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Women's Earth and Climate Action Network
Submission to the COP30 Presidency Roadmap for Halting and
Reversing Deforestation and Forest Degradation by 2030

The Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN) is a climate justice-based organization established to unite women in worldwide movement building for social and ecological justice.

Introduction

Forest ecosystems are integral for conserving global biodiversity, sequestering the world's carbon, and stabilizing climates. Forests are also vital for communities' cultures and economic systems, providing subsistence and medicinal needs for peoples across the world. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, deforestation occurs at approximately the rate of 10 billion hectares per year,¹ which releases nearly 5 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere every year.² As reported by the World Resources Institute, in 2024, the world lost a record-breaking 6.7 million hectares of tropical primary forest; this forest loss released 3.1 gigatonnes of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) into the atmosphere.³ Wildfires, largely a result of climate change which deforestation perpetuates, caused the majority of tropical forest loss in 2024. The other main causes of forest loss include agribusiness, mining, and logging.⁴ In order to prevent further planetary warming and biodiversity loss, and support communities' sovereignty, food security, and well-being, the world must halt further deforestation and restore degraded forest ecosystems.

This submission outlines key barriers to halting and reversing deforestation and forest degradation, and highlights climate justice principles that should guide global approaches to forest solutions. In particular, the submission underscores the need for wealthy countries' to directly fund community-led reforestation programs in alignment with the

¹<https://ourworldindata.org/deforestation#:~:text=Over%20the%20decade%20since%202010,were%20cut%20down%20each%20year.>

²<https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/8f599970-661d-45f5-a598-2ea46ca1605f/content/src/html/deforestation-and-degradation.html>

³<https://gfr.wri.org/latest-analysis-deforestation-trends>.

⁴<https://gfr.wri.org/latest-analysis-deforestation-trends>.

principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC).

Below, please see WE CAN's submission to the open call for submissions by the COP30 Presidency in regard to the Roadmap for Halting and Reversing Deforestation and Forest Degradation by 2030.

Critical Barriers to Stopping Deforestation and Forest Degradation

Economic—Market-based schemes and carbon offsets⁵

Market-based schemes are a result of the international economic system in which profits are prioritized over the health of people and the environment. Market-based schemes to offset GHG emissions through reforestation have spread across the world as corporations and nations seek to cancel out (instead of reduce) their emissions.

Carbon offsets allow polluters to “offset” their emissions by investing in projects that supposedly remove or avoid carbon emissions. The types of projects that qualify as carbon reduction mechanisms include “forest management.”⁶ These approaches fail to reduce emissions at the source, frequently lack scientific backing, and often harm Black, Brown, Indigenous, and low-income communities through land theft and environmental degradation.⁷

Carbon offsets often lack credibility and do not deliver the climate-saving benefits that governments and industries claim.⁸ A UC Berkeley study that included almost 300 carbon offset projects concluded that developers have been allowed to claim emissions reduction benefits far beyond what is justified.⁹

Companies and governments using carbon offsets to lower their emissions are often making unvalidated claims about their carbon emissions. In 2023, research revealed more than 90% of Verra's (the world's leading carbon standard) rainforest offset credits are “phantom credits,” or carbon offsets that can be bought, but do not reflect genuine carbon reductions.¹⁰ Corporations have also been weaponizing carbon offsets to acquire land for tree-planting and forest management schemes. In one instance, the Indigenous Kichwa People in Peru were not only forcibly displaced from their land when Shell and

⁵This section is excerpted and adapted from WE CAN's report, [The Need for Real Zero Not Net Zero](#)

⁶https://climatefalsesolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/HOODWINKED_ThirdEdition_On-Screen_version.pdf

⁷Ibid.

⁸<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-021-01245-w>

⁹<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/forests-and-global-change/articles/10.3389/ffgc.2023.958879/full>

¹⁰<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/18/revealed-forest-carbon-offsets-biggest-provider-worthless-verra-aoc#:~:text=The%20research%20into%20Verra%2C%20the%20companies%20E2%80%93%20are%20likely%20to%20be%20E2%80%9C>

TotalEnergies bought carbon credits from a national park, but were also denied the right to hunt on their ancestral territory.¹¹

Institutional—Insufficient regulations and lack of transparency

Without contending with the activities that drive deforestation and forest degradation, achieving global forest conservation is not possible. Actors profiting from these activities include governments and companies behind fossil fuel, agribusiness, mining, and logging operations. The UN FAO reports that agriculture alone accounts for nearly 90% of global deforestation,¹² driven largely by the expansion of cropland (~50%) and the grazing of livestock (~39%).¹³ Products such as palm oil, soy, timber, rubber, and cattle come with some of the highest deforestation risks and these risks are ingrained across the supply chains of many companies based in high-income countries.¹⁴

