forest is taken care as a cultural good, to stop burning fossil fuels, to stop polluting plants, and to implement recycling, garbage control, among the solutions. Everything would be easier if people were truly aware. The problem is that people with power choose money over environment, so the situation is getting harder and harder. We, from the Wará culture, rely on nature and have a lot of knowledge to share: how to traditionally re-forest, how to take care of environment in our region, about ways to clean the land for our subsistence crops and ways to regrow fallen trees.”

— PIRATÁ WAURÁ

Engage indigenous voices in policy and planning:

“We want to be consulted in relation to public policies, from the federal level...to the municipal and state-level, that impact directly the surroundings of our territory with projects related to tourism, highways, railways, hydroways, monoculture plantation, among others. We’d like to see projects of environmental education in the cities that teach the youth to understand the ecosystem of the region they live. But, mainly, we want the public administration in municipal, state and federal levels to recognize that we can hold partnerships for projects that take care of our region and the planet. Everyone relies on the socio environmental equilibrium to live better as human beings.”

— CAIMI WAIASSÉ XAVANTE

Localize agroforestry systems:

“We still believe that there’s a way to fix this situation. But for this to happen we must stop deforestation and do it now. At this moment, we know very well that the cut-down forest and the plantation areas are enough. If they used this whole cut-down area to produce food for the people, everyone would live well and there would be no hunger. The point is that we don’t eat soy, and the people and the environment are not a priority. All this soy is sent abroad, to make money and produce other things.”

— MANOEL KANUNXI

We must tell new stories:

“Climate change is making more and more complicated the everyday life and co-existence of humans and all living beings...A great destruction is happening and living beings don’t have proper space to live. Due to capitalism, climate change is uncontrolled and only a few people are concerned about nature. It’s essential to disseminate indigenous knowledge through records and books to put on concerns and lessons in favor of the preservation of nature. The same must happen at the media, showing mechanisms of protection and sustainable use of nature.”

— MAYAWARI MEHINAKO



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