



TROPICAL DEFORESTATION IN THE AMAZON AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

IDEAS AND SOLUTIONS
FROM ASHOKA FELLOWS



→ PURPOSE

This report was written with the aim to help key decision makers and actors in the Ashoka Community: Ashoka Fellows, Ashoka Support Network Members, Ashoka Young Changemakers, nominators and strategic partners looking to intervene in the space of tropical deforestation. We hope this report can be used to understand the work and solutions that Ashoka Fellows are implementing in key tropical areas. We choose the Amazon and Southeast Asia as our focus regions because they account for more than half of the rainforests in the world. Additionally, we have a critical mass of Fellow working in these two regions with innovative solutions to address deforestation.

→ ABOUT NEXT NOW: PLANET & CLIMATE

Next Now is Ashoka's new initiative focused on four urgent global challenges: Planet & Climate, Technology & Humanity, New Longevity, and Gender. Next Now: Planet & Climate aims to change the course of history by uniting extraordinary changemakers around audacious goals that bring people and planet to a new equilibrium. We will achieve this goal by supporting breakthrough systems-changing solutions rebalancing humanity's relationship with the planet. Additionally, we identify and amplify key levers and frameworks to advance field-level impact.

→ ABOUT ASHOKA

Founded in 1980, Ashoka is the world's leading network of social entrepreneurs. We pioneered the field of social entrepreneurship and are now building toward an "Everyone A Changemaker" world: where all of us have the confidence and support to contribute to the common good. Ashoka identifies and supports leading social entrepreneurs, learns from the patterns in their innovations, and mobilizes a global community of more than 3,700 social entrepreneurs in over 90 countries.

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Introduction

The climate goals agreed upon in the Paris Climate Agreement are an ambitious target for humanity. While there is progress, it is happening at a slower pace than needed and, simultaneously, the complexity of the issue continues to increase and is correlated with multiple other developments such as the state of democracy worldwide (The Economist, 2021), managing a global pandemic (Wyns, 2020), and increasingly more volatile financial and economic markets (OECD, 2021).

Climate action consists of rethinking and reorganizing our societies altogether and it impacts all domains of life. There are multiple measures we can take and many behaviors we must change. Fighting deforestation is one of the core elements of reaching the climate targets by the end of the century (Hein et al, 2018). Forests are key ecosystems that can support limiting global warming to 1.5°C, preserving and properly managing these ecosystems has never been of greater urgency.

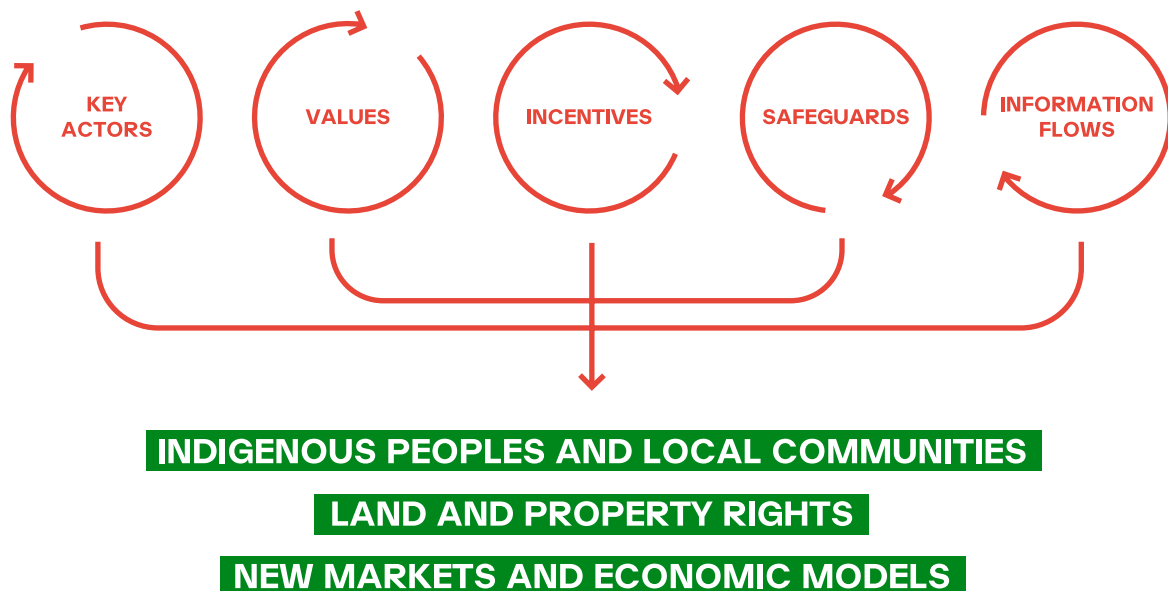
Tropical forests in particular are important because of the significant role they play in carbon capture globally. Rainforests around the world have experienced alarming deforestation activity in the past decades, with significant global consequences (Butler 2021; Cowan, 2021). This has multiple ramifications ranging from the process of setting up global carbon markets to issues related to energy production and

reorganizing food systems and food security. Fighting deforestation is a crucial step to reach the climate goals by the end of the century.

Drawing from Ashoka's knowledge in the field, consulting with experts, and our background research, we have surfaced key insights on how to better operate and develop solutions for tropical deforestation. This report draws from multiple conversations with stakeholders and experts in the Ashoka network - and beyond - to gain insights toward answering two questions:

- How do we stop deforestation (and tropical deforestation in particular)?
- How do we design - and implement - effective decision-making processes that will attain that goal?

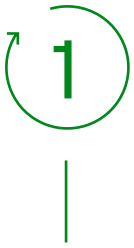
In this report, we differentiate between 5 core elements that play a role in understanding and designing systems for effective decision-making: key actors, values, incentives, safeguards, and information flows. We use these elements as guidance to examine three main topics of debate regarding forests and land use in tropical deforestation: indigenous peoples and local communities, land and property rights, and new markets and economic models.





I. INCLUSION OF VOICES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Indigenous people and local communities (IPLCs) play and will have to play one of the most critical roles in developing sustainable conservation alternatives, at the same time they are most affected by its adverse effects. Safeguarding their rights and enhancing their role is an essential component of countering the ongoing climate catastrophe.



Ensure IPLCs have better access to decision making



Traditionally, tropical forests have been best protected where indigenous peoples bear responsibility for them. Building on the input of these communities is critical to gaining a **comprehensive understanding of the environment and its relation to individuals**. Their agency and integrity have beneficial consequences on a range of levels, notably controlling deforestation, reducing carbon emissions, and fostering local resilience. The indigenous concept of 'territory' does not so much imply possession of the land as such, but more importantly, it encompasses their economic, social, ecological, and cultural unity.

The **relationship between IPLCs and their local, regional, and national governments** is vital. In both regions of the world, there is much room for improvement. From our research, several ideas surfaced on how these relationships could be better built and nurtured. These ideas include setting up agreements between indigenous peoples and states, implementing international standards concerning their rights, and using intermediate platforms – such as transnational indigenous networks – to engage with local authorities.

Compared with the process being done by a company - they get the permit easily - ... it's different when the community applies or submits a request for the same permit. They [the government] still have a long process to get the permit, and sometimes the community cannot do that by themselves because of the lack of information and the capacity to access the process and the information. So that's why the role of the NGOs in this context is very important.

LAILI KHAIRNUR
Director of Gemawan



Ensuring that IPLCs can participate meaningfully in the decision-making processes around the tropical forest also involves **carefully thinking about language**. This can be understood concretely – in ensuring exchanges and negotiations with other stakeholders are translated into traditional languages. It can also be un-

derstood in the way the narrative is developed – in a way that people in local communities can understand the issues being discussed and can decide for themselves. Both aspects fall under the general requirement of securing Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) from indigenous peoples and local communities.



