

# CHANGING PLANET



## The key to conservation lies with indigenous peoples, according to the World Bank.

In [Changing Planet](#) November 15, 2011 [2 Comments](#)



[Joanna Eede](#)



YANOMAMI HUNTER DARTS  
THROUGH THE AMAZON  
RAINFOREST, BRAZIL. ©  
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*'I was born in the forest, and I grew up there. I know it well, '* says Davi Kopenawa, a Yanomami spokesman from the Brazilian Amazon, who has devoted his life to fighting for the Yanomami's human rights and the environmental protection of his ancestral home.

Davi's knowledge is unsurprising: the Yanomami have lived in the rainforest for thousands of years. Their very survival has depended on maintaining a delicate balance between the ecological health of the rainforest and the ongoing needs of their people. They have long lived by the principle that to take more than is needed from the forest – or to degrade it in any way – is not only self-defeating but a reckless neglect of their unborn children. *'If we hurt nature, we hurt ourselves,'* says Davi.

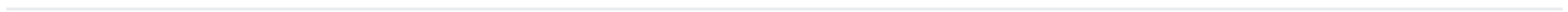
So the results of a recent study by the World Bank, which show that indigenous peoples are key to preserving the world's forests are – again – unsurprising. After all, it is thought that 80% of the world's protected areas lie within the territories of tribal peoples. They are the forests' original owners, scientists and conservationists. They have detailed knowledge of the flora and fauna; to put it simply, they know things we don't.

It is, in fact, precisely *because* these protected areas have been looked after so well by their indigenous guardians that they have been chosen, by western conservationists, as reserves. The Jarawa of the Indian Ocean Andaman Islands, for example, inhabit the last remaining tracts of virgin rainforest on the Andaman Islands. And a glance at a map of the Amazon shows that much of the rainforest that lies outside tribal reserves has been denuded, whereas, within indigenous areas, it largely remains intact.

This is also reflected in the World Bank's report. Using satellite data from forest fires to help indicate deforestation levels, the study showed rates were lower by about 16% in indigenous areas between 2000-2008. In short, conservation reserves that exclude tribal peoples suffer. And yet, ironically, millions of tribal people across the world are excluded from their homelands, becoming 'conservation refugees'. In India, an estimated 100,000 people have already been displaced in the name of conservation, while in Africa mass

evictions from protected areas have taken place, including the Batwa 'pygmies', who were forcibly removed from Uganda's Bwindi Forest in order to protect the mountain gorillas. *'Protecting ecosystems does not mean protecting them from the people who have always been their guardians,'* says Stephen Corry of Survival International. On the contrary, it stands to reason that the best way of protecting fragile ecosystems – as well as defending the rights of vulnerable peoples – is to secure the rights of indigenous communities.

To tribal peoples, rainforests are living, breathing entities that are vital for the future of the world. They look on in horror – and concern for us all – as the forests are slashed, felled and scorched. *'We know the health of the Amazon,'* says Davi Kopenawa. *'We know that when you destroy the rainforest, you cut the arteries of the future and the world's force just ebbs away. Give them back to us, before they die.'*





## MEET THE AUTHOR

Joanna Eede was an editorial consultant to Survival International with a particular interest in the relationship between man and nature and tribal peoples. She has created and edited three environmental books, including *Portrait of England* (Think Publishing, 2006) and *We are One: A Celebration of Tribal Peoples* (Quadrille, 2009). Joanna writes for newspapers and magazines on subjects such as the repatriation of wild Przewalski horses to Mongolia, the whales of the Alboran sea, the chimpanzees of the Mahale rainforest, uncontacted tribes of the Amazon rainforest and the Hadza hunter gatherer people of Tanzania. Future ideas include a book about Tibet's nomads.

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