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Equal Right Contribution to the COP30 Presidency Roadmap on Halting and Reversing Deforestation and Forest Degradation by 2030

Submitted by: Equal Right

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Abstract: Equal Right submits this contribution in response to the COP30 Presidency's open call for inputs to the Roadmap on Halting and Reversing Deforestation and Forest Degradation by 2030. Drawing on our direct experience advancing community-centred conservation finance across the Global South, this submission identifies critical barriers to halting deforestation and proposes two concrete, integrated solutions: Cash for Conservation, which provides direct economic security for forest communities and ecosystem guardians; and the Solidarity Mutirão, which builds the political coalitions and South-South cooperation infrastructure needed to advance equitable forest finance at scale. Both solutions place the rights and agency of Indigenous Peoples and local communities at their centre, and are designed to work across diverse national contexts and degrees of forest cover. This submission calls on the COP30 Presidency and the UNFCCC Secretariat to incorporate these approaches into the Roadmap ahead of COP31 in November 2026, and to create institutional pathways for member states to adopt and scale them.

Part I – Critical Barriers to Halting and Reversing Deforestation

1. Economic Insecurity as the Root Driver of Deforestation Pressure

Communities living within and adjacent to forests are simultaneously the most effective guardians of forest ecosystems and the most economically vulnerable to deforestation pressures. Without viable economic alternatives, even communities with strong ecological values and conservation commitments face irresistible pressure from extractive industries, agricultural expansion, and illegal economies. Deforestation is fundamentally a failure of economic security and of states' ability to protect communities' territorial rights. Any effective roadmap must address this root cause directly - not merely regulate the symptoms.

2. Inadequate, Inequitable, and Inaccessible Forest Finance

Existing international forest finance mechanisms - including REDD+ and results-based payment schemes - frequently fail to reach the communities and ecosystems most in need. Financial flows are concentrated in intermediary institutions, conditioned on complex monitoring and reporting requirements, and subject to carbon market volatility that communities cannot control or predict. Communities receive a disproportionately small share of the resources generated by their conservation efforts. The mismatch between forest finance architecture and the economic realities of forest communities is not a peripheral design flaw - it is a structural obstacle to achieving the 2030 target.

3. Weak Territorial Governance and Land Rights Insecurity

Across much of the Global South, Indigenous land rights remain legally insecure or practically unenforced, exposing communities to encroachment by extractive actors operating with impunity. Weak territorial governance limits communities' ability to defend their territories, implement their own development visions, and participate meaningfully in national and international decisions affecting their forests. No financing architecture can substitute for the legal and institutional recognition of Indigenous and community territorial rights.



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4. Marginalisation of Global South Voices in Forest Finance Design

Despite holding the majority of the world's remaining tropical forests, Global South countries and their communities remain marginalised in the design of international forest finance instruments. Solutions developed in high-income country institutions rarely reflect the institutional realities, political economies, or social understandings of equity that prevail in forest countries. South-South cooperation, which could generate shared strategies rooted in lived experience, is chronically underfunded. The result is a persistent disconnect between the architecture of international forest finance and the conditions required for it to work.

Part II – Concrete Solutions for Halting Deforestation

Solution 1: Cash for Conservation - Direct Economic Security for Forest Guardians

Relevant topics: Forest conservation; Indigenous Peoples and local communities; international forest finance; deforestation drivers and solutions

Level of implementation: Community / National / International

Cash for Conservation is an innovative programme co-founded by Equal Right, Cool Earth, and GiveDirectly that provides direct, unconditional cash transfers to communities living in and around critical forest ecosystems. Unlike results-based payment schemes that impose complex conditionalities and divert resources through layers of intermediaries, Cash for Conservation recognises communities as rights-holders whose existing stewardship of forests merits direct, immediate support - without requiring them to demonstrate conservation outcomes through externally defined metrics before receiving any benefit.

