

*****EXPERT BRIEFING ON FORESTS HOSTED BY COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY'S EARTH INSTITUTE**

AROUND 5TH ANNIVERSARY OF PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT ***

9 DECEMBER 2020

9:00 AM D.C//2:00 PM LONDON//9:00 PM JAKARTA

**Peter Daszak, Jeffrey Sachs and Other Leading Global Experts: Land
Rights are an Affordable, Effective & Untapped Solution to
Deforestation, Biodiversity Loss & Pandemic Risk**

With [researchers](#) warning of massive destruction to rainforests from development plans for Amazon, Congo and Indonesia, panel of diverse experts to report on [urgent need](#) [to](#) defend ecosystems, and land rights for Indigenous, local forest peoples as key solution

In the lead up to the five-year anniversary of the historic and ambitious 2015 [Paris climate accord](#), where tropical forest countries [pledged to stop destroying their rainforests](#), a virtual briefing will draw attention to land rights for Indigenous Peoples and local communities as an affordable, effective solution for climate change that is rarely cited in global plans for addressing biodiversity loss and deforestation. A growing body of evidence warns that failure to protect these ecosystems [will fuel a rise](#) in the release of potentially deadly pathogens.

The on-line science panel planned for December 9 will convene peer-reviewed researchers -- top experts in deforestation, biodiversity loss, sustainable development and the risk of future pandemics--to raise the visibility of evidence that suggests scaling up the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in tropical forest countries represents [an untapped solution](#) for addressing climate change and other crises linked to the destruction of vulnerable ecosystems.

Hosted by Andrew Revkin, director of the Earth Institute's [Initiative on Communication and Sustainability](#), the panel will meet as [deforestation continues unabated](#) in tropical forest countries, where “forests are under threat by an ever-increasing demand for natural resources and different land uses, fueled by global markets, power imbalances, and weak governance.”

WHEN & WHERE:

- **Wednesday, December 9, 9:00 AM ET // 2:00 PM GMT // 9:00 PM WIB**
- **FOR INSTRUCTIONS FOR JOINING:** Please RSVP to Wanda Bautista at wbautista@burness.com or + 1(302) 233-5438 (WhatsApp or text).

WHO:

Participants on the panel:

- [Peter Daszak](#), President of [EcoHealth Alliance](#), a US-based organization that conducts research and outreach programs on global health, conservation and international development. Dr. Daszak's [research](#) has been instrumental in identifying and predicting the origins and impact of emerging diseases across the globe. He is an author of the recently released by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report on the links between the degradation of nature and increasing pandemic risks. "The IPBES is an independent intergovernmental body established by States to strengthen the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, long-term human well-being and sustainable development.
- [Pamela McElwee](#), Associate Professor in the [Department of Human Ecology](#) in the [School of Environmental and Biological Sciences](#) at Rutgers University and lead author of [Chapter 6](#) on governance of biodiversity for the high-profile IPBES report, the first global scale assessment to systematically engage with ILK and issues of concern to Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLC). In a [paper](#) published in June, McElwee and her co-authors reported on lessons learned in working with Indigenous knowledge holders, a process that "demonstrated the importance of Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLC) to global biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management."
- [Jeffrey Sachs](#), University Professor at Columbia University and Director of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, also the Convener of the [Science Panel for the Amazon](#), which will produce the first scientific assessment to cover the entire Amazon basin and its biomes. Experts on the panel are developing a plan for the future of the Amazon to inform policy-making in seven sovereign Amazonian countries whose leaders committed last year in [Leticia](#), Colombia, to protect the rainforest and its biodiverse treasures; to respect the rights of the region's traditional peoples, and to explore innovative ways to sustainably develop the region, while keeping the forests standing.
- [Peter Veit](#), Director of the Land and Resource Rights (LRR) initiative at the [World Resources Institute](#), has authored and co-authored papers documenting the impact of land rights on forests in the Amazon, looking at [carbon density](#) and forest cover. He also has developed new information [platforms](#) and has provided evidence to inform legislative and policy activities. Peter is also an Adjunct Professor at the [School of International Advanced Studies](#), Johns Hopkins University.
- [Norman Jiwan](#), a Kerambai Dayak from West Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo) and an NGO activist who works for the Indonesian NGO, [SawitWatch](#), a watchdog group that tracks the palm oil industry in the region. He is an author of a series of case studies about Borneo that illustrate the impact of a massive infrastructure project on forests and forest peoples, funded by Chinese and Asian development banks. The stories also reveal the failure of Indonesian and Malaysian governments to live up to their commitments to slow deforestation and respect the rights of local forest communities.
- [Mina Susana Setra](#) is an indigenous woman leader (Dayak Pompakng) from West Kalimantan, Indonesia. She is currently the Deputy to Secretary General of AMAN, the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago of Indonesia. AMAN represents 2,373 indigenous communities, and is the largest indigenous organization in the world with more than 17 million active members. For 18 years, Ms. Setra has worked on indigenous issues locally, nationally and internationally. In 2012, she and others won a major constitutional court case, recognizing indigenous peoples' customary rights over Indonesia's forests.

- **Moderator:** [Andrew Revkin](#) is a well-known environmental journalist and founding director of the new [Initiative on Communication and Sustainability](#) at Columbia University's [Earth Institute](#). At Columbia he hosts [Sustain What](#), a global conversation identifying solutions to the complicated, shape-shifting and epic challenges attending humanity's [Anthropocene](#) environmental surge.

WHAT:

Indigenous Peoples and their rights: an invisible, effective and untapped solution for protecting ecosystems of growing importance to planetary and human health.