2

Engage women as local leaders and solution-providers

Women – given their responsibilities in families and communities, and their role as stewards of natural resources – are uniquely positioned to play a significant role in combating deforestation, counteracting the effects of the climate crisis and restoring local governance. In the rural populations of the Amazon, for instance, there is heterogeneity in gender roles: both men and women are responsible for providing food and water for the family, but if livelihood resources are scarce, men are forced to migrate to enter the labor market, leaving their family to work in factories or cities. As a result, women are forced to take on the role of breadwinner but face a drastic decrease in access to resources.

Women's deep commitment to forests needs to be recognized and their perspective incorporated into forestry issues. Women leaders are active participants in the sustainable management of forests and communities and their further engagement can be strengthened through regional-based workshops, regional fellowship opportunities, and women's empowerment programs. There are also more technical measures to be taken: women require access to technical assistance for agriculture, access to land tenure, and access to financial resources to mitigate climate crisis effects.



Women in rural areas play a key role in nature conservation. They are not only responsible for the family, but also for the use of natural resources. Their role is jeopardized as they are caught in the middle of the uncertainty of what is wrongly called 'development'. Their struggle is invisible, yet they remain resilient in the face of multiple forms of violence. The great challenge is for women to be recognized as having leadership and the right to express themselves freely in defense of life, represented here as a source of autonomy, self-governance, and mutual balance with mother nature.

JOENIA WAPICHANA
Ashoka Fellow





II. BETTER COMMUNICATION ON TROPICAL DEFORESTATION

Communication on tropical deforestation is essential for not only transmitting knowledge and expertise but also raising awareness and ensuring that the correct information and appropriate narratives reach all relevant audiences.



Strengthen the knowledge base

More can be done to **provide local communities with technical knowledge** on tropical deforestation and climate change. For instance, farmers can participate in trainings in best agricultural practices. Lack of information and understanding leaves communities vulnerable to exploitation. Understanding the way social and economic systems around tropical deforestation work can empower communities and groups. Armed with this knowledge, they can confidently voice their opinions and ideas at decision-making tables.

Ashoka Fellow [Neil Aldrin Mallari](#)'s approach to a more effective conservation sector in the Philippines is to develop new tools that equip natural resource managers across private, public, and citizen sectors to act collaboratively as science-driven decision-makers. By widening the circle of conservation from a field traditionally only effectively influenced by academics and non-profits to include leading businesses, national government, and citizens, he removes the barrier of the conservation agenda being too daunting and overwhelming for non-experts.

Still, it is not sufficient to just connect with local communities and share information with them. They're often bombarded with lots of information from different sources, which can be overwhelming and confusing. It's therefore crucial to connect them with the most authoritative sources, such as scientists who are working in the forests. By increasing budgets for science and

technology projects, governments in the global South can attract regional and international knowledge, which also serves as an investment in innovative research, commercialization, and sustainable production in their countries.

In dealing with the deforestation problem from a knowledge perspective, it is important to also consider and **value the traditional insights and experience of IPLCs themselves**. Communities often have extensive expertise in ecosystem dynamics, as well as community-based governance models which have traditionally worked well. These models can be scaled, and traditional knowledge leveraged in finding solutions both for the technical side of sustainable forestry and for the decision-making processes.

Disinformation is a prevalent challenge among IPLCs. Ensuring development in the Amazon and Southeast Asia regions requires strategic communication around sustainable development opportunities, as well as counteracting phenomena such as fake news. Economic development alternatives such as bioeconomy, biodiverse economy, supporting current sustainable supply chains, agroforestry can be made more visible through strategic communication and connected explicitly with the multiple social issues of the communities. Part of creating new narratives around development opportunities is also to counteract fake news or disinformation campaigns run by various stakeholders in the regions with an interest in maintaining the status quo.

2

Monitor land use and signal issues in real-time

Existing technological solutions could be leveraged to help combat deforestation. Google, for example, has [the] technology to document streets around the world through pictures. They could collaborate with communities to document the status of tropical forests, and this data coupled with field research that conservation scientists are putting out would be made available to everyone, therefore making tracking and accountability easier.



HARRY SURJADI
Ashoka Fellow

Advanced technology offers new opportunities for monitoring deforestation almost in real-time. Investing in technology and reporting methods to track illegal logging and deforestation, combined with effective law enforcement measures at the regional level has proven effective in the past, both in the Amazon and in Southeast Asia.

Ashoka Fellow [Tasso Azevedo](#) has been leading a collective of actors focused on open access data platforms that are empowering actors across society to take actions to reduce greenhouse emissions and deforestation. What's interesting about his recent model is that he does not task his own organization with all the work but, rather, he spearheads these initiatives under the umbrella of the Climate Observatory in Brazil (a network of actors which until recently also did not have any legal entity). Recently, he's been focusing on working with multiple actors to use this data to inform their actions (e.g., he is working with banks so that they use the data to investigate whether the businesses that they invest in are involved in illegal deforestation).

Investigative journalism is a powerful avenue for communicating injustices around land-use practices. The role of connecting citizen reporting with mainstream media – for raising awareness and putting pressure – is particularly important in contexts where the media is private and highly dependent on advertising or state funds. Therefore, independent voices are crucial. Indigenous peoples and local communities should be trained as citizen journalists, as Ashoka Fellow [Harry Surjadi](#) is doing in Indonesia with his organization TempoWitness. Since the local community is closest to the problem, they can witness – and share out – what's happening on the ground. To engage Indigenous people more, support should be advanced to the next level so they can have their own newsrooms and have the information they put out republished and shared out by other media.

There is power in democratizing journalism, data production, and communication. Along the same lines, reports and analyses related to current deals or developments need to be made more transparent. This allows citizens to check the legality of contract terms and the validity of people who signed them.

In citizen journalism, working with highly reputable media protects citizens from being sued, or unfairly taken advantage of, by more powerful entities. **Mechanisms to protect whistleblowers** are therefore integral and need to be put in place where they're lacking. This allows the community to feel more empowered because the risk is minimized.

3

Communicate broadly and shape consumer demand

There are numerous groups and people working hard to fight tropical deforestation. But to make faster progress, there is a need to share more information about the problem and its consequences among people not engaged so far. Through compelling data visualizations, films, social media messaging, and journalistic pieces on channels that people use by default, content, and information about tropical deforestation can be made easily and practically accessible to a wide audience. This can increase credibility – and therefore acceptance – of evolving research output and data on the connection between tropical deforestation and climate change. In addition, it can encourage citizens to politically sanction governments and politicians who don't properly address the issue. This extensive communication can also build public awareness on indigenous rights violations and their vital role in forest conservation worldwide and build public trust between IPLCs and broader society.

Stopping tropical deforestation also involves communicating with people from various communities and globally as consumers. People worldwide need to understand the impact of their economic behavior on climate change and its connection to deforestation practices. Providing feasible alternatives to consumers and incentives for them to move towards more sustainable practices is a big component of mainstreaming new economic models and mindsets moving forward.

Youth can play a big role in getting others excited about the value of forests. Given their heavy online presence, it's important that they're presented with the right information so they can make more informed decisions and outreach. And to rally their support, we need to recognize their changing perceptions, needs, and desires, and furthermore, find solutions that connect to their ambitions.