The programme addresses deforestation at its root cause: economic insecurity. Direct cash transfers reduce the pressure on communities to accept or participate in extractive activities, strengthen household resilience to climate shocks, support locally defined livelihoods and development pathways, and reinforce community governance systems. Crucially, by placing resources in the hands of communities rather than intermediary institutions, Cash for Conservation strengthens rather than undermines community agency and territorial control.

Evidence from pilot programmes across the Amazon and Congo Basin, like Cool Earth's pilot in Peru, demonstrates that direct transfers reduce deforestation pressure, improve household food security, and generate broader community co-benefits - including for gender equity and social cohesion. These programmes provide a replicable, adaptable model for diverse forest governance contexts, land tenure systems, and national regulatory environments.

Recommendation to the COP30 Presidency and UNFCCC Secretariat:

Equal Right calls on the Roadmap to formally recognise direct, unconditional cash transfers as a legitimate and evidence-based instrument of forest conservation finance, alongside and complementary to REDD+ and results-based payment schemes. We recommend that the UNFCCC Secretariat commission a technical review of existing Cash for Conservation pilots, including the most recent ones led by Equal Right and partners in Colombia and Kenya, to inform the Roadmap's finance chapter, and that the Roadmap invite member states and multilateral finance institutions to develop dedicated funding windows - such as the Journey Fund model - that channel resources directly to forest communities without multiple intermediary layers. Progress on direct community finance should be a measurable indicator in the Roadmap's implementation tracking framework, to be reviewed at COP31.

How Cash for Conservation works:



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- Regular, unconditional cash transfers are made directly to community members living in and around critical forest ecosystems.
- Transfers are delivered through community governance structures, respecting and reinforcing existing collective decision-making processes.
- Complementary light-touch monitoring tracks household and community outcomes - not as a condition of payment, but as a tool for adaptive learning and evidence generation.
- Programmes are co-designed with communities to align with locally defined territorial life plans and governance systems.

Actors responsible:

- Forest communities define priorities through their own governance systems and life plans; they are rights-holders, not merely programme beneficiaries.
- NGOs/CSOs and partner organisations design, implement, and evaluate pilot programmes.
- The UNFCCC Secretariat and COP Presidency create the institutional conditions for direct community finance to be recognised, tracked, and scaled within the international forest finance architecture.
- National governments provide regulatory frameworks, integrate programmes into forest policy strategies, support land rights recognition, and report on community finance flows in their national forest strategies.
- International donors and multilateral institutions provide funding through dedicated direct-transfer mechanisms.
- Research institutions co-design monitoring systems and generate accessible evidence on impacts.

Required instruments:

- Direct, unconditional cash transfer programmes delivered through community governance structures.
- Dedicated funding mechanisms that channel resources directly to communities without requiring passage through multiple intermediary layers.
- Legal recognition and enforcement of Indigenous and community territorial rights as a precondition for programme effectiveness.
- Participatory monitoring systems co-designed with communities, generating evidence without imposing conditionalities.
- Integration of Cash for Conservation within national forest finance strategies and REDD+ architectures.
- A UNFCCC reporting category for direct community conservation finance, enabling tracking and comparability across national contexts.

Key milestones:

- 2026: Expand pilot programmes across forest territories; build evidence base on deforestation impact and community outcomes; UNFCCC Secretariat commissions technical review of direct community finance approaches.
- COP31 (November 2026): Present evidence from expanded pilots; seek formal Roadmap recognition of direct community cash transfers as a conservation finance instrument; advocate for a dedicated multilateral funding window.



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- 2027–2030: Integrate Cash for Conservation within national strategies and multilateral forest finance frameworks; develop regional financing mechanisms.
- 2030–2035: Mainstream direct community transfers as a recognised and funded component of the global forest conservation finance architecture.
- 2035–2050: Achieve systemic integration at scale, with stable long-term financing securing community-led forest guardianship across critical ecosystems globally.

Gender-responsive and human rights-based approach:

Cash for Conservation adopts a human rights-based approach by recognising communities as rights-holders and stewards of ecosystems. Universal transfers to participating community members directly support gender equity by providing women with independent economic resources, reducing their dependence on male-controlled household income. Programme governance structures are co-designed to ensure inclusive decision-making, and complementary support for community governance reinforces women's participation in territorial management.

