

COP30 GLA-Gagga side event  
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## Locally-Led, Globally Needed: Why COP30 fell short, and how communities stepped up

**COP30 did not deliver the forest commitments the world expected. But it did amplify the leadership of Indigenous Peoples and local communities whose long-standing knowledge systems already protect millions of hectares. What remains is for finance, governance and power structures to catch up. Locally-led action is no longer the alternative; it is the way forward.**

*Collaborative op-ed article from the Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA), with contributions from Eva Duarte Davidson (GLA), Valentina Martínez (GFC), Mariana Gomez (Gaia), Joost van Montfort (TBI) and Femy Pinto (NTFP EP)*

**Before COP30—the UN’s annual climate negotiations, held for the first time in the Amazon—we wondered whether global leaders would deliver for tropical forests and the communities who defend them. The short answer from Belém: not yet. But missing commitments are only half the story.**

The other part happened outside the official process, in the unprecedented mobilisation and leadership of Indigenous Peoples, women-led groups, local communities, youth and civil society. A power shift that may ultimately matter more than the text governments approved.

Belém was expected to chart a concrete path to halt deforestation by 2030. It did not. The final COP30 text not only failed to establish a binding deforestation roadmap but also removed all references to stopping deforestation in the last days of negotiation.

What survived were voluntary ‘forest and climate roadmaps’: helpful as signals but lacking teeth, oversight or deadlines. In other words, a roadmap with no road. The absence of fossil fuel phase-out language further weakened the logic: it is impossible to protect forests while fuelling the crisis that destroys them.

And if deforestation continues, we lose not only ecosystems but also the Indigenous knowledge and community-rooted governance systems that make locally-led solutions possible in the first place.

**The Tropical Forests Forever Facility (TFFF), launched by Brazil, secured USD 6.7 billion in sponsor capital, with twenty percent nominally reserved for Indigenous Peoples.**

But this is less than a quarter of the USD 25 billion needed for full rollout, and the fund faces major governance and equity concerns, including the fact that Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IP&LC) have no decision-making power over these resources.

Civil society and Indigenous Peoples organisations voiced sharp criticism, and the need for direct-access, rights-based and gender-just finance remains unmet. Despite setbacks in the negotiations, several developments pointed in a more hopeful direction.

***It is impossible to protect forests while fuelling the crisis that destroys them.***

Rights-based and tenure-focused finance gained renewed traction: the Forest Tenure Funders Group extended its landmark COP26 pledge with an additional USD 1.8 billion to strengthen IP&LC land and resource rights.

This was reinforced by the Intergovernmental Land Tenure Commitment, which aims to recognise 160 million hectares of customary land by 2030, alongside a USD 2.5 billion pledge for the Congo Basin.