Financial—Subsidies and financial backing for activities that cause deforestation

One of the largest sources of environmentally destructive financial contributions worldwide is agricultural subsidies.¹⁵ The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's report, *Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation 2024*, finds that between 2021 and 2023 across 54 countries, government support for agriculture averaged US\$842 billion per year.¹⁶

Financial institutions are also impeding genuine forest solutions by continuing to finance and invest in companies and projects that result in forest degradation. The Global Canopy's annual 2024 Forest 500 report, found that 150 financial institutions provided US\$8.9 trillion to the deforestation economy.¹⁷

Social—Underpinning Structures

The exploitation of nature is underpinned by social and economic structures rooted in colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and anthropocentrism. These systems perpetuate cultural beliefs that natural communities and ecosystems are property to be exploited and consumed endlessly by humans. These dominant logics contribute to false solutions and

¹¹<https://apnews.com/article/business-peru-forests-climate-and-environment-2c6cddb1707a12c31c14d9a226699068>

¹²

<https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/cop26-agriculturacontinuedestructionl-expansion-drives-almost-90-percent-of-global-deforestation/en>

¹³ <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/fe22a597-a39d-4765-8393-95fbcaed6416/content>

¹⁴ <https://deforestationfreefunds.org/companies>

¹⁵ <https://www.worldanimalprotection.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/english/subsidising-factory-farm-harm.pdf>

¹⁶ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2024/11/agricultural-policy-monitoring-and-evaluation-2024_b4c72370.html

¹⁷

<https://globalcanopy.org/insights/publication/forest-500-finance-report-deforestation-is-a-bad-investment/#:~:text=report%20finds%20that%20the%20150%20financial%20institutions%20with%20the%20greatest%20exposure%20to%20deforestation,of%20nine%20forest%20risk%20commodities>

overconsumption, which are harming forests and the many communities who are connected to these vital ecosystems.

Racism and ongoing settler-colonialism

False solutions that result in land grabs and forest destruction are underpinned by racism and ongoing colonial policies.

This exploitation persists through the ongoing erasure and criminalization of Indigenous resistance. Across Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, Indigenous land defenders have been surveilled, displaced, and murdered for opposing carbon offset schemes and trying to protect their forests. These communities' knowledge systems offer some of the most effective strategies for maintaining biodiversity and forest health. Rather than respecting Indigenous sovereignty and leadership, many forest carbon projects that frame local peoples as barriers to conservation rather than its most effective stewards. These dynamics reproduce colonial hierarchies under the guise of environmentalism and reinforce systems of racialized dispossession.

Overconsumption

Overconsumption—especially among high-income countries—is a major driver of forest degradation and global ecological instability. Material-use has skyrocketed: the global material footprint more than doubled from 43 billion metric tons in 1990 to 92 billion metric tons in 2017, and it is projected to reach nearly 190 billion metric tons by 2060 if current trends continue.¹⁸ The demand for materials, food, and energy places immense pressure on forests through increased extraction of timber, minerals, and agricultural commodities.

Potential Levers to Protect Global Forests

Financial

Global climate finance must reflect common but differentiated responsibilities by providing outsized support for regions most affected by deforestation and climate change.¹⁹ In order to rectify past harms, the wealthy countries must transition from providing loans to grants and reparative finance. A 2025 report published by the North American Congress on Latin America, found that ~95% of climate finance between 2011 and 2020 was provided “with the expectation of a return” primarily in the form of loans.²⁰

¹⁸ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/goal-12/>

¹⁹ <https://essd.copernicus.org/preprints/essd-2024-619/essd-2024-619.pdf>;

<https://climatenetwork.org/2024/09/20/us5trillion-owed-to-global-south-by-global-north-due-to-the-climate-crisis/>

²⁰ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10714839.2025.2542078>;

https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1C_3CbkCm91823pU3vIV41V7IyiOIMw8G

Reparation funds can be made readily available by redirecting existing financial streams, including state budgets, targeted taxes (i.e., higher taxes on industries that are linked to harms), and the reallocation of environmentally harmful subsidies.²¹

Institutional

Countries must adopt and implement zero-deforestation policies and hold companies accountable to rigorous environmental, Indigenous, and human rights standards, ensuring that forest-destructing activities are regulated and prevented from receiving public financing. Governments must require corporations to publicly and regularly disclose the environmental and social impacts of their investments and policies, while also rapidly phasing out investments in—and insurance coverage for— deforestation-linked sectors.

