

## WAKE-UP CALL

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

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On May 6, 16-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg tweeted that “the message is clearly not getting through”. Thunberg was referring to a major UN-backed report released this week, which has startling revelations about the battered state of nature globally. For starters, the report states that approximately one million animal and plant species now face extinction, many within decades. It offers stark statistics to map the destruction of nature caused by every sphere of human activity — from the fishing industry to mining and forestry to urbanisation.

The Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the UN-backed Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) has been compiled by experts from 50 countries over the past three years and evaluates changes over the past five decades. It concludes that there has been a systematic destruction of nature over the decades and that human activity has caused most of it. However, one aspect highlighted in the report holds out hope: “Nature managed by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities is under increasing pressure but is generally declining less rapidly than in other lands.” This is significant since “at least” a quarter of the world’s land area is “traditionally owned, managed, used or occupied by indigenous peoples”. It’s unusual for an international report to admit that the world “would benefit from an explicit consideration of the views, perspectives and rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, their knowledge and understanding of large regions and ecosystems”. UN agencies have in the past undertaken projects to tap the knowledge systems of indigenous communities. For instance, during 2012 and 2014, it engaged with the local communities in the Solomon Islands, a vulnerable ecosystem. The aim was to document the practices of the villagers when it comes to preventing natural calamities. Similar outreach efforts have been tried in rural Ghana.

Yet, political orders continue to strip the indigenous across the world of their rights and homelands. In India, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs flagged the United Nations’ Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in March about violations of the rights of the indigenous peoples in the current Draft National Forest Policy. The world must cease to see indigenous communities through the prism of profitability and as impediment to the extraction of natural resources. The world may need to learn from them to ensure a harmonious natural order.

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