



MAKING THE EU WORK  
FOR PEOPLE & FORESTS

A nighttime photograph of a forest. A large, leafy tree in the center is brightly illuminated by a spotlight, making its green leaves stand out against the dark background. Other trees and foliage are visible in the shadows around it. In the lower-left background, a small building with warm interior lighting is partially visible through the trees.

# ANNUAL REPORT

**JANUARY - DECEMBER 2018**

# Fern's theory of change

Forests are essential to life on earth: they maintain biodiversity and protect land and water. More than 1.6 billion people rely on them for their livelihoods, and they're critical in the fight against climate change.

What's more, as the weather becomes deadlier and hurricanes, droughts and floods intensify, forests can offer some protection.

Yet the threats against forests are multiplying.

Around the world, they are being plundered for timber and cleared to make way for mines, infrastructure and agriculture.

Fern works to protect forests and improve the lives of forest communities.

We identify the threats facing the world's forests, and work with affected peoples, social and environmental organisations and policy makers to devise and deliver solutions.

Our purpose, as a Europe-based NGO, is to address the root causes of this forest destruction from a European perspective. As the number one global trade and aid power, the EU has an immense influence on the world's forests and the people who depend on them.

Our close work with partners in the global South and Europe shapes and drives our campaigns and is vital to bring about lasting change on the ground.

Fern makes decisions by consensus and all our campaigns are built in close collaboration with social and environmental organisations and movements across the world.

## Contents

|  |    |   |    |
|--|----|---|----|
| <b>Fern's theory of change</b>                             | 2  | <b>Forests and Development Aid</b>                                      | 17 |
| <b>Our team / Our board</b>                                | 3  | Bringing marginalised communities' voices to the EU                     | 17 |
| <b>Welcome from campaigns coordinator Hannah Mowat</b>     | 4  | Why benefits of community forestry outweigh those of industrial logging | 18 |
| <b>2018: at a glance</b>                                   | 6  | A day in the life of a Fern's communications manager                    | 18 |
| <b>Forests and Consumption</b>                             | 8  | <b>Forests and Trade</b>  | 21 |
| The EU Action Plan roller-coaster                          | 8  | Improving EU trade policy to achieve social and environmental justice   | 21 |
| Campaigning for cocoa sector regulation                    | 10 | 2018: number crunching  | 22 |
| A day in the life of a Fern partner                        | 10 | <b>Fern's finances</b>  | 23 |
| <b>Forests and Climate</b>                                 | 13 |   |    |
| Forests must be at the heart of climate strategies         | 13 |   |    |
| It's time for a modern vision for forests                  | 14 |   |    |
| Fern's gender work is starting to get outside recognition  | 15 |   |    |
| In memory of Fern's partner Priso Regis Christo: 1981-2018 | 16 |   |    |