Canadian Fellow [Vanessa LeBourdais](#) works on empowering youth and children to be active environmental change agents within their families and communities. Vanessa has launched an environmental change agent apprenticeship program called Planet Protector Academy (PPA) that helps kids garner community-based practices for environmental stewardship. PPA has reached almost 850,000 children through programming in around 125 cities in Canada, some cities in the US, and two schools in India. Over time, other programs like Emergency Preparation Squad (EPS) and H2Whoa, a water conservation program, have been added to the portfolio.

Shift to a narrative of possibility and positive stories



Stories have a transformative power to get people to care, understand, and act. We, therefore, need to tell stories that motivate action. Stories must be about aspects that are most relevant for people, to connect people to their own realities. And in order to tell the right stories, we need to truly **understand these realities on the ground.**

All too often, narratives around deforestation and climate change are almost solely focused on the problem and the impending doom. Ashoka Fellow [Shubhendu Sharma](#) highlights the value of shifting focus from a mere fascination with the problem, to understanding root causes. When we focus more on the root causes, we go beyond resolving just the symptoms, we realize the complexity of problems and are better able to address them.

For people to visualize change and progress, **solutions need**

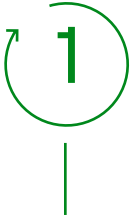
to be made more visible and communicated in a relatable way. We need to tell positive stories about what works and shift the narrative toward opportunities (Per Espen Stoknes, 2021). For example, the benefits of sustainability and cost-effectiveness of climate initiatives should be communicated and communicated better.

There is enough scientific data to make compelling arguments about the drivers of deforestation – cattle, soy, illegal mining – and where the science is unclear, or the data is insufficient, there seem to be unanswered questions. Although we have data documenting illegal deforestation and its effects on climate, how can we use this information to convince both the regular citizen and the company CEO to act differently? These kinds of questions need an answer with a frame of positive storytelling in mind.

III. CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMBINED



Addressing tropical deforestation in the Amazon and Southeast Asia requires going beyond conservation efforts and thinking about the social and economic development of the regions. To design viable long-term solutions, a balance between the two approaches needs to be struck. Any effort along these lines must start with understanding the local needs and wishes of people, which are not so different from those of people in other regions of the world. In the global North, governments and institutional actors often connect climate issues with issues of social justice, green jobs, green development, etc., but when it comes to tropical forests, they tend to confine dialogue to conservation. The way forward is adopting holistic solutions in addressing economic and social problems – solutions that also align with environmental goals.



Develop entrepreneurial opportunities and economic alternatives for communities

The value of engaging with local and Indigenous communities is almost common knowledge at this point – because of their proximity to the problem and the fact that they're often the most adversely affected by the effects of deforestation. However, how we engage them deeply matters. We need to work with them to develop alternative economic prospects, design indigenous-led conservation models, ensure benefits from the commercialization of cultural heritage are shared fairly and equitably, integrate the management of resources – and therefore reduce costs – and unlock the potential of social forestry (Wong et al, 2020). We need to work with them at a **level playing field: as entrepreneurs and not just beneficiaries of charitable interventions.**

In India for example, when Ashoka Fellow Shubhendu Sharma's [organization](#) conducts afforestation workshops in forests, workshop attendees stay with indigenous communities residing in the area.

These communities provide hospitality services and in return, Afforest compensates them at the market rate. Afforest also ensures that those who help run the workshops are paid as much as Afforest employees – and this is made clear and transparent. Afforest aims to change the dynamics of working with such communities by helping them professionalize their services in return for fair compensation. In addition, workshop attendees purchase goods and services from them. Rather than donating some money or a fraction of the returns from the workshops to these communities, the goal is to, as Shubhendu articulates, “convert them into partners, into vendors” so that they can be self-sustainable.

Indigenous peoples and local communities are often referred to as the “guardians of the forests and lands” (FAO, 2021). But in today's globalized world, they are just as much as anyone else part of an economic system that creates pressures and needs for them. Being grateful for their

guardianship role also means developing and implementing **mechanisms of reward for indigenous peoples, traditional communities, farmers, and other rural dwellers.** This includes access to credit lines and financing focused on decarbonizing the economy (BCCFA, 2021), as well as payment mechanisms for damage compensation or tax incentives and exemptions.

Developing **job schemes for professional transitions or training for green jobs** is important in the case of workers already employed by corporations that are not prioritizing deforestation. Any job scheme or retraining program needs to cater directly to the needs of the people, rather than just paying lip service to these ideas. In regions where incomes are scarce and local development is still a pressing need, guarantees for reducing adverse consequences of job changes must be put in place, and the farmers and the workers themselves involved in the development plans for the local economy.

Market economic products from biodiverse forests

Economic activity can still take place without widespread deforestation of tropical forests. Conservation-based economic opportunities exist, and they can be an incentive for forest regeneration. It is important to highlight the profits available to businesses through “green practices” and leverage their power in shifting supply chains.



Nature-based Solutions (NbS), such as reducing deforestation, low-carbon agriculture, restoration, and sustainable silviculture, especially with native species (BCCFA, 2021), are viable alternatives already. It is important to also identify and support other commodities with power to influence supply chains. One way to do this is tapping into – or strengthening – the market for tropical-forest-specific products such as nuts, fruit, bamboo, etc. Solutions such as silviculture of native species, agroforestry systems, and crop-livestock-forest integration systems have been proven to work financially, sequester carbon, and improve water quality (BCCFA, 2021). They can also make livestock farming more efficient and profitable which results in reducing the amount of land that would otherwise be cleared for farming.

It is important, however, to connect these technical solutions and scale them through policy and commercial chains. Our research echoed the need for mandatory due diligence for operators who place specific commodities on the market, as well as facilitating access to the regional market for producers bringing in these commodities and for others pioneering sustainable solutions.

Successful case studies of silviculture of native species, agroforestry systems, crop-livestock-forest integration systems have been documented and analyzed in this [report of the Brazilian Coalition on Climate, Forests and Agriculture](#).

Regulate emissions trading and carbon markets

In recent years, the idea of carbon markets has been developed as an economic alternative for tropical forests areas. The COP 26 conference also announced the intention of advancing carbon markets globally. Carbon offset projects are viewed as a tool through which the protection of the forests by local communities is incentivized, in exchange for financial rewards. Still, there are many unanswered questions and pending issues when it comes to the implementation of carbon offset projects and voluntary carbon markets. **Clear and transparent rules and regulations** that govern these carbon markets are still being developed. Their operationalization in different countries is yet to be spelled out. This brings with it issues of fair and equitable pricing, as well as ensuring that the profits and revenues primarily serve local communities. Issues of land ownership and land and territory rights need

to be cleared up first in order to make sure the economic gains from carbon credit reach communities.

The issue of **potential corruption** is pertinent here. The (still) disputable legality of carbon deals can make carbon unsellable. Moreover, there will always be economic players looking to make a profit at the expense of development. Therefore, **due diligence** around the compliance of traders is crucial, as well as increased transparency through reports and analysis of current deals. These steps will help limit corrupt actors' access to the market.

The regulation and operationalization of carbon markets will be the key determinant for whether they become a tool that alleviates the carbon emissions problem.

