

# Pollution impacts food and water consumption for Indigenous peoples worldwide

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Sulphur mine in Ijen, Java, Indonesia. Both large-scale industrial ore mining and local artisanal small-scale mineral extraction are major sources of pollution in Indigenous Peoples' lands. Credit: Joan de la Malla

A new study from the University of Helsinki presents the current state of knowledge on the exposure and vulnerability of indigenous peoples to environmental pollution, reviewing the innumerable impacts that pollution poses on Indigenous communities from all over the world.

"While the number of studies examining the impacts of [environmental pollution](#) upon [indigenous peoples](#) is growing, most of this research is isolated and fragmented across disciplines and [geographic regions](#)," says Dr. Álvaro Fernández-Llamazares, from the Faculty of Biological and Environmental Sciences, who led the study. "In fact, few efforts have cut across disciplinary topics and/or regions, and until today there was no [global review](#) mapping out the worldwide impacts of environmental [pollution](#) on indigenous peoples."

The study reviewed more than 680 different publications to highlight broad patterns of all the documented impacts of environmental pollution among Indigenous groups from all inhabited continents. The authors found out that most pollution-related health impacts documented among indigenous peoples are mediated through the consumption of polluted water and food, including wild foods obtained through hunting, fishing, and gathering. Because activities associated with collecting country foods generally serve important community roles, concerns associated to pollution regarding the consumption of wild foods can also impact these practices. Pollution can result in fear of consuming traditional wild foods, and foster increased reliance on nutrient-poor and expensive market foods, often increasing the risk of malnutrition and chronic diseases.

"All the literature reviewed provides clear evidence that indigenous peoples are largely and heavily affected by polluting activities both through their exposure and vulnerability, and that much of this pollution is linked to broader patterns of colonization," says Fernández-Llamazares. "However, we also note that, all over the world, indigenous

peoples are developing innovative strategies to limit, abate or stop ongoing pollution and fighting to prevent it from the outset."

The literature review documents several pathways in which indigenous peoples are contributing to bring pollution to levels that are not detrimental to human health and ecosystem functioning. Such strategies include social mobilization, blockades, cultural resistance camps, global policy advocacy litigation processes to hold pollutants into account or participatory monitoring, among others.

Fernández-Llamazares notes "I was particularly inspired by the numerous examples where Indigenous communities and scientists have built successful partnerships to martial global support for the defence of environmental justice. It is my hope that this review will contribute to bring visibility to the arduous efforts of the many Indigenous communities that are fighting to combat pollution all over the world."

**More information:** Álvaro Fernández-Llamazares et al. A State-of-the-Art Review of Indigenous Peoples and Environmental Pollution, *Integrated Environmental Assessment and Management* (2019). [DOI: 10.1002/ieam.4239](https://doi.org/10.1002/ieam.4239)

Provided by University of Helsinki

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