Solution 2: The Solidarity Mutirão - South-South Cooperation for Equitable Forest Finance

Relevant topics: Forests, climate change, and international cooperation; Indigenous Peoples and local communities; international forest finance; capacity building

Level of implementation: Global / South-South

Halting deforestation by 2030 and sustaining that achievement through 2050 requires not only financial resources but sustained political will, shared knowledge, and coordinated advocacy across forest countries. Yet the political conditions for ambitious, equitable forest finance are consistently undermined by the marginalisation of Global South governments and communities in the design of international instruments, the fragmentation of civil society and government coalitions, and the absence of a shared political narrative that can make redistributive forest finance defensible across diverse national contexts.

The Solidarity Mutirão is Equal Right's response to this political deficit. It is a structured, multi-stakeholder process that builds the coalitions, analytical frameworks, and institutional relationships required to advance equitable climate and forest finance - not as a series of episodic interventions, but as a sustained political infrastructure.

The Political and Policy Context

The Global South is at a critical juncture. With deep-rooted social disparities and extractivist economic models, many forest countries face accelerating ecological crises - even as they hold the world's most important remaining forests and bear the least historical responsibility for the emissions driving those crises. At the same time, the Global South - and Brazil in particular - has pioneered equitable social and economic policies: solidarity economy models, innovative cash transfer programmes like Bolsa Família, and public wealth funds designed to redistribute natural resource revenues to citizens.

It is time to rethink the current debt-driven, exclusionary model of international forest finance. A more solidary, redistributive approach is needed - one that allows communities to manage resources, participate fully, and strengthen national sovereignty. To address the intersectionality of the climate and deforestation crises, economic inequality, and extractive dependence, forest finance must become an instrument of redistribution and community empowerment.



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The Global South's policy innovation in social policy, solidarity economy, and environmental governance offers transferable lessons for countries facing similar challenges. The Mutirão seeks not only to strengthen domestic policy innovation but to inform South-South cooperation - helping to articulate shared strategies for financing forest conservation and economic justice across diverse national contexts.

What the Mutirão Does and How

The Solidarity Mutirão operates at the intersection of research, coalition-building, and strategic political engagement. It brings together policymakers, civil society organisations, Indigenous Peoples' representatives, researchers, and financial institutions to identify specific policy instruments - already embedded or partially embedded in national institutional landscapes - and examine what equity looks like in each case: who controls resources, who benefits, and what political trade-offs are involved. These instruments are presented as coherent packages, strengthening political defensibility and reducing the risk that individual mechanisms can be dismissed or co-opted.

The combination of actors is essential. Government officials working on forest and social policy bring institutional access and implementation capacity. Civil society organisations representing territorial and community interests bring legitimacy and accountability. Indigenous Peoples' leaders bring irreplaceable territorial knowledge and political standing. Researchers bring analytical rigour and comparative perspective. Aligned international partners bring global advocacy reach. Together, they transform fragmented technical proposals into a shared political narrative backed by a coordinated network capable of sustaining advocacy through changing institutional and electoral contexts.

Scalability: From Regional Platform to Global Architecture

Transforming the Mutirão from a national intervention into a regional and ultimately global platform for South-South forest finance solidarity means building coalitions across diverse forest country contexts to answer key questions: how do redistributive forest finance mechanisms gain political traction? How do institutional pathways enable or block resources from reaching Indigenous peoples and marginalised communities? How does equity in forest governance interact with histories of racial injustice and territorial dispossession? And how can regional cooperation expand the political and fiscal space for equitable forest policies?

The aim is to identify what travels across borders, what does not, and how South-South learning can expand the space of political possibility. The Mutirão's ultimate ambition is to build a living political infrastructure - sustained relationships, shared analytical frameworks, and coordinated advocacy capacity - that enables diverse countries and communities to advance equitable forest finance in ways that reflect their own political economies, institutional capacities, and social understandings of justice. This infrastructure is essential for the deforestation roadmap: without it, the international forest finance architecture will continue to be shaped by actors distant from the forests themselves, with communities positioned as recipients of externally defined solutions rather than as the rights-holders and knowledge-holders they are.