If there is a transferring system and a fair sharing system and it adds to agroforestry being the earner in learning model, then it can contribute to going back to more sustainable land use. So yes, I think that it [the carbon market] can contribute, but it's often happening like in Malaysia...that just some outside party decides that is carbon that we sell. And no local people involvement. So, there is the key element and the need to talk about laws

WILLIE SMITS
Borneo Orangutan
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Treat tropical deforestation as an intersectional issue

Tropical deforestation and its impact on local communities and indigenous peoples is closely linked to other needs in the communities such as investment in healthcare, education, and developing alternatives for livelihoods. These issues cannot be treated separately, but rather holistically — in what is referred to as a multi-solving approach (Sawin, 2018). Developing social programs for IPLCs (BCCFA, 2021) goes hand in hand with addressing other issues such as nutrition and food security, access to clean water, women's and children's rights, combatting gender-based violence. Solutions must also target improving the economic value of the forest itself by restoring and rehabilitating ecosystems, providing direct and indirect socio-environmental benefits for the Amazonian population through employment, income generation, and paying out dividends to the communities. This further serves to strengthen the rights of the people as they continue to contribute to the economy and the development of their communities, thus establishing a community-driven model for social justice.

The interconnectedness of healthcare and the environment has been made even more visible by the COVID-19 pandemic, and has been a focus area for Ashoka Fellow [Kinari Webb](#) for a long

time. Through her organization Health In Harmony, Kinari provides high-quality and affordable healthcare to communities in the Indonesian rainforests, so that they do not have to log the forest to obtain income to cover extremely expensive care. The clinic offers discounted healthcare to community members who stop illegal logging. In addition, anyone can pay for their care with non-cash payments such as tree seedlings, manure, or volunteering work in the hospital's organic gardens. This has reduced the pressure on communities and has also allowed the regeneration of the forest. Health In Harmony enters these communities and practices a grounded methodology called Radical Listening in order to position indigenous and traditional rainforest communities

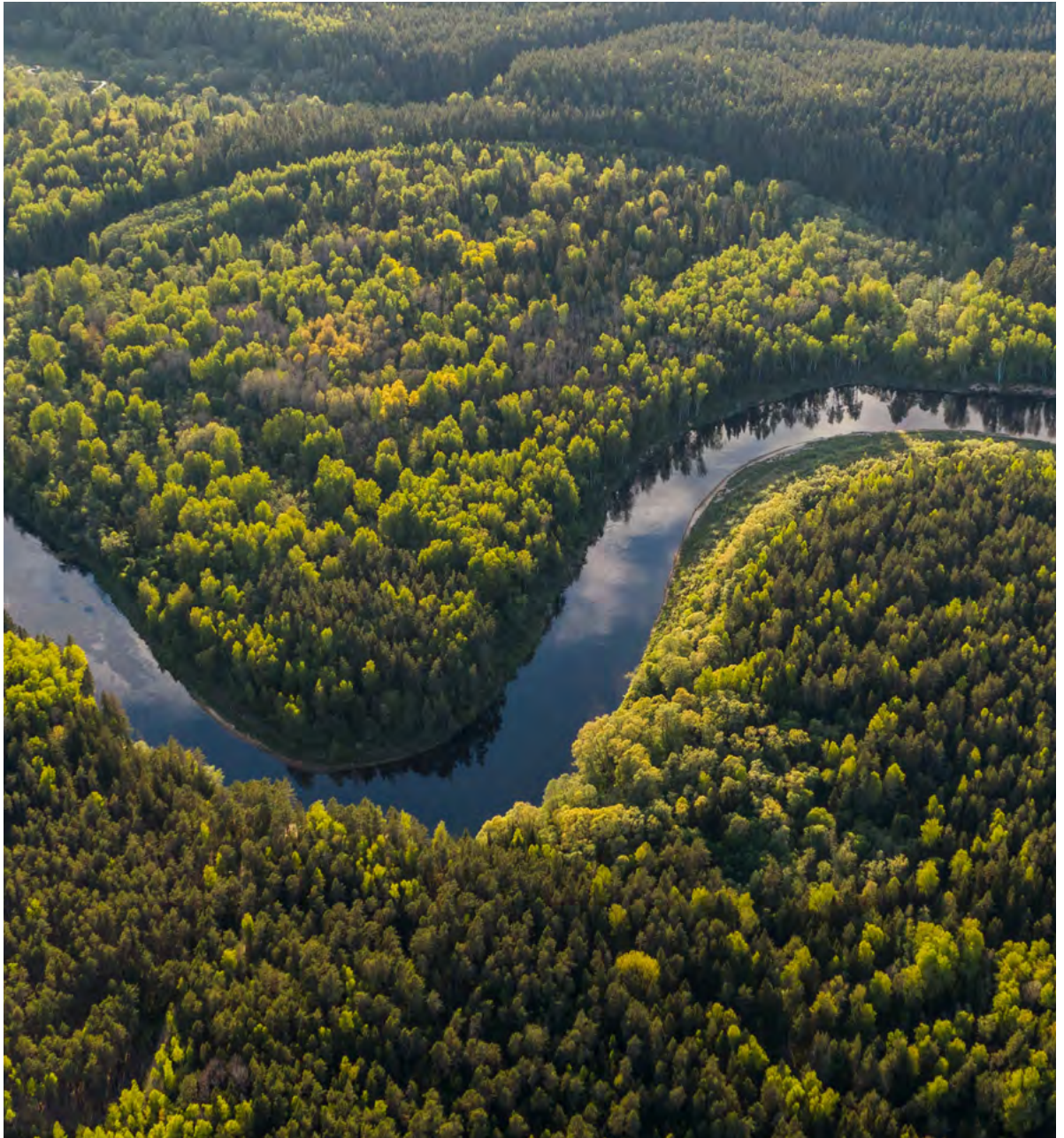
When talking about the Amazon, we always have to look into different lanes and different patterns out of the region. We can not only talk about systemic development without talking about social issues. There's no sustainable development economy without understanding the region social needs (from jobs to inequality reduction, to internet access), they are all connected and we should be tackling all of them when we're looking into the Amazon.

IAGO HAIRON

Young Changemaker and Climate

Justice Program Officer at Open Society Foundation





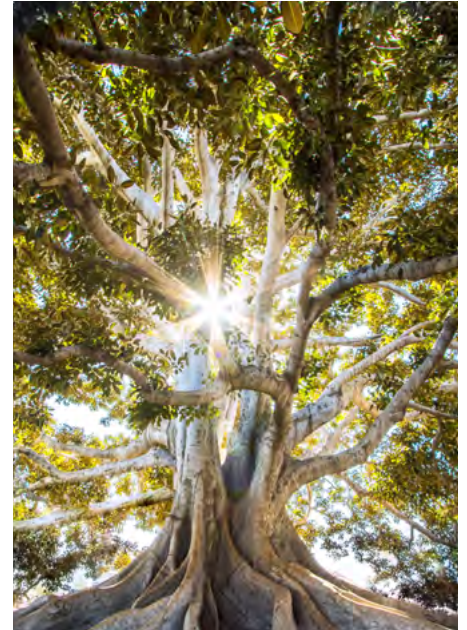
as climate and conservation experts who can identify and interrupt the various root causes of rainforest degradation. For example, to reverse deforestation, rainforest communities from Brazil to Indonesia do not design siloed, sector-based solutions; they design exchange systems, consistently defined by the following interdependent elements: healthcare, conservation, jobs training, and education.

There is rampant disruption of community structures among communities living in and around tropical forests. The cause of this disruption is two-fold: 1) young people, in pursuit of more modern lifestyles, no longer live by traditional values and customs, resulting in a generational gap through which knowledge is lost; 2) external entities – both individuals and companies – take advantage of weaker community links and use blackmail to force community members to give up their land. Therefore, there is a need for safeguards to protect indigenous ancestral links to land and for enhanced capacity of local and indigenous communities to defend their rights against external pressures.

