

## PARTICIPANTS

- Mark Constantine – IG Co-chair
- Andy White – IG Co-chair; RRG
- Indigenous Peoples’ Majors Group for Sustainable Development - Joan Carling
- RECOFTC - Jenna Jadin
- Earthworm Foundation - Robin Barr, John Nelson, Clara Rowe, Charlotte Goubin
- Landesa - Scott Schang
- IDH - Nienke Stam
- TMP Systems -Sophia Murday, Ben Bowie
- Global Witness- Ali Hines
- Oxfam Global-Pubudini Wickramaratne, Madeleine Brasser
- Proforest: Dawn Robinson
- Pepsi - Natasha Schwarzbach
- IKEA - Roger Steinhardt
- Miro Forestry - Kate Mathias
- SIAT - Florent Robert
- Finnfund - Anne Arvola
- OPIC - Julie Kim
- EIB - Joana Pedro
- SIDA- Madeleine Jonsson and Nadja Berger
- DEG- Charlotte Zwitter
- Resource Equity - David Bledsoe
- The Nature Conservancy - Helcio Souza
- RRG – Bryson Ogden, Amanda Peçanha Hickey

## BACKGROUND

The Interlaken Group held a virtual meeting on May 14th to take stock of the unfolding impacts of the COVID-19 in global supply chains and determine how to leverage its position to ensure that tenure and sustainability concerns remain at the center of response and relief efforts. The meeting was motivated by recognition of a pivotal moment occurring as a result of the pandemic, which could heighten global commitment to land rights and sustainability goals or reverse crucial progress that has been achieved.

Prior to the meeting, leaders from companies and organizations participating in the Interlaken Group identified several critical issues which are emerging in the wake of the pandemic:

- **A lack of information filtering up from the local level:** Civil society has been forced to pull back, as have field units within companies. Fieldwork for service providers has largely halted and certification audits are being conducted remotely. It is challenging to support rightsholders as local voices have been quieted.
- **Indications of de-prioritization of sustainability among companies and governments:** There are troubling examples of governments relaxing enforcement of environmental regulations. There have been reported cases of companies trying to ‘fast-track’ extractive operations where regulations have been relaxed. Reduced cash-flows and a fall in commodity prices erode companies’ willingness to pursue and maintain certification.

- **Solvency and the resulting vacuum:** Companies in rural areas are financially impacted, and some will fold. This may disrupt supply chains committed to certification and standards. Poverty and joblessness may drive short-term decision making, raising the risk of deforestation and other violations.
- **Targeting of frontline defenders:** Companies are seeking advice on policies and initiatives to protect human rights and environmental defenders amidst increasing reports of violence and intimidation of IPLCs.
- **Resilience:** There is evidence that IPLCs with secure rights are better able to use land and forests in their alternative livelihood and coping strategies.

The objective of the virtual meeting was to answer the overarching question, *“What can we as a community of practice do to ensure that land rights and sustainability concerns are protected and advanced in the wake of COVID 19?”*

## Overview

The chairs opened the meeting with a reminder of its objective and the ground rules, including Chatham House Rule. In order to preserve this convention from previous Interlaken Group meetings, the decision was made not to record the session, though the chairs emphasized that this issue can be revisited to meet Group needs during COVID-19.

A “tour de table” followed, where participants in were asked to respond to three questions:

1. How are your supply chains, investments, and communities impacted by the crisis?
2. How has the pandemic affected your ability to monitor supply chains and sustainability performance in the areas where you work?
3. What can the Interlaken Group do to respond to these issues?

The following themes emerged from the contributions of CSO/NGO, DFI, and private sector participants:

- Impacts of the virus in developing countries have so far been uneven. Companies, investors, and civil society are supporting information campaigns and sensitization, providing protective gear and sanitary supplies, and are assisting communities to control their borders and exposure to outsiders. In other regions, communities, financiers, and companies are still waiting for impacts to emerge.
- Troubling “collateral” impacts of the crisis are coming to the attention of community advocates:
  - Cases of governments using COVID as an excuse to violate rights; land rights and due process violations have been documented worldwide.
  - Food security is a growing concern amongst rural communities as farming, supply chain, and marketing activities are disrupted.
  - Public administrative functions and judicial systems have been temporarily suspended, which has impacted communities’ ability to register property, increased illegal transactions, and inhibited communities’ ability to defend against incursions.

- Communities are experiencing heightened risks related to land grabs, but also disruptions from land “drops” where previous concession holders or operators are leaving abruptly and creating ambiguity in land status.
- New evidence and examples of how secure land rights contribute to the resilience of communities and supply chains during the crisis. Participants note that countries with registered forest rights are responding better, and farmers with land rights are more food secure.
- Stakeholders are repurposing existing supply chain infrastructure to respond to COVID19 needs, and note that procedures developed to safeguard human rights and sustainability concerns have applications in responding to the pandemic- via information campaigns, supplying protective equipment, etc.
- It remains unclear what form recovery packages will take, and what strategic opportunities the Group can use to influence these initiatives in ways that strengthen land rights and sustainability agendas.
- Recognition that the impacts of the crisis are felt differentially between men and women, and that land rights has a part to play in safeguarding the well-being of women and vulnerable groups.
- Challenges with monitoring and certification are numerous because of limited access to the field. Participants expressed interest in learning more about systems which allow local communities to communicate data on the impacts and challenges associated with supply chains and investments in rural areas (i.e. Kumacaya).
- Reduced access to the field may be the “new normal” for teams operating in rural areas. There is little in the ways of guidance to ensure that remote due diligence on ESG norms and standards have been achieved.

After the stocktaking, the chairs facilitated a discussion to understand the concrete opportunities to use the Interlaken Group platform to address these emerging issues. Several priorities were proposed:

- **Collective Messaging:** Participants agreed that the Group had an important and timely role to play in signaling the commitment of progressive stakeholder to land rights and sustainability both during and after the crisis.
- **Exploration of Local Monitoring Approaches and Innovations:** Participants expressed a need for a space to connect and share knowledge on innovative strategies being used to monitor supply chains and conduct FPIC and certification procedures remotely.
- **Guidance and Tools:** Participants noted the absence of guidance on what constitutes best practice under this “new normal”, particularly with respect to monitoring and assessing local impacts of operations/investments.
- **Information Sharing and Local Learning:** Participants observed that the importance of multi-stakeholder platforms; connections between different stakeholder groups can help overcome some of the information gaps created by the crises, a strategy which should be explored further.