## Our team

**Hanna Aho:** Forests and Climate Campaigner (outgoing)

**Daria Andreeva:** Campaigns and Communications Assistant

**Alexandra Benjamin:** Forests Governance Campaigner (West Africa) (incoming)

**Pierre-Jean Brasier:** Strategic Communications Adviser

**Julia Christian:** Forest Campaigner

**Cristina Díaz Paradedá:** Partner Finance Officer (incoming)

**Perrine Fournier:** Forest and Trade Campaigner (South East Asia)

**Katja Garson:** Bioenergy Campaigner (maternity cover)

**Marie-Ange Kalenga:** Forest Governance Campaigner (Congo Basin)

**Rudi Kohnert:** Gender and Monitoring and Evaluation

**Raphael Koenig:** Finance and Administration Manager

**Hannah Mowat:** Campaigns Coordinator

**Mark Olden:** Press Adviser

**Julie Painting:** UK Office Administrator

**Kelsey Perlman:** Forests and Climate Campaigner (incoming)

**Nicole Polsterer:** Sustainable Consumption and Production Campaigner

**Indra Van Gisbergen:** Forest Governance and Sustainable Consumption Campaigner (Cameroon)

**Viviane Vandemeulebrouke:** Finance Officer

**Richard Wainwright:** Communications Manager

**Linde Zuidema:** Bioenergy Campaigner (on maternity leave from September onwards)

## Our board

**Ramy Bulan:** specialist in law, indigenous issues – Malaysia

**David Kaimowitz:** specialist in forest politics, economics and community rights – Nicaragua

**Jacques Lauruol (treasurer):** specialist in financial issues and financial training – UK

**Elisa Peter (chair):** specialist in forest politics and United Nations institutions – UK

**Fred Pearce:** specialist in communications, climate change and land grabs – UK

**Silas Kpanan'Ayoung Siakor:** specialist in community and human rights and natural resource management – Liberia

**Flip van Helden:** specialist in forest governance and EU relations – Netherlands



# Welcome

## Being hope

**Hannah Mowat** Fern Campaigns Coordinator



The reality of climate breakdown dawned for many in 2018. The Northern Hemisphere baked. The polar caps melted. Forest fires raged. Meanwhile the global media broke its self-imposed climate omerta, as the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned in their latest report that we have just 12 years left to avert disaster.

This same report highlighted that unless we harness forests' awesome natural power, runaway climate change is inevitable.

Throughout 2018, Fern presented a positive vision for how to do so: one in which forests sequester carbon on a vast scale without threatening food security, causing ecological catastrophe, or trampling the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

In October, along with other members of the Climate Land Ambition and Rights Alliance (CLARA), we fleshed out this vision in a landmark scientific report, which showed how the world can limit warming to 1.5°C by combining deep emissions cuts with restoring natural forests, ending deforestation, better agricultural practices, strengthening community land rights and reducing meat consumption.

Meeting this challenge will require a level of international cooperation unseen in peacetime. And the role of the European Union (EU) – collectively the world's largest aid donor and biggest trading bloc – will be crucial.

In 2018, there were signs that the EU is moving away from some of the damaging policies that, through our research, campaigning and coalition building, we have sought to end.

### On the brink of a breakthrough

In December – following mounting calls from Member States, the European Parliament and over 200,000 citizens – the European Commission finally announced plans to act against deforestation and forest degradation.

Agriculture is the biggest driver of deforestation on earth, and the EU is the second biggest importer of agricultural goods which cause deforestation, much of it illegal. The urgency of passing laws which eradicate deforestation, land grabs and other human rights

abuses from the EU's agricultural supply chains, is, moreover, intensified by two factors.

First, as the EU continues to embrace open trade in the face of growing protectionism and trade wars, many of the free trade deals it has signed or is in the throes of negotiating, pose a profound threat to forests and people – unless combatted by specific and bold measures.

Second, the need for action is amplified by developments in Brazil, where the country's new President, Jair Bolsonaro, appears hellbent on tearing up his nation's environmental protections and stripping away Indigenous People's rights. How this battle unfolds will be one of the defining environmental stories in the coming years. Its outcome will affect us all.

The EU is already complicit in the destruction of Brazil's savannahs and rainforests, including the Amazon, through its agricultural imports, especially beef and historically soy. Binding legislation ensuring that these imports are free from abuses could act as a brake on Bolsonaro's worst impulses. Later in this report, we tell the story of our campaign: from the early research we undertook to help expose the EU's role in agricultural deforestation, through to the often protracted process of building momentum towards meaningful EU action, which we now appear to be on the brink of.

### Civil society on the move

The hard slog that's invariably a prerequisite for real change is also a feature of our development campaign: supporting structural transformation in societies whose timber industries are blighted by illegality and poor governance – overcoming powerful vested interests, increasing accountability and transparency, giving voices to women and men who have been historically denied them – often comes incrementally. And when it happens, it tends to be beneath the radar of publicity. Yet the impact on peoples' lives is real.

Two examples from 2018 in countries where we work closely with our local partners illustrate this.

After eight years of negotiation, Vietnam and the EU finally signed a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA)





Fern staff participating in the December 2018 Belgian climate strike.

to end the illegality that's riddled Vietnam's timber sector for decades. While huge challenges remain, the process so far has seen Vietnam's civil society, which has traditionally operated under serious constraints, play an unprecedented role through its work ensuring that the views of poor communities across the country were heard by the deal's negotiators.

And in September, George Weah, president of Liberia – a nation ravaged by years of devastating civil war and Ebola – signed a new Land Rights Act, which is probably the most progressive in Africa. It is the first Liberian law to recognise women's rights to land, and if successfully implemented, could enfranchise Liberian women to a degree unprecedented in the country's history.