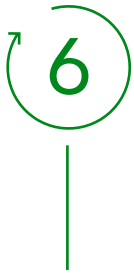
Strengthen collective ownership models

Our research highlighted the importance of strengthening collective ownership models as a way of addressing deforestation. Narratives and practices need to be shifted towards commonalities again. Cooperatives that acquire land from the government can develop ownership models where the farmer is also the shareholder and in which decision-making processes are more inclusive. Stronger ownership in the hands of farmers and local loggers can also lead to building a more socially sustainable logging model.

Ashoka Fellow [Silverius Oscar \(Onte\) Unggul](#) develops sustainable forestry models in Indonesia. Through the social conglomeration business model, he builds cooperatives of loggers and works with the Sustainability Council for certification of their work. The farmers are not stakeholders, but shareholders of the organization which is built based on the small areas of land that the farmers themselves own.



In the future, there are plans to also use public land for social forestry through government legal certificates. The social conglomeration business model is also a decision tool, as people can decide what they want to do with their forests. Onte and his team want to expand this business model from forestry to fisheries and other industries with the intention of making them more equitable. You can read more about Onte's work [here](#).



Reinforce protected areas of land and conservation efforts

Establishing protected areas of land and developing territorial planning with a focus also on conservation has been effective in reducing deforestation in the past (Allegretti, 1990). It remains to be seen, however, how these models can complement other efforts of sustainable development and, in addition, how the internationalization of tropical deforestation affects governments' willingness and capacity to establish these areas.

Models pioneered by Ashoka Fellows [Maria Alegretti Zanoni](#) and [Martha Isabel \(Pati\) Ruiz](#) have proven to work. Maria Alegretti Zanoni set up the model where extractive reserves are protected zones in which indigenous peoples and local communities can ensure their livelihoods by cultivating forest products (such as nuts, latex, fruits) and conducting small-scale fishing, hunting, and farming. The model reconciles the need for

conservation of the tropical forest with the need for local communities to engage in economic activity. Martha Isabel (Pati) Ruiz works with a community development model in which protected forest areas are a source of income through ecotourism, commercial tree planting programs, and sustainable farming.

Developing environmentally friendly economic solutions for tropical forests also involves restoration efforts which can lead to the strengthening of ecosystems which can then, in turn, serve the economic use of various forest commodities. Planting native tree species or working towards reforestation by matching species with the right location, culture, and climate changes is a holistic approach in which we learn from nature because "nature knows best" (Ashoka Fellow Willie Smits).



IV. GLOBAL, REGIONAL, LOCAL DIMENSIONS OF TROPICAL DEFORESTATION

The issue of tropical deforestation is no longer confined to national or regional boundaries. Since its effects are global, international governments, companies, NGOs are all pertinent stakeholders. International interests - of businesses and governments - affect local dynamics to a large extent.

This increases the **complexity of the power dynamics** in decision-making and necessitates continuous monitoring and accountability checks. Procedures through which international corporations are prevented from pressuring national governments need to be established. Similarly, there is a need to increase transparency and accountability of development funds and private investment from international governments to make sure they respect the development goals of the regions themselves. There is also a need for policy coordination at regional and international levels for sustainable solutions for tropical forests to be viable.

1

Create real engagement while taking on the ground conflict into account

Although there is widespread discourse globally about the significance of tropical forests and the efforts to find alternative livelihood solutions, the reality on the ground is sometimes marred with conflict and people still suffer the effects of colonialism, racism and corruption.

Finding solutions for tropical deforestation requires a lot of **communication and facilitation** between very diverse stakeholders. Platform approaches in which many sectors and stakeholders can

come together eye-to-eye can help bring underrepresented actors to the table. Cross-sectoral partnerships between business, academia, and social entrepreneurs around mutual interests can also deter bad actors who oppose alternatives to the status quo.

The involvement and perspectives of **indigenous peoples and local communities are not always aligned** either. While some groups want to participate in decisions regarding the governance of

the forest and new economic avenues such as carbon markets, others oppose any deviation from traditional forest guardianship. These dynamics need to be thoroughly understood before reaching decisions with these communities.

Addressing tropical deforestation means developing innovative policy and institutional frameworks for economic and social issues. But to realize change, it also requires significant **effort on the implementation side**.

2

Facilitate peer-to-peer exchange and popularize best practice models

There is a need to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and information exchange between communities with similar needs and experiences in tropical forests, both regionally and globally. Relying on building trust in and among communities is vital. **Face-to-face interaction and the role of direct information flows in communities should not be underestimated.** This connection and exchange between communities with similar experiences can also be achieved by **popularizing cases and best practices** that can set precedents globally. Public authorities can also play a role in this sense, for example by sharing data proving how the income and quality of life of local people can be improved, deforestation reduced, and environmental services promoted.



V. DEVELOPMENT AND STRENGTHENING OF REGULATIONS, STANDARDS, AND RULES

Better decision-making and governance processes, as well as economic alternatives, can be developed only through the creation and enforcement of firm regulations and standards that can guide all stakeholders and ensure their compliance with the climate goals. This aspect is intricate and complex, so below we break down insights that emerged from our conversations into 5 main themes.

1

Build legislative measures to gain clarity on land ownership and rights

The issue of deforestation is also closely interlinked with land ownership and land use. The starting point in addressing conflicts in this area is to understand that IPLCs, governments, and private actors do not always mean the same things when talking about land rights (Merino, 2021; Merino & Gustaffson, 2021). The problem stems from the different understandings between territorial rights (which are a political type of rights connected to social justice) and property rights (which take on the economic perspective of land ownership) and collective property rights (which take into account communities overall and not just individual ownership). Failure to carefully consider these differen-



ces in conceptual understanding represents an oversimplification of the debates taking place.

The inherited land rights of indigenous peoples and local communities are granted and maintained by the state, and they should protect against, for example, encroachment by loggers and farmers, as well as land grabbing. However, the mere existence of land rights does not prevent violent conflicts from breaking out. A factor contributing to these conflicts is that land titles are often limited to the surface of the land and do not extend to the subsoil. Thus, even in indigenous territories, despite the existence of land tenure rights, concessions are issued for oil or mining exploration and extraction. As such, the struggle to protect the still intact forests overlaps with the issue of legal recognition of indigenous territories as the basic condition for ascertaining self-determined development.

Clarity around land ownership can only be achieved through legislative measures. IPLCs ask that all indigenous lands be recognized and secured. To recognize is to demarcate, homologate and protect these lands. These land reforms should also be accompanied by climate mitigation funds to finance the titling and delimitation of indigenous territories. Permits for the management of forest land - which do not solve the ownership question (the land is still owned by companies or governments) - need to be distinguished from other requisite permits. In Indonesia for instance, different categories of forests are governed by different rules - village forests, indigenous forests, collaborative forests, etc. Although some progress on land reform has been made, it is limited to certification of the land and does not extend to the distribution of the land, which is the issue that IPLCs are trying to draw attention to.

I think it's better than before because before we [had] two up to, maybe, seven years, and now we just have one year to get the permit related to the social forestry, but on the other side, this means we still have a problem with the land reform progress. I think our government still just understands that land reform means something like a certification. But for us, for NGOs, and also for the community, land reform is not about learning certification, but it's about that distribution and about reclaiming our rights related to the land and forests. (...) In West Kalimantan, we have a 14-million-hectare upland forest. This is the total area but almost 80% of the area is already owned and managed by the companies and also by the government. Some parts are protect[ed] areas and conservation areas and other parts are already managed and owned by mining companies, forest plantation companies, and also oil companies. So I think the problem is related to the injustice in the ownership of the land between communities and industry.