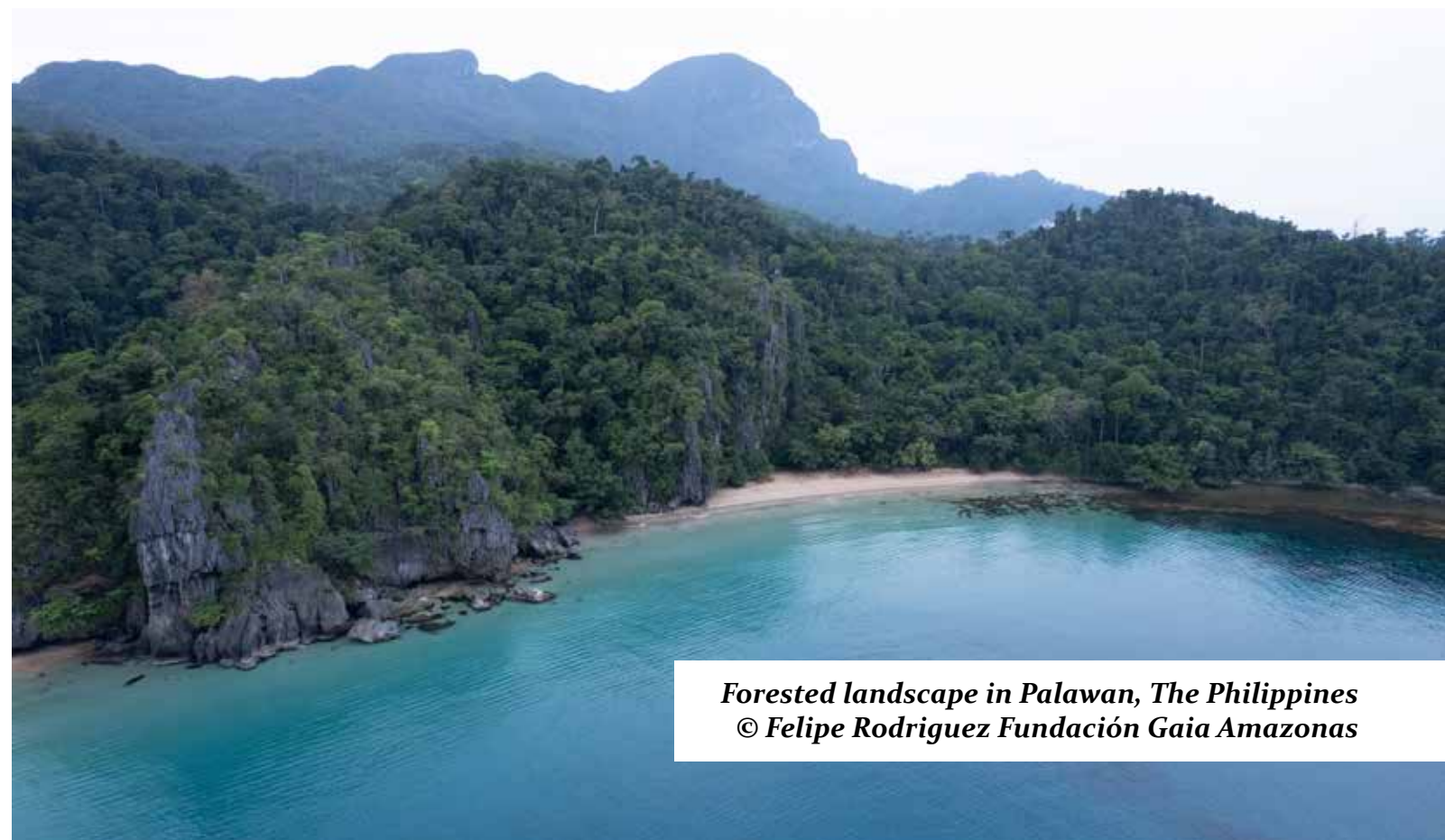
Wildfire resilience also received long-overdue recognition. The Call to Action on Integrated Fire Management gained backing from nearly sixty countries and institutions, including FAO and ITTO. It provides a voluntary guiding framework to reduce wildfire risk, emphasising prevention and the role of IP&LCs.

**Indigenous leadership moved decisively from the margins to centre stage. COP30 hosted a historic three thousand Indigenous leaders, the largest presence ever. Brazil’s demarcation of ten new Indigenous territories marked a tangible win.**

As one panellist at the GLA side event noted, ‘Without Indigenous governance, forests would not have survived as they have.’ Yet the limited number of Indigenous delegates in formal negotiations highlighted the persistent gap between representation and influence.

Gender justice also made concrete advances. The Belém Gender Action Plan, despite losses in human rights language, created new avenues to protect women environmental defenders and integrate care, safety, and participation into national climate processes.

What made COP30 different was what happened outside the plenaries. The People’s Summit drew twenty-five thousand participants. The Global Climate March brought seventy thousand people to the streets of Belém.



**Forested landscape in Palawan, The Philippines**  
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Movements drafted and presented a People's Charter to the COP30 Presidency; a clear, collective demand for territorial rights, zero-deforestation and locally rooted climate solutions.

And, it has to be said, this level of civic energy was only possible because Brazil and Colombia, in the context of last year's biodiversity COP16, are functioning democracies. Future COPs in more restricted civic spaces may not offer the same room for people to speak their minds.