### Forests, the new coal

In contrast to the relative obscurity surrounding the EU's flagship anti-illegal timber policy, Member States' reliance on bioenergy attracted controversy in 2018 as the EU decided to continue to support burning forest biomass, with few caveats.

The forestry and energy sectors have found themselves pitted against increasing public opposition and growing scientific consensus, as the evidence becomes incontrovertible that burning forest biomass harms the climate, forests and biodiversity.

The bioenergy industry has doubled over the last ten years, and is set to increase by a staggering 250 per cent in the next decade, leading to the further industrialisation of forests and increasing harm to the climate – unless it can be stopped.

### Inspiring change

Given the scale of the challenges we all face – and the dystopian future that runaway climate change would bring – it's easy for pessimism to take hold.

But we can't allow it to.

What inspired me and gave me hope this year was the creative rebellion of young people who poured onto our streets to strike for the climate. Generation Z have shown us what they are capable of, and we must create space for them to continue leading.

But if these are the new branches of the tree, I am also inspired by Fern's roots, the legacy of our co-founder Saskia Ozinga and our partners who work on the frontline of protecting human rights and preventing forest destruction in Africa, Asia and Europe.

As Fern edges nearer to our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020 – which, significantly, is the same year that the EU has pledged to halt deforestation by – we will continue striving to be agents for hope. Not having hope, but being hope.

# 2018: at a glance

Publicity generated by Fern's report, Unearned Credit, pressures Virgin Atlantic airlines to stop buying credits from a REDD+ carbon offset scheme in Oddar Meanchey, Cambodia. Our report showed that forests which were supposed to be protected by the project were systematically cleared by the military.

Environment minister Dr Therese Coffey tells timber industry representatives that the United Kingdom won't abandon the EU's key anti-illegal logging measures in the wake of Brexit. Instead, it will incorporate the European Union Timber Regulation (EUTR) and Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) into UK law.

Saskia Ozinga, our co-founder and Campaigns Coordinator, steps down after 23 years at Fern. She is succeeded by Hannah Mowat.

The deadly impact of coal mining on people and forests in Kuzbass in southern Siberia, revealed in Fern's report Slow Death in Siberia, pressures German energy company RWE to include the findings in their discussions with the region's coal companies.



April: Action during the FME meeting in Estonia.

The Council of the EU adopts new LULUCF regulations, meaning a lack of clear rules for accounting for carbon removals and emissions from the land sector, including forests. Our analysis shows that these rules will allow countries to hide a significant amount of emissions caused by increased logging, and that its objective is to maintain – rather than increase – the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> being absorbed annually by land and forests across the EU.

Fern joins the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), a non-profit initiative aimed at responsibly managing and protecting the Congo Basin's tropical forests, and which is sponsored by more than 40 governments and investors.

In the face of mounting scientific evidence and rising public unease, the EU clings to its doomed biomass policy in its new Renewable Energy Directive for the period 2021 – 2030. It means that the destructive practices of recent years will continue to be incentivised: increasing forest harvests, the burning of whole trees and stumps, and the large-scale use of biomass in inefficient electricity installations.

Indigenous leaders and human rights activists from Liberia, Indonesia and Colombia deliver a petition – eventually signed by 211,000 people and endorsed by 20 organisations worldwide, including Fern – to European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. It urges the EU to fulfil its international commitment to halt deforestation by supporting an EU Action Plan to protect forests and respect forest-dependent peoples' rights.

## January

Work by leading artists from Brazil, Colombia and Europe capturing both the beauty and the destruction of the Amazon, is exhibited at the European Parliament. At the event – organised and co-hosted by Fern – ten Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from across the spectrum call for the EU to tackle the imports of commodities driving this deforestation – which the EU is a major consumer of – such as soy.

## February



Fern hosts the Belgian premiere of Silas: No More Business as Usual, a feature-length film depicting rural Liberians' struggle against the takeover of their land and the destruction of their forests by agricultural companies. The film was followed by a Q&A with its subject, Silas Kpanan'Ayoung Siakor, Liberian environmentalist, Fern board member, human rights activist, and Goldman Prize winner and Saskia Ozinga.