LAILI KHAIRNUR
Director of Gemawan



IPLCs see the issue of land rights nationally as connected to the International Declaration of Human Rights and they sometimes even advocate for a declaration of a human rights emergency for **indigenous human rights** defenders.

In the Amazon, Ashoka Fellow and indigenous leader Joenia Wapichana is working with indigenous communities to reverse a landmark ruling of the Brazilian government stipulating that people who were not occupying the land before 1988 have no right to it and cannot claim ownership over such lands. This affects indigenous communities directly, as some were occupying the lands long before that, even

before the Portuguese invasion in the 1500s. This is recognized in the constitution from 1988 and the activists want to uphold the law which considers the history of the country and of the communities. Joenia sees the landmark ruling as a threat to all constitutional rights and human rights of the entire population, including IPLCs. The decision will encourage an invasion of these lands by miners, companies and businesses. Therefore, the groups involved are asking for the International Declaration of Human Rights to be respected, highlighting once more the close connection between the local and global dimensions of issues in the tropical forests.

Strengthen deterrents to illegal logging



Addressing illegal logging is just important as developing other solutions for land use. Measures that have proven effective in the past, according to Ashoka Fellow [Adalberto Verissimo](#), – especially in the Amazon during the period of time in which deforestation reduced drastically – are confiscation of equipment and property, and restriction of rural credit if illegal logging is proved. Illegal activity is more likely to be discovered – and penalized – when groups of actors work together by sharing data and building collaborative projects. Still, forbidding logging and mining is not a sufficient safeguard against deforestation. Procedural steps and implementation of these laws and better enforcement are needed if illegal operations are to be stopped.

Unbridled corruption in both the Amazon and Southeast Asia stifles deforestation efforts. In Indonesia for example, increased partitioning of government and administration levels has led to more politicians at various levels and as a result, increased opportunities for corrupt deals. Local government officials – and even religious leaders – are easily bribed by private companies. In many countries, the irony is that entities like the government that are tasked with implementing conservation policies are corrupt and find ways to profit in the name of conservation.

In addition, citizens themselves are easily corruptible. This makes it difficult to sustain innovations created by intervening organizations when they're ready to leave the community. Willie Smits shares a story about a co-operative the Masarang Foundation set up and handed over to local farmers. Only 3 weeks after hand-over, he was devastated to learn that the factory was promptly abandoned, and funds embezzled by the farmers after they were bribed by a local bank. The democratic and inclusive decision-making processes with other farmers in the community were broken and worse, the farmers defrauded their own community members. The foundation had to step in again and is now managing the factory instead of the farmers.

Develop subsidies, tax arrangements, and regulations for local and international business

The economic behavior of businesses needs to be managed as well if we are to stop tropical deforestation. Both national and international businesses can be incentivized through subsidies and tax arrangements to shift their business practices toward more sustainable and forest-protective practices. Regulations and legislation to control or shape business behavior are essential and they can take the form of trusts, reserves, licenses, or negotiations (Per Espen Stoknes, 2021). These regulations must also cover business supply chains in order to avoid loopholes or minimal adjustments that will not have any substantial impact.

“It feels like it’s a really interesting time to rethink our markets and our capital markets and how they work in flow. And so my broader vision is that we can really both at the sort of political and market capital level start doing a better job including the negative externalities of a bunch of our sort of current infrastructure and really making super rational market incentives, market mechanisms, you know, tax incentives and things like that, so that there’s a real cohesion in terms of how things are purchased, the types of investment that [are] available, the types of financing mechanisms, the types of results-based financing, all of that could unify really well to support a number of extremely positive initiatives in the economy and to stop sort of favoring elements of our society and food chain and overall sort of marketplace today that still allows you know, dirty or unjust business models to thrive.”

ALEXANDER EATON
Ashoka Fellow



Change standards in measuring economic activity

When thinking about new economic systems, it's also important to change the standards by which we measure the net success of economic activities. Ideas such as setting up an ESG financial system and developing metrics that help prevent investments from damaging practice are already taking root. These measures should also be included in calculations for investments and tax systems and thus develop a proper and realistic "balance sheet" of the planet. In the future the price we pay for products could take into account its impact on the environment rather than be based only on market value. The need is to shift the actual idea of growth toward "health growth", a concept defined by Per Espen Stoknes (2021) as green growth in which the economic benefits are sufficiently inclusive of all humans.

Another necessary measure of change in the economic system is a high level of **transparency and strengthening of reporting requirements and practices**. Transparency must also extend to the fossil fuels practices of corporations as it can put pressure on senior executives and corporations to change business practices.

Founder of Canopy, [Nicole Rycroft](#) partners with the private sector to develop business solutions and supply chains that protect forests. Canopy partners with companies who benefit from the current system of forest degradation, working with the forest

industry's largest customers, including publishers and clothing, food and cosmetic brands. Since its founding in 1999, Canopy has worked with over 750 partners to reform their practices and integrate environmental conservation into their companies' values. In 2019, Canopy launched the Pack4Good initiative which aims to support the world's largest corporate consumers to move the massive global paper packaging supply chain out of high carbon forests and towards resource-efficient design. Recognizing the power of the market, Nicole is also generating market demand for environmentally friendly and circular alternatives to forest products. Canopy works to incentivize and support consumer brands and producers to voluntarily reform their practices, eliminate their consumption of species and carbon-rich forest products, and become champions of forest conservation.

This level of transparency is, however, difficult to realize without **connecting big data with realities on the ground**. Audits relying just on office documents and no field trips are not reliable sources of information (Brice, 2022). When supply chains are easily traceable, it is easier to understand people's lives and challenges on the ground and therefore ensure livelihoods, because administrative and legal loopholes which allow companies to make money at the expense of the forest, can be identified and rectified.



5

Turn nature into a legal stakeholder

Many organizations are thinking about how to award legal rights to nature and to include nature as a stakeholder in decision-making. Many questions arise, such as who should represent nature and what legal status and forms can be used for this purpose. But there are also examples and precedents already, like in New Zealand the Maori tribe gave legal status to the river Whanganui (Per Espen Stoknes, 2021).

Other examples include Ashoka Fellow James Thornton and his organization ClientEarth which uses litigation to protect nature, environments, and human rights. These legal decisions set precedents and new legal standards in addressing climate and environmental issues.

ClientEarth initiates legal proceedings against companies and governments in favor of their sole client – the earth – enforcing accountability and improving the law for environmental protection. This is a way for forcing governments and businesses to act in certain ways and make environmentally conscious decisions, as they traditionally are too slow in adapting and changing their practices. James highlights two vital aspects in his work. The first is that changing the law does not automatically mean enforcing it and this is something that requires continuous attention and effort. Secondly, the development of human rights law now also incorporates climate security from a human rights angle, which strengthens, even more, the leverage of legislation and regulation.

This approach challenges us to reconsider regulation and legislation and to reframe our thinking and solutions to the needs posed by a dynamic climate situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERVENTION IN FOREST AND LAND RIGHTS



Drawing from the insights we surfaced, we believe there are many opportunities for action and follow-ups moving forward.

A quick point to acknowledge is that you may notice an overlap in the different elements and ideas shared in this report. This is not by mere accident. All these elements form a kaleidoscope of interconnected contexts that shape the field of tropical deforestation. Solutions and action points need to consider many (if not all) of these aspects in a holistic and interdependent manner.

No economic solutions can be developed without considering the culture and traditions of local communities. No proper legislation can be implemented without addressing issues of political rights and economic stability. Separating the findings and the recommendation in thematic areas makes analysis and understanding clearer, but it does not intend to suggest that solutions are clear-cut individual ones.