Recommendation to the COP30 Presidency and UNFCCC Secretariat

The Roadmap should formally recognise South-South cooperation on equitable forest finance as a structural component of its implementation governance, and call on the UNFCCC Secretariat to establish a dedicated mechanism for channelling and amplifying South-South learning into official implementation frameworks. Equal Right recommends that the Roadmap invite member states - particularly those in the Global South - to support and resource multi-stakeholder processes such as the Solidarity Mutirão as part of their national forest strategy contributions. We further call on the



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COP Presidency to ensure COP31 includes a dedicated high-level space for presenting South-South policy innovations in forest finance, and that the Roadmap's governance framework explicitly affirms that Global South forest countries are architects - not merely recipients - of international forest finance solutions.

Actors responsible:

- Equal Right and other Civil Society Organisations/NGOs lead the Solidarity Mutirão process in their regions, developing research, building coalitions, and facilitating political engagement across national contexts.
- The UNFCCC Secretariat establishes institutional mechanisms to channel and amplify South-South forest finance learning into the Roadmap's official implementation framework and review processes.
- National governments - particularly forest country governments - participate in structured dialogue and commit to integrating equitable forest finance instruments into their national forest strategies and NDCs.
- Civil society and Indigenous Peoples' organisations contribute territorial knowledge and accountability.

Required instruments:

- A UNFCCC-supported South-South knowledge exchange mechanism on equitable forest finance, formally linked to the Roadmap's implementation tracking framework.
- Dedicated high-level space at COP31 and subsequent COPs for presenting Global South-led forest finance policy innovation.
- South-South dialogue platforms, research collaborations, and knowledge-sharing networks supported by flexible multi-year funding.
- Integration of Mutirão policy outputs into the Roadmap's implementation architecture and member state review processes.

Key milestones:

- 2026: Produce country-level and regional policy outputs on equitable forest finance; engage with national governments on integration of redistributive forest finance instruments.
- COP31 (November 2026): Present South-South learning and coalition recommendations; seek UNFCCC institutional recognition of South-South forest finance cooperation as a Roadmap implementation component; advocate for formal Secretariat support mechanism.
- 2027–2030: Consolidate a durable regional political platform; expand to additional Global South forest regions based on learning.
- 2030 and beyond: Scale South-South cooperation mechanisms into a durable global infrastructure for equitable forest finance.

Gender-responsive and human rights-based approach:

The Mutirão places structural equity - including gender equity, Indigenous rights, and racial justice - at the centre of its analytical and political work. It explicitly examines how histories of colonial dispossession and gender inequality shape communities' ability to participate in and benefit from forest finance. International cooperation initiatives emerging from the Mutirão prioritise inclusive participation, structural representation of the Global South, Indigenous Peoples, women, and marginalised communities in forest governance and decision-making.

Part III – Integration and Coherence



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Cash for Conservation and the Solidarity Mutirão are designed as complementary elements of an integrated strategy for equitable forest conservation finance. Cash for Conservation provides the community-level economic foundation: the direct, unconditional support that enables forest communities to exercise their role as ecosystem guardians without sacrificing economic survival. The Solidarity Mutirão provides the political architecture: the coalitions, shared narratives, and cross-border advocacy capacity that make equitable forest finance politically viable and institutionally durable.

Together, they address the two most fundamental failures of the current forest finance architecture: its inability to deliver economic security to forest communities, and its inability to build the political conditions for systemic change. The COP30 Presidency Roadmap, to be presented at COP31 in November 2026, represents a rare opportunity to reset both - by naming direct community finance as a recognised instrument, mandating South-South cooperation as a governance component, and creating the institutional conditions for Global South forest countries to lead the solutions. Equal Right stands ready to contribute technical inputs, facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue, and support the integration of these approaches into the Roadmap and its implementation beyond.

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