- A science panel to be held on the eve of the Paris Agreement's five-year anniversary and during a [week-long initiative to raise awareness of land rights](#) of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The panel will feature peer-reviewed researchers and Indigenous leaders from territorial organizations in tropical forest countries that represent millions of people, many of whom are on the front lines of a battle to prevent deforestation and biodiversity loss.
- During the sessions, experts will present evidence that reveals the outsize role of Indigenous and local peoples in protecting vulnerable ecosystems and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals by standing up to activities that destroy forests and the resources the communities depend on for their lives and livelihoods.

Additional experts available for interviews:

Indigenous leaders:

- **José Gregorio Diaz Mirabal (TBC)**, Coordinator of the Congress of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin ([COICA](#)), "Twenty years ago, we were protesting in the street," Mirabal [told a reporter](#) at the COP25 in Madrid last year. "Now we are here at the COP25 as observers, albeit without a formal vote...."(And) while we [indigenous leaders] discuss [among ourselves], we cannot speak with governments. They are negotiating in another room. And we don't know what they are talking about."
- **Joan Carling** is an indigenous activist from the Cordillera, Philippines. She is the co-convenor of the [Indigenous Peoples' Major Group \(IPMG\) for Sustainable Development](#) and is co-founder of [Indigenous Peoples Rights International \(IPRI\)](#). In 2018 she was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by the UN Environment Programme.
- **Mina Setra**, with [AMAN](#), an indigenous organization that represents 17 million people in Indonesia.

Researchers:

- [Iliana Monterroso](#), (Ph.D., Autonomous University of Barcelona), is Scientist and Co-coordinator of Gender and Social Inclusion Research with Center of International Forestry Research at CIFOR and an expert on the impact on forests and sustainable development of [community rights devolution](#). In a study on the impact of granting long-term concessions to local communities in the forests of the Mayan Biosphere in Guatemala, Monterroso and her colleagues concluded, "with the documented evidence of environmental impacts, the results of this analysis suggest a positive relationship between socioeconomic progress (income, investments, savings, capitalization of

community enterprises as well as asset building at household and enterprise level) and conservation of the areas under concession (deforestation rates close to zero in active community concessions).”

- [Kathryn Baragwanath](#), a PhD candidate from the University of California, San Diego, and author of a recently published [study](#) in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), concluding, “Our local effects indicate that areas of land right inside a territory with full property rights experience significantly less deforestation than those right outside of the border. Collective property rights might thus provide an effective way to reduce deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon.”
- [Carlos Zambrana-Torrel](#), Vice President for Conservation and Health at EcoHealth Alliance. Zambrana-Torrel works on the intersection between animal and human health. He and colleagues argued in a recent [policy paper](#), “developing evidence-based preventive approaches in the post COVID-19 era through a globally coordinated interdisciplinary and integrated programme focused on the improvement of current systems for pandemic risk prediction in the short-term, as well as identifying and testing long-term solutions in current and future socio-ecosystems that can quantitatively reduce the probability of new pandemics.” Originally from Bolivia, Zambrana-Torrel holds a PhD from Sapienza Università di Roma on Environmental and Evolutionary Biology, as well as degrees in Biology and Ecology from Universidad Mayor de San Andres in Bolivia and the University of Puerto Rico.

MORE ABOUT THE EXPERTS

Experts on the panel will include authors of UN [biodiversity](#) reports and authors of other peer-reviewed studies. Their papers either cite research, or confirm findings suggesting that forest peoples, when armed with strong land rights, outperform other forest managers. Where forest communities had strong rights, researchers found less [deforestation](#) and [biodiversity loss](#), and less likelihood of [conditions](#) that enable the release of potentially dangerous pathogens.

The compilation of findings, particularly evidence linking their role to reducing pandemic risk, may well strengthen the hand of Indigenous Peoples and local communities from the forests of Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia. For decades, their leaders, who have demanded recognition of customary rights to traditional territories, and a central role in negotiating and implementing global plans for conserving forests and other biodiversity hotspots.

According to Peter Daszak, President of the EcoHealthAlliance and lead author for [a new paper linking disease risk to deforestation and biodiversity loss](#), the world is confronting the threat of a rise in the number of pandemics, should governments fail to protect vulnerable ecosystems, and the Indigenous Peoples and local communities that traditionally manage them.

“The evidence linking land use change to pandemics like COVID-19 is crystal clear. Deforestation and land use change is a globally significant cause of new emerging diseases moving from wildlife into people,” Daszak said. “Granting and protecting Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities land rights is a critical step in protecting our whole planet from emerging pathogens.”

Also on the panel are Indigenous leaders, among them [Norman Jiwan](#), a Kerambai Dayak, who will report on the plight as well as the promise of Indigenous communities in West Kalimantan

(Indonesian Borneo). Their [Traditional knowledge](#) contributes to the health of ecosystems and provided IPBES researchers with information that was vital for assessing the status of the one million species found to be at risk of extinction.

Five years after 197 governments said they would commit to the Paris Agreement, 189 have ratified the accord; but leaders in tropical forest countries--with support from the global financial sector--are now advancing [a series of infrastructure projects](#) that threaten to destroy some of the most remote intact forests of South America, Southeast Asia and Central Africa.

There is an alternative economic model in the pipeline, however. [Jeffrey Sachs](#), University Professor at Columbia University and Director of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, is co-chair of the [Science Panel for the Amazon](#), which will produce the first scientific review to cover the entire Amazon basin and its biomes. *The research panel that calls itself, "the Amazon we Want,"* envisions a bioeconomy that will enable the Amazon's forest peoples to keep their forests standing, while sharing in benefits arising out of research based on traditional knowledge, with free, prior and informed consent.