I. Inclusion of voices of IPLCs



→ **Support IPLCs organizations and initiatives.** This refers not only to remote communities, which are frequently the focus of international support, but also to the populations living in urban areas around tropical regions. Understanding the diversity and specificity of initiatives within local communities can open opportunities for more targeted and effective support.

→ **Support social entrepreneurs and IPLCs to have a stronger say in the establishment of the carbon markets regulation.** The new market architecture around carbon trading can be complex and technical, which makes it inaccessible even for people who're familiar with climate issues. Support organizations need to make sure that local

communities have the right information and the capacity to get involved in the setup of these markets. This will increase the likelihood that they would also reap the benefits of these carbon deals.

→ **Support women and youth.** The subsistence economy is largely a female responsibility — they depend on access to common resources for their survival because they lack access to economic alternatives. Young people — who will still be alive decades from now will be most exposed to the long-term effects of forest degradation. Doing more to include women and youth is not only crucial to establishing a new environmental order, but also key to challenging gender and intergenerational gaps and structural discrimination.

II. Better communication on tropical deforestation

→ **Strengthen the narrative and communication around solutions, possibilities, and alternatives for tropical deforestation.** More can be done to promote and publicize the solutions of social entrepreneurs, best practices in the field, and alternatives for the future. This

will contribute to this positive narrative and mobilize others.

→ **Support independent and investigative journalism and reporting on tropical deforestation and fund organizations or initiatives which protect whistleblowers and activists.**

III. Conservation and development combined

→ **Stand for an approach that promotes conservation solutions combined with economic and social development solutions for the tropical forest communities.** The issue of tropical deforestation is not an either-or one. Local communities and countries want to continue developing economically, while at the same time ensuring an environmentally sound path. Combining these two approaches and advocating for them is necessary.

→ **Organize learning exchange and best practice transfer between indigenous peoples and local communities who developed viable economic and environmental models.**

→ **Support viable economic alternatives to scale.**



IV. Global, regional, local dimensions of tropical deforestation

→ **Act as convenors.** Local communities, social entrepreneurs, authorities, international organizations, local and international businesses are critical stakeholders. When all these stakeholders are brought to the table, and communication channels are established both regionally and globally, it will allow for alignment and set up for future progress.



Overall, to design new decision-making architectures that will accelerate solutions in tropical deforestation we collectively need to:

→ **Clearly define the negotiating framework and set up the right safeguards** (i.e., change rules, laws, policies, regulations in a way that works for the environment)

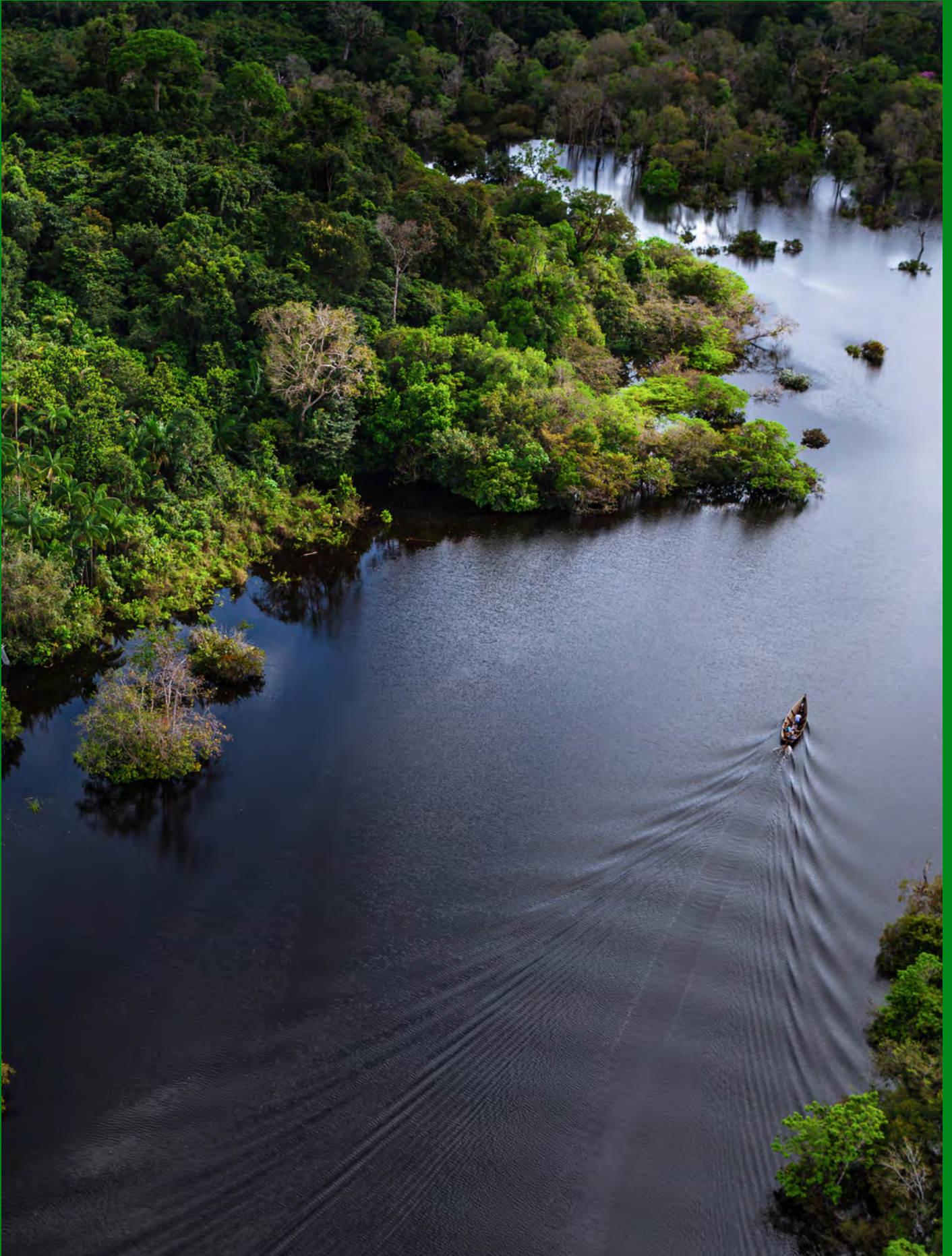
→ **Change economic incentives** (i.e., gain economically from environmentally friendly solutions and at the same time connect these solutions and the actors implementing them)

→ **Share information that empowers** (i.e., bring awareness to people in a globalized world about the actual impact of their decisions, bring environmental impact close to people)

→ **Engage people's values and culture** (i.e., turn working for and with the environment into a core culture piece, so that if people value it then they automatically act according to it)

Many questions remain unanswered about how to best build this architecture considering the multiple social, political, and economic systems impacted by it. Further studies, conversations, and exchanges on topics can shed more light on how we can collectively advance solutions.

METHODOLOGY





This report is a result of multiple research, analysis, and exchange elements, as we utilized a primarily qualitative mixed-methods approach. Between September 2021 and March 2022, we:

→ Started by conducting secondary data and background literature review (online, from previous Ashoka reports and work in the field of Planet & Climate, etc.)

→ Continued by reviewing over 20 interviews conducted with Ashoka Fellows globally in 2020, focusing on their insights regarding forests, as well as indigenous people's rights, land rights, and economic models.

→ Reviewed and analyzed various public (online) sessions and events in the field of Planet & Climate with Ashoka fellows (e.g. Welcome Change series)

→ Documented and analyzed the main insights from the Learning Exchanges in Southeast Asia on December 7, 2021 and in Latin America on March 15, 2022.