Center Indigenous and Local Communities in Forest Solutions

Adopting and enforcing safeguards for Indigenous and human rights as related to forest activities can stop rights-violations, while ensuring that Indigenous Peoples and land-dependent communities can protect and steward their territories. First and foremost, governments and companies must implement mandatory policies that uphold Indigenous rights, including Free, Prior, and Informed consent as outlined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Providing land tenure to Indigenous communities helps to prevent illegal logging, mining, and other activities that result in forest degradation and land-grabbing.²² Legal recognition of land rights has been shown to significantly reduce deforestation. Studies have found that formalizing land rights for Indigenous Peoples is one of the most cost-effective approaches to bringing about forest protection.²³

Providing legally recognized land tenure for Indigenous Peoples and local communities also improves forest conservation outcomes. In Brazil's Atlantic Forest, for instance, areas under formal Indigenous ownership have demonstrated stronger forest recovery and lower rates of forest loss compared to non-tenured lands.²⁴ Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent local communities bring deep ecological knowledge and ancestral ties

²¹

<https://www.globalsurvivorsfund.org/latest/articles/financing-reparations-debunking-the-myths/#:~:text=Where%20does%20current%20financing%20for,government%20issuance%20of%20social%20bonds>.

²²<https://news.mongabay.com/2023/06/indigenous-land-rights-key-to-curbing-deforestation-and-restoring-lands-study/>;
<https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2221346120>

²³[https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7456116/#:~:text=First%2C%20indigenous%20traditional%20land%20use,requires%20\(14%E2%80%93320\);](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7456116/#:~:text=First%2C%20indigenous%20traditional%20land%20use,requires%20(14%E2%80%93320);) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666719325001980>

²⁴ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36712937/>

to forests and the natural world.²⁵ In order to have effective and lasting reforestation, these communities must be centered as decision-makers in restoration efforts.

Technological and Technical

Robust and long-term monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems are some of the most effective ways to ensure that reforestation projects achieve their intended goals. Deforestation and forest degradation are often gradual and involve subtle changes that can be hard to identify.²⁶ Effective MRV systems can help track tree survival and carbon sequestration, differentiate between short-term forest changes and longer-term persistent degradation patterns, review stakeholder concerns, and account for other critical factors that influence the credibility, transparency, and overall success of the project.²⁷

Social

Addressing deforestation requires international collaboration. Without consistent safeguards, companies can shift destructive practices to other nations to circumvent country-level regulations, undermining forest protection efforts. Robust global coordination ensures that corporations are held to the same environmental, social, and Indigenous and human rights standards wherever they operate, reducing the risk of leakage²⁸ and supporting more effective global forest conservation outcomes.

To safeguard forests and the communities intertwined with them, the global community must fundamentally reorient its relationship with the natural world. This means recognizing that human societies, economies, and well-being are embedded within ecological systems—not external to them. Moving forward requires integrating frameworks that center reciprocity, balance, and long-term ecological health.

Rights of Nature and Buen Vivir

Buen Vivir (which roughly translates to “good living”) frameworks—rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems—recognize that humans are part of, rather than separate from, the natural world.²⁹ These approaches assert that ecosystems possess inherent rights to exist,

²⁵ <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/03/why-forest-restoration-needs-a-100-year-plan-and-indigenous-multi-gen-leadership/>; <https://tek.forestry.oregonstate.edu/what-tek>

²⁶ <https://gfr.wri.org/forest-condition-indicators/forest-degradation>

²⁷ <https://gfr.wri.org/forest-condition-indicators/forest-degradation>; [hnot ha ve representhttps://us.1t.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/1t.org-US-Technology-and-MRV-in-Forest-Carbon-Finance.pdf](https://us.1t.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/1t.org-US-Technology-and-MRV-in-Forest-Carbon-Finance.pdf)

²⁸ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/geb.13172>;

²⁹ <https://climatestrategies.org/deforestation-leakage-policy-spill-overs-and-the-case-for-integrated-management/>

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Unai-Villalba-Eguiluz/publication/263720271_Buen_Vivir_vs_Development_A_paradigm_shift_in_the_Andes/links/5da771c7a6fdccda454ac650/Buen-Vivir-vs-Development-A-paradigm-shift-in-the-Andes.pdf;
<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/buen-vivir-philosophy-south-america-eduardo-gudynas>;
https://e01c23b4-9f2e-4830-9320-a86de06b013e.filesusr.com/ugd/d99d2e_667f4c3eb1244893a6ba52c1efe24457.pdf

regenerate, and flourish. Numerous countries and local communities have codified these principles into laws and policies, including through Rights of Nature laws and policies, which are tools to recognize the rights of natural entities.

Post-growth

Post-growth frameworks offer alternatives that place human well-being, ecological health, and community resilience at the center of economic planning. One way to reorient national priorities is through alternative metrics such as Gross National Happiness (GNH). While Gross Domestic Product measures the total value of goods and services produced, GNH aims to assess the well-being of people and the health of the environment. Rather than equating prosperity with accumulation, GNH offers a model of development that prioritizes collective well-being and ecological integrity, demonstrating that national progress does not have to come at the expense of forests, biodiversity, or cultural survival.

