

Indigenous Peoples and Biodiversity Protection

Summary of Research Team Findings

New Leaders Initiative at Earth Island Institute & Sacred Land Film Project

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Summary by Ataya Cesspooch — April 22, 2019

Task: Evaluate the World Bank's 2008 assertion that indigenous people are 4% of world population, control 22% of all land, on which is 80% of the planet's remaining biodiversity.

1. "Indigenous peoples make up 4% of the world's population"

Summary of Research Team Findings

The research team found that indigenous peoples make up between 4-5% of the world's population. They were unable to find other sources to substantiate the World Bank's figure, as most of the articles they found who used the figure were citing the World Bank. According to the World Bank's website, there are 370 million Indigenous people worldwide. Indigenous people are defined by the World Bank as "culturally distinct communities which base their identities on the land on which they live." The current world population (7.7 billion) divided by the 370 million Indigenous population number provided by the World Bank gives us 4.8%.

In referencing the Garnett et al. article (*A spatial overview of the global importance of Indigenous lands for conservation*, Nature Sustainability, July 2018), the team noted that the authors use two figures to represent the indigenous population: Garnett et al. asserts that, referencing the World Bank, there are approximately 370 million Indigenous People globally, which they equate to five percent of the global population (p. 369). It is later stated that "Indigenous Peoples represent <5% of the global population, creating a slight confliction within the same article (p. 370). However, because Garnett et al. are citing the World Bank, we know that the figure is 4.8% of the world population and it is fair to assume that the authors were rounding up when citing the population as 5%.

In addition, the research team found two sources: Walter, M., & Andersen, K. (2013). *Indigenous statistics : a quantitative research methodology*. Walnut Creek, CA : Left Coast Press, [2013]. And Coburn, E. (2015). *A review of Indigenous Statistics: A Quantitative Research Methodology*. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 4(2), 123–133, which troubled the use of statistics in indigenous communities. Walter and Anderson (2013), demonstrate how statistics have been used as a neo-colonial tool to adversely impact indigenous peoples through the use of policy. They seek to remedy this by providing a framework for the incorporation of indigenous quantitative methods. Cobrun (2015), takes a less staunch opinion regarding the use of statistics, and believes that while statistics may have historically been used to harm indigenous communities, that it is possible to non-indigenous peoples to use statistics without "ill intentions."

In sum, the research team found that the world's indigenous population is between 4-5%.

2. “Traditional indigenous territories encompass up to 22 percent of the world’s land surface”

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The research team found that the only data available regarding global indigenous land ownership disseminates from a handful of groups that are very closely related to one another and draw from each other’s data, e.g. LandMark, Rights and Resources Initiative, the World Resources Initiative. They were unable to find any academic research papers who were investigating these land ownership issues independently of the global organizations mentioned. For example, the Garnett et al. article utilized the LandMark database. LandMark is a collaboration between the World Resources Institute and other organizations, being one of the Data Platforms directly under the World Resources Institute (source: <https://www.wri.org/resources/data-platforms>). Thus, the team concluded that the only data available regarding land ownership on a global scale stems from international non-governmental organizations.

Regarding the World Bank’s assertion that Indigenous Peoples live on 22% of land globally, the team was unable to substantiate this claim based on any other source material. However, the figures found were not far off from 22%. The primary source document found was the Rights and Resources Initiative’s (RRI) 2015 report *Who Owns the World’s Land? A Global Baseline of Formally Recognized Indigenous and Community Land Rights*. The RRI report analyzed 64 countries, representing 82% of global land area, and found that within those countries, 18% of land is formally recognized as either owned or managed by indigenous peoples. The RRI report did not include numerous countries in West Africa which could account for the discrepancy with the World Bank’s figures. According to the RRI report, “10 percent of land in the countries studied is owned by Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and 8 percent of land in the countries studied is designated for (or “controlled by”) Indigenous Peoples and local communities” (p. 9). The Garnett article calculates that about 28% of the world’s lands are owned or managed by indigenous peoples. However, the Garnett et al. report does not include a comprehensive breakdown of the total land per country that is owned or managed by indigenous peoples, in addition, the sources they cite for the figures in their table are not credible (e.g. they cite conferences). Between the World Bank’s uncited assertion, and Garnett et al.’s sparsely cited report, the RRI report includes the most comprehensive figures currently available, despite its omission of certain countries.

Some of the issues raised by the research team involved the date data was collected and the possible changes to the land ownership since that collection date, as well as different classifications of land ownership. Some research articles, such as the Garnett et al. piece include lands that are both owned *and managed* by indigenous peoples, whereas the World Bank figure of 22% only encompasses lands that are *owned* by indigenous peoples. Thus, the figure can fluctuate depending on whether we are including lands managed, but not owned, by indigenous peoples.

In sum, the research team found that indigenous peoples own or manage between 18-28% of the world’s lands.

3. “Indigenous lands coincide with 80% of the world’s biodiversity”

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In researching the citation used by Sobrevila in the World Bank report the team reviewed the World Resources Institute’s 2005 publication, *The Wealth of the Poor: Managing Ecosystems to Fight Poverty*. They found no mention of the 80% assertion anywhere in the report and there is no mention of biodiversity at all in the section referenced.

The research team notes that the World Bank included a disclaimer within the 2008 report *The Role of Indigenous Peoples in Biodiversity Conservation* authored by Claudia Sobrevila that stated “Papers in this series are not formal publications of the World Bank. They are circulated to encourage thought and discussion. The use and citation of this paper should take this into account. The views expressed are those of the author and should not be attributed to the World Bank” (p. 3).

However, in practice we found that many publications have not followed this disclaimer and have adopted the 80% biodiversity figure in their publications, often without clearly citing any source. This includes journalistic publications, such as by Spanish author Baher Kamal with the Inter Press Services. Kamal is cited by Eva Gurria of the United Nations Development Program when she writes, “there is a growing understanding that indigenous lands and waters represent 80 percent of the world’s biodiversity” (Gurria 2013). National Geographic cited the 2008 World Bank document as well. Other influential authors and activists citing this statistic include Mark Dowie, Gleb Raygorodetsky, Eriel Derenger, as well as the Sacred Land Film Project.

Stephen Garnett, lead author on the 2018 report *A spatial overview of the global importance of Indigenous lands for conservation*, wrote to the team in an email: “We did look at the 80% assertion but could find no documented evidence supporting it.”

Our Conclusion: Because this final number is dependent on the previous figures, no new sources were identified, and the World Bank’s figure is unsubstantiated, there is not a clear figure or range of figures advocated for by the research team.