→ Conducted 9 further in-depth interviews with Ashoka Fellows, researchers and experts on the issue of tropical deforestation in the 2 regions throughout January 2022

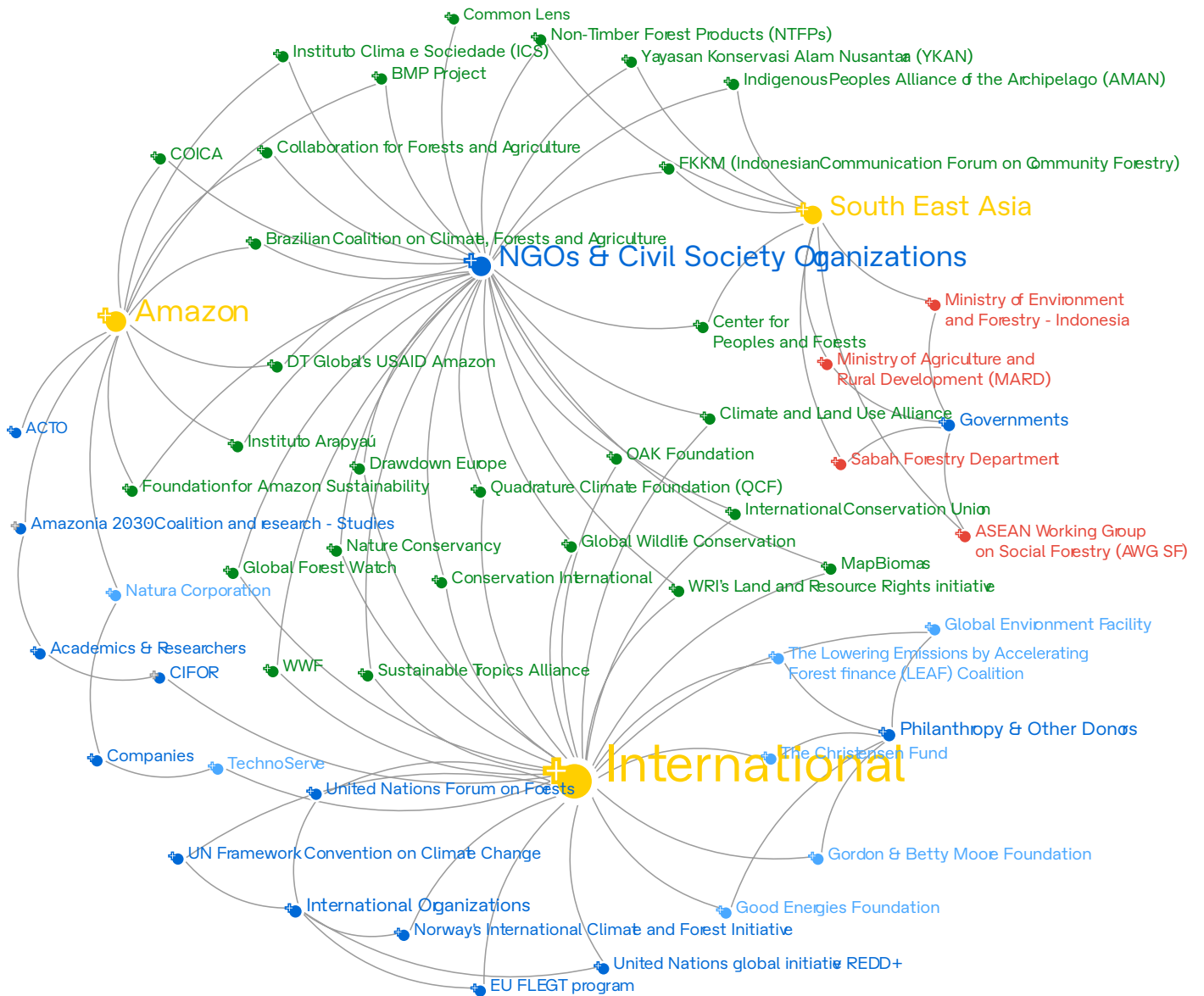
This report is the result of an iterative qualitative analysis process between the research team and the broader project team and other Ashoka colleagues with expertise on Planet & Climate and decision-making frameworks.

This report and analysis are by no means exhaustive, nor does it fully capture the deep complexity of tropical deforestation. There are many stakeholders we haven't managed to interview – such as government or corporate officials – and many other aspects we haven't incorporated – such as certifications, financial markets, etc. All these and more can be explored in further research, together with a stronger contextualization of the overarching ideas presented in this report. Any concrete solution in the two regions addressed in this report needs to be strongly embedded in local institutional realities.

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING FOR THE AMAZON AND SOUTHEAST ASIA



Based on secondary data analysis, readings, conversations and Fellow recommendations the following is a mapping of a 'laundry' list and a visualization of organizations we could engage moving forward in this field:



An interactive map of key stakeholders can be found [here](#)

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

International organizations

- [United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017-2030](#)
- United Nations global initiative REDD+
- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
- Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative
- EU FLEGT program

NGOs and civil society organizations

- [Global Forest Watch](#)
- Nature Conservancy (Guidelines for Good Corporate Practices with Indigenous Peoples)
- Sustainable Tropics Alliance [Earth Innovation Institute (Brazil, Indonesia, Colombia), Pronatura-Sur (Mexico), the Instituto del Bien Común (Peru), the Instituto de Pesquisa Ambiental da Amazônia (Brazil)]
- Conservation International
- WRI's Land and Resource Rights initiative (Peter Veit, director)
- MapBiomass
- Climate and Land Use Alliance
- Global Wildlife Conservation
- OAK Foundation
- Quadrature Climate Foundation (QCF)
- WWF
- Common Lens
- International Conservation Union
- Drawdown Europe

Philanthropy and foundations

- The Christensen Fund
- Global Environment Facility
- Good Energies Foundation
- Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation
- The Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest finance (LEAF) Coalition

Companies

- TechnoServe

Academics and researchers

- CIFOR – Center for International Forestry Research

AMAZON

NGOs and civil society organizations

- [Foundation for Amazon Sustainability](#)
- Collaboration for Forests and Agriculture, an initiative (led by World Wildlife Fund, National Wildlife Federation, and The Nature Conservancy, and supported by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation)
- DT Global's USAID Amazon
- BMP project
- COICA, the Coordinator on Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon basin
- Instituto Arapyaú
- Instituto Clima e Sociedade (ICS)
- Brazilian Coalition on Climate, Forests and Agriculture
 - COICA as the other key organization that tries to develop political aspirations of indigenous peoples – the question is how to bring COICA into ACTO processes, how to bring IPLCs at the table
 - Amazon Concertation - Home - [Uma Concertação pela Amazônia](#)

Private companies

- Natura Corporation

Academics and researchers

- Amazonia 2030 Coalition and research - Studies - AMZ2030 (amazonia2030.org.br)

Transnational body

- ACTO

SOUTHEAST ASIA

NGOs and civil society organizations

- Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN)
- Centre for People and Forests
- Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs)
- FKMM (Indonesian Communication Forum on Community Forestry)
- Yayasan Konservasi Alam Nusantara (YKAN)
- WALHI
- GEMAWAN
- Samdhana Institute
- WARSI

Government

- ASEAN Working group on social forestry
- Ministry of Environment and Forestry - Indonesia
- ASEAN Working Group on Social Forestry (AWG SF)
- Sabah Forestry Department
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) - Vietnam

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