Circular Economy

Circular economy models aim to “live better while producing less” by eliminating waste, reusing materials, and designing products for long lifespans and repairability. This means fully utilizing resources already extracted—through reuse, repair, and refurbishment programs, improved product efficiency, and community-led innovation—while dramatically limiting the need for new raw materials. By consuming fewer materials, extending product lifespans, and investing in local reuse and repair infrastructure, countries can significantly reduce the pressure placed on forests and the communities that depend on them.

Defending Land Defenders

In 2024, at least 146 people defending forests, rivers, and land were killed or disappeared.³⁰ Despite making up ~6% of the world’s population, Indigenous Peoples accounted for approximately one third of those killed. These cases are largely linked to extractive industries, including agribusiness and mining, and are a result of land reform—meaning people are being killed for defending their homes and communities. Governments and companies must uphold the rights of land defenders, including through legally recognizing the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to their territories.³¹ Existing mechanisms to protect environmental defenders, such as the Escazú Agreement and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, must be bolstered and enforced. The Escazú Agreement, a legally binding multilateral treaty that spans Latin

³⁰<https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/land-and-environmental-defenders/roots-of-resistance/>

³¹<https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/land-and-environmental-defenders/roots-of-resistance/>

American and the Caribbean, has great potential to support remediation and transparency if effectively implemented.³²

Women-Led Regional Examples of Successful Forest Restoration and Protection Projects

For more than a decade, the Women's Earth and Climate Action Network Women For Forests Program has supported a diverse constituency of international women to protect forests through projects that protect and restore global forests. WE CAN's Women for Forests program practices this model by actively collaborating with local organizations and rural and Indigenous women to co-facilitate trainings and strategy sessions, while also conducting outreach and advocacy to raise international awareness on issues impacting community partners.³³

WE CAN Women for Forests projects and campaigns do not participate in any market-based mechanisms, including carbon offsets, carbon credits, biodiversity offsets, biodiversity credits, REDD+, or nature-based solution schemes. All projects represent a holistic approach to reforestation and forest protection founded on the leadership and knowledge of Indigenous women and the WE CAN Women for Forests program analysis, practices, and methodologies. By addressing environmental degradation, economic challenges, and social issues, we aim to build a resilient future for Indigenous and forest communities, plant and animal life, and people worldwide who depend on forests for a healthy and liveable planet. Below we highlight two projects that are protecting the worlds' largest forests.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Since 2014, WE CAN has been working with women in South Kivu Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo to protect 1.6 million acres of old-growth forest in the Itombwe Rainforest, which constitutes a part of the Congo Rainforest, the second largest tropical rainforest in the world. We work with over 1,000 women to protect old-growth forests while restoring damaged lands through tree planting. More than half a million trees have been planted since the project's inception– all by hand, with no machinery or equipment to further protect the delicate ecosystems and landscape.

There has been an 83% tree survival rate because of the dedicated work of the women reforesters. As the women continue to plant trees and ensure their survival, “wild

³²<https://www.wecaninternational.org/PressReleases/women-land-defenders-of-the-amazon-speak-out-at-cop30-as-escazu-agreement-toolkits-are-released>

³³ <https://www.wecaninternational.org/women-for-forests>

nurseries” are emerging, meaning that native trees are regenerating themselves naturally as biome conditions stabilize due to all the trees that have been planted. The wild nursery groves are burgeoning because the trees that have been planted are reviving the moist, rain-filled biome that encourages tremendous growth. With the rains returning, the reforestation efforts address drought and natural forest regeneration. Additionally, the women are monitoring and patrolling the forest-protected areas to ensure no illegal logging occurs. Learn more about this project here: www.wecaninternational.org/drc

Ecuadorian Amazon

In early 2024, WECAN initiated a forest protection and reforestation project with women in the Sarayaku community in Ecuador to save vital tree species on the threshold of extinction due to extractive industries and climate change. This project also includes trees that can clean pollution in the rivers and prevent soil erosion. Working in partnership with the Women’s Association of Sarayaku, WECAN’s Indigenous Women of the Ecuadorian Amazon Reforestation and Forest Protection Project aims to safeguard endemic tree species within the 135,000 hectares of Sarayaku territory and restore once-polluted waters to ensure vital ecological integrity.

The Indigenous women participating in this initiative have made significant strides in advancing reforestation goals. To date, over 100 different plant species have been hand collected and planted across seven community nurseries, with plans to continue adding species based on their seasonal fruiting cycles. Learn more here: www.wecaninternational.org/ecuador-en