

However, the project has suffered delays in finalizing its governing board and recruiting its leadership.

African countries should be able to access vaccines without a public-health emergency – just as is the case in other parts of the world. As of now, the continent imports 99% of its vaccines. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was much talk of bringing vaccine manufacturing to the continent, but progress has been limited. If anything, things are going backwards. In April, the pharmaceutical company Moderna, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, ‘paused’ a plan to create a facility for making mRNA vaccines in Kenya, saying that it had experienced \$1 billion in losses and write-downs now that COVID-19 is no longer a priority. In response, the Africa CDC said that “to blame Africa and Africa CDC for lack of demand for COVID-19 vaccines” and thereby to put plans to manufacture vaccines in Africa on hold “only serves to perpetuate the inequity that characterized the response” to the pandemic.

Some measures taken as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic mean the world is better positioned to tackle mpox. But in other respects, it looks like business as usual. There has to be a cast-iron commitment on the part of world health leaders not to repeat some of the mistakes of the pandemic if mpox is to be brought under control in Africa.

Support Indigenous stewardship of biodiversity

Questions surrounding an often-repeated statistic about Indigenous Peoples and biodiversity show that researchers should take more care when sourcing facts.

For at least two decades, scientists, policymakers and journals, including *Nature*, have cited a statistic without determining its validity. The data point in question is that 80% of global biodiversity is under the stewardship of Indigenous Peoples. There is no doubt that Indigenous communities are core to the conservation of biodiversity, but to say that they are stewards of 80% of the world’s genetic, species and ecosystem diversity isn’t supported by evidence, as the authors of a Comment article last week stated (Á. Fernández-Llamazares *et al. Nature* **633**, 32–35; 2024).

A single, unsubstantiated number also does not reflect Indigenous values and world views, the authors add. There are better indicators and statistics on Indigenous communities and biodiversity, says Álvaro Fernández-Llamazares, a co-author of the Comment article and an ethnobiologist at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain, in an accompanying Nature Podcast (see go.nature.com/3mfsqkl).

“**Around the world, the struggle for Indigenous rights has a long way to go.**”

Biodiversity – defined as the variety of life on Earth, including its variation at the level of genes, species and ecosystems – is extremely hard to quantify. Even the simplest statements come with great uncertainty: there is no consensus, for example, on the number of species on the planet¹. There are at least 50 ways to value nature, according to researchers working with the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in Bonn, Germany².

The authors of the Comment article, three of whom identify as Indigenous, reveal that the 80% statistic seems to have emerged in policy reports, from which it spread into the scientific literature. As of 1 August, the researchers found the 80% claim mentioned in 186 peer-reviewed journal articles. The earliest mention that they found was in a 2002 United Nations document that said that Indigenous Peoples “nurture 80% of the world’s biodiversity on ancestral lands and territories”, without a citation (see go.nature.com/3auk1tq). The number is repeated in an influential 2008 World Bank report (see go.nature.com/4egd3p3).

So why might this number appear in policy documents first? It stems from Indigenous Peoples’ centuries-old encounters with more-powerful interests, the resulting exploitation and mistreatment, their fight for rights, and the international community’s ongoing policy response.

Worldwide, there are some 467 million Indigenous People across 90 countries. Today, they are among the poorest, most vulnerable and least protected people in their nations. Some international laws and modern research practices pertaining to biodiversity derive from the 1992 UN Convention on Biological Diversity. This agreement has its origins in a movement to create protected areas – ironically, areas often initially created by taking away Indigenous Peoples’ rights to land or expelling them. During the negotiation, representatives of low-income countries and Indigenous Peoples fought to ensure that the agreement included provisions for the equitable sharing of biodiversity’s benefits, such as profits from food or medicines.

By the early 2000s, organizations such as the World Bank were working with Indigenous Peoples’ representatives, and examining the impact and legacy of their own previous lending practices on Indigenous Peoples and creating ways to involve them in their decisions.

The research community also had work to do. When IPBES was established in 2012, it pledged, for the first time, to incorporate Indigenous and local knowledge in its global scientific assessments of biodiversity. Studies are now being co-produced between Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors. A next step needs to be more studies designed and led by Indigenous authors³.

Around the world, the struggle for Indigenous rights has a long way to go. Researchers have a crucial role in supporting communities, which includes being rigorous with data. As Fernández-Llamazares says in the Nature Podcast, unproven data risk fuelling scepticism on the role of Indigenous communities in biodiversity stewardship.

1. Wiens, J. J. *PLoS Biol.* **21**, e3002388 (2023).
2. Pascual, U. *et al. Nature* **620**, 813–823 (2023).
3. Goolmeier, T. *et al. Nature Ecol. Evol.* **8**, 1623–1631 (2024).