At the official UNFCCC side-event hosted by the Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA) and the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (Gagga), *'From pledges to locally-led climate actions: gender-just Indigenous solutions for forests and climate'* we saw something similar: a full room, an honest conversation and a powerful consensus across very different actors; community leaders, feminist funds, Indigenous organisations, government representatives from Ireland and the Netherlands and philanthropic networks.

As one panellist put it: *'We are not project participants. We are partners in forest governance and climate action.'* Locally-led action is not only about shifting resources; it is about shifting relationships: from control to trust, from consultation to genuine partnership. Power, not projects, determines whether forests stand or fall.

**Across GLA countries, Indigenous Peoples** and local communities prove daily that locally-led solutions work. But they cannot keep forests standing on rights alone. These approaches endure only when governance aligns with economic realities: reasonable prices, predictable incomes and finance that does not punish communities for being small or remote.

We draw on examples from our previous pre-COP op-ed: In Indonesia's West Sumatra, communities working with KKI WARSI are integrating climate adaptation directly into social forestry across more than thirty thousand hectares.

Through agroforestry, diversified livelihoods and ecosystem restoration, they are increasing tree cover and reducing pressure from extractive industries, showing how Indigenous governance strengthens resilience.

In southern Cameroon, the Avebe and Meyos communities, supported by CED, halted illegal clearing of 1,200 hectares near the Dja Reserve. Their mapping, monitoring and advocacy efforts have now secured protection for more than

four thousand hectares, demonstrating how defending rights is central to protecting forests.

And in the Colombian Amazon, the Macroterritory of the Jaguars of Yuruparí, supported by Gaia Amazonas and Tropenbos Colombia, has mapped 3.5 million hectares and strengthened Indigenous territorial governance, contributing to the protection of more than four million hectares of forest.

As Norlita Colili of the Philippines noted at our side-event: *'From Bertas land-use systems to Uma farming cycles, communities hold the knowledge needed to sustain forests, if only it were recognised and supported.'*

These examples show a simple truth: when communities have rights, resources, recognition and economic space, forests stay standing.

***Power, not projects, determines whether forests stand or fall.***

***Panelist Norlita Colili, Pala'wan Indigenous woman environmental and human rights defender from Amas, Brooke's Point, Palawan, in the Philippines.***

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**COP30 may have delivered finance numbers**, but little of it is structured to reach the people actually protecting ecosystems. Community organisations, especially women-led, Indigenous and Afro-descendant groups, still face rigid procedures, short project cycles and reporting systems designed around donor needs rather than community realities.

Promising alternatives exist: the Socio-Environmental Funds of the Global South, the IPAS Fund in Asia and Indonesia's Nusantara Fund. Or, on a smaller scale, the Pastor Rice Small Grants mechanism and the Strengthen the Roots programme.

These mechanisms show how flexible, trust-based, locally governed finance leads to deeper, more durable outcomes, but they remain small compared to the scale of the need.

Locally-led solutions thrive when anchored in strong landscape-level governance. Inclusive platforms that bring together communities, Indigenous authorities, civil society and state institutions help mediate land-use pressures and align decisions.

Ultimately, it is about ensuring that the communities that safeguard forests have real influence over the rules and decisions shaping their territories.

If COP30 taught us anything, it is this: what is agreed in negotiation rooms matters, but the pressure and leadership coming from communities increasingly determine whether global commitments turn into action.

The next two years will determine whether momentum becomes something durable: real, non-market-based finance reaching communities, rights secured, deforestation plans strengthened, and governance reshaped toward equity; or not. Tropical forests remain at risk, but the leadership needed to protect them has never been clearer.

**The task now is to mobilise resources to the communities already safeguarding these landscapes and to invest in the civic space, institutions and alliances that allow their leadership to flourish.**

**There is no shortage of effective, locally rooted solutions. The challenge is to push political leaders to act at the scale required and to press for non-market-based financing architectures that support the solidarity economies we need, rather than perpetuating the ones we have.**



***Forested landscape in Palawan, The Philippines***  
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