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HOW CALIFORNIA CAN HELP STATE GOVERNMENTS AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN THE TROPICS COLLABORATE ON FORESTS AND CLIMATE

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We often talk about the importance of forests for climate change mitigation—they are "the forgotten solution," "one-third of the solution to climate change," and even Cinderella. Yet, we can't talk about conserving forests without talking about the people that live in forests and from forests.

It is estimated that over two-hundred million "forest peoples"- including indigenous peoples and local communities- live within and depend upon the tropical forests in the Amazon, Southeast Asia, Mesoamerica and the Congo Basin. Our ability to slow climate change is linked to these communities that are on the frontlines of conservation. To successfully mitigate climate change, we must find new forms of collaboration that meet the goals of forest-dependent communities for secure land rights, equitable participation in decision-making, and dignified livelihoods.

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California is strategically positioned to encourage these collaborations while working to halt tropical deforestation because it includes the "Guiding Principles for Collaboration between Subnational Governments, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities" as part of the California Tropical Forest Standard.

The "Guiding Principles" represent a landmark agreement between subnational governments, indigenous peoples and local communities to collaborate on climate change mitigation. They lay out shared commitments to protect forests, recognize rights, support indigenous and community livelihoods, and protect nature defenders, as integral aspects of global action on climate change. Thirty-four state and provincial governments that are members of the Governors' Climate and Forest (GCF) Task Force and 18 representative indigenous and local community organizations including Indonesia's Indigenous Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN), the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (AMPB), the Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA), and the

Mexican Network of Peasant Forestry Organizations (REDMOCAF), announced their endorsement of the Guiding Principles during the Global Climate Action Summit hosted by former California Governor Jerry Brown last September in San Francisco.

The Guiding Principles received another boost this month when governments, indigenous and local community organizations and civil society allies gathered at the Governors' Climate and Forest (GCF) Task Force meeting in Caquetá, Colombia reaffirmed their commitment to collaboration. But now what's needed is to translate these commitments from paper into policies. One of the best opportunities to do so is right here in California, as I discuss further below.

About the Guiding Principles

The Guiding Principles are a set of universal tenets that orient subnational governments, indigenous peoples, and local communities as they work together to slow climate change. They explicitly acknowledge subnational governments' protagonism in fulfilling ambitious climate change mitigation goals. The Guiding Principles describe shared commitments to recognize rights, support livelihoods, strengthen participation of forest-dependent communities in decision-making, and protect nature defenders. They reinforce existing safeguards and commitments, such as ILO 169, UNDRIP and the Cancun Safeguards.

Leaders of indigenous peoples' and local communities' representative organizations, civil servants from the subnational governments across the tropics that form the GCF Task Force, and civil society representatives collaborated in drafting the Guiding Principles through a two-year process. The resulting set of principles were informed by the experience of the state of Acre in Brazil, where state government representatives and indigenous peoples co-designed a framework for collaboration in the context of the state's climate change mitigation law.

Why the Guiding Principles are a breakthrough

The Guiding Principles are the first set of global criteria for subnational actors to collaborate on climate change mitigation that explicitly address issues of rights, forest-dependent livelihoods and participation. These issues are fundamental to climate justice.

Subnational governments are increasingly recognized as crucial actors for climate change mitigation. Many such jurisdictions, such as California, are taking the lead on climate action as national governments stand by. Their potential for impact is huge—the subnational governments that make up the Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force encompass one-third of the world's tropical forests. The endorsement of the Guiding Principles by GCF Task Force members, along with indigenous and local community organizations, is significant because of its potential to operationalize climate justice

as standard practice in climate change mitigation.

Benefits to the endorsers of the Guiding Principles

For indigenous peoples and local communities, the Guiding Principles facilitate recognition by subnational governments of their critical role in forest conservation. The Guiding Principles bring issues related to rights, livelihoods, participation and benefit-sharing to the fore in climate and forest policies.

For subnational governments, the Guiding Principles provide more certainty about how to work with indigenous peoples and local communities to meet their climate change mitigation commitments in tandem with their commitments to safeguard human rights. This guidance is especially crucial given that in many tropical forest regions, issues relating to indigenous peoples are generally outside of the domain of state governments.

How California can bring the Guiding Principles from aspiration to implementation

Perhaps the most important near-term opportunity to turn the Guiding Principles into policy is here in California. The state of California—a longtime leader in domestic climate policies and founding member of the GCF Task Force—is now poised to amplify its climate action internationally by supporting tropical forest conservation and tropical forest communities. The California Air Resources Board has proposed a California Tropical Forest Standard, which details the criteria tropical forest jurisdictions would need to meet in order to partner with the state on forest conservation initiatives, potentially including participation in California's regulatory carbon market. Importantly, it sets a high bar for other partnerships involving subnational governments, indigenous peoples and local communities.

The Guiding Principles are now included in the California Tropical Forest Standard as a result of input from indigenous representatives and GCF Task Force members to the California Air Resources Board last fall. The inclusion of the Guiding Principles, along with other safeguards, provide added assurance that California's climate policies will go beyond just "doing no harm". By taking this proactive approach, California's action on climate can foster partnerships, both between the state and tropical forest jurisdictions, and between those jurisdictional governments and forest-dependent communities. These collaborations can deliver real benefits in terms of forest conservation and well-being.

Now what's needed is for California state legislators to encourage the California Air Resources Board to endorse the Tropical Forest Standard, embedding the Guiding Principles in policy. In doing so, California would establish an important precedent for its potential partner jurisdictions in the Tropics in bringing benefits to indigenous peoples and local communities and promoting climate justice.