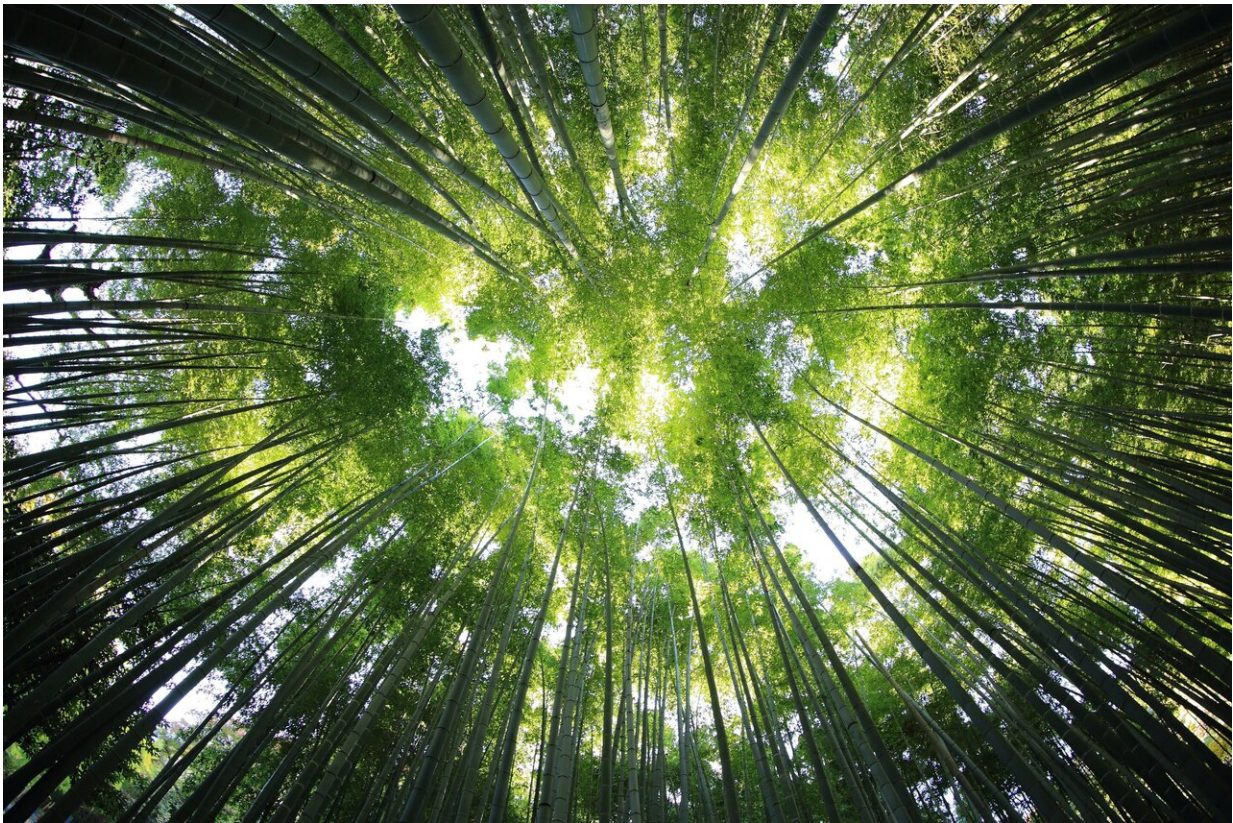


# Forest conservation policies must safeguard indigenous peoples' rights, researchers urge

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Global policy commitments on conservation such as the recent COP 26 declaration on Forest and Land Use are a step in the right direction but policy-makers must be inclusive of indigenous peoples and ensure that

any initiatives learn from the long and problematic history of forest conservation, argues an international consortium of indigenous scholar activists and social, cultural, environmental, and behavioral scientists in correspondence published today in the journal *Nature Ecology and Evolution*.

The researchers argue that there is little evidence to show that traditional [policy](#) tools such as incentives, compensation and legal coercion are effective in securing sustainable land use. In fact top-down [conservation](#) measures that do not take into account the realities and priorities of indigenous [forest](#)-dwelling communities can be very harmful and even accelerate deforestation and land degradation.

In Thailand a forest conservation plan has had the unintended consequence of declaring forest-dwelling communities "forest intruders," with 18,000 cases of illegal forest trespassing recorded since 2014, often against peoples who have lived in the forest for more than a hundred years. The conservation laws prevent the indigenous community from carrying out traditional environmental management practices including rotational agriculture and animal grazing.

Highlighting the need for inclusive, heritage-sensitive, and behavioral conservation policy, the authors recommend that there should be local social impact assessments supported by satellite mapping in order to better understand the social and ecological consequences of conservation policies; that this [evidence base](#) should be overseen by an independent body and shared openly; and that indigenous scholar activists should be closely involved in the process.

Consortium member Prof Ivo Vlaev (Warwick Business School) stresses the critical role of the behavioral sciences intersecting this process: "Behavioral sciences need to inform the process of open sharing of evidence of the social consequences of conservation, and thereby

legitimise forest conservation actions that safeguard indigenous peoples' livelihoods. We can nudge sharing of evidence; we can also inform appropriate forest conservation policies which consider the psychological and economic impact on indigenous populations."

Dr. Haenssgen, lead investigator and consortium coordinator at Global Sustainable Development (University of Warwick), adds: "Halting deforestation to achieve climate change mitigation will depend on socially inclusive policy that safeguards [indigenous peoples](#). Siloed and top-down solutions alone cannot achieve this balance, requiring consortia such as ours in which scholar activism, grounded knowledge of local realities, and cultural perspectives of indigenous heritage are just as critical for success as political science perspectives, behavioral policy mechanisms, and ecological research."

"COP26 declaration to halt forest loss: avoiding mistakes of the past" will be published as a correspondence item in *Nature Ecology and Evolution* on 13 January 2022.

**More information:** COP26 declaration to halt forest loss: avoiding mistakes of the past, *Nature Ecology and Evolution* (2022). [DOI: 10.1038/s41559-021-01650-6](#)

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