## March

Fern's partners from tropical forested countries around the world visit Brussels, Paris and Bonn to meet representatives of the European Commission, the European External Action Service, the European Parliament, and various Member State governments. They press them to ensure that the EU's trade and aid policies improve forest governance. The partners (and Fern) subsequently release a statement calling on the EU to properly implement the FLEGT Action Plan, and tackle deforestation.



The European Commission publishes its long awaited study on Options to Combat Deforestation and Palm Oil.

## April

The European Court of Justice upholds democratic principles and the need to protect one of the last remaining parts of the primeval forest which once stretched across Europe, in its ruling that the near tripling of harvests in Poland's Puszcz Białowieska Natura 2000 site, violated its obligations under EU Birds and Habitats Directives.

The annual Forest Movement Europe (FME) gathering takes place in Elbiki, Estonia and is hosted by Estonian Forest Aid. Estonian forests, the campaign for an EU deforestation action plan, the state of the global paper industry and grassroots campaigning, are among the topics discussed. Fern has facilitated the FME – a network of more than 45 NGOs from 12 countries – since 1995.

## May

Alongside our Ghanaian partner, Civic Response, Fern organises an event at the Tropical Forest Alliance (TFA) 2020 gathering in Accra, exploring how lessons from tackling deforestation in Ghana's timber sector could be applied to its cocoa industry. In 2018 Fern also launched a coalition of 14 NGOs who are campaigning together for an EU regulation on cocoa.

## June

Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez and EU Commissioner Director General Stefano Manservigi initial the text of the EU-Honduras Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA). The deal offers a shard of light in a country riven by conflict, and is the first such agreement to recognise Indigenous Peoples as a separate group, along with government, civil society and the private sector.

The Oslo meeting on tropical forests highlights the importance of engaging with communities and indigenous groups to tackle climate change, echoing the call Fern and its partners made at the Abidjan Summit on the Talanoa dialogue.

Findings of an investigation by Mighty Earth, Rainforest Foundation Norway and Fern into the disastrous impacts of soy production in Argentina and Paraguay, and how that soy is shipped to France and Germany and used as livestock feed is picked up by more than 600 outlets.



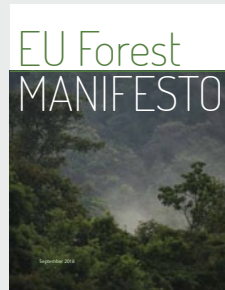
August: Fern publishes an investigative report into the ongoing dispute between palm oil company Socapalm and residents. Image shows Agatha Killeng, president of the Mbongo village branch of Synaparcam.



Widespread media coverage, including in the New York Times, follows a call by Fern and its partner NGOs at a hearing in the European Parliament, for EU legislation ending the human rights violations and environmental destruction scarring the cocoa industry.

After Fern publishes an investigative report into the ongoing dispute between palm oil company Socapalm and residents living near its plantations in Cameroon, the company pledges to examine allegations of violence against women and have a dialogue with Synaparcam, a collective of oil palm farmers.

Fern launches the **EU Forest Manifesto**: our call for political parties, EU election candidates and EU leaders proposal to the next generation of EU leaders to support forests and forest peoples.



As the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** issues a stark warning that time is receding to stop catastrophic climate change, Fern, and other members of the Climate Land Ambition and Rights Alliance (CLARA), offer an alternate vision of how to keep the planet under 1.5°C of warming: one in which natural forests are restored, community land rights strengthened and agricultural practices are improved.

We co-host an event with the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) at the European Parliament exploring community forestry, sustainable forest management and the impact of EU aid funding. Experts from Central Africa and the EU participate in the event, *The new EU multi-financial framework (MFF): what's in it for forests and community livelihoods?*

The European Commission recognises the crucial, positive role that land and forests should play in fighting climate change in its long-term climate strategy, as calls for the EU to reach net zero emissions by 2050. The Commission also recognises the multiple risks to the climate of scaling up forest-based bioenergy, taking on board growing evidence that bioenergy can have a negative impact on the climate.

Fern organises a tour of Brussels by Brazilian indigenous leaders in which they meet EU officials and international media to highlight the threat that Jair Bolsonaro's presidency poses to their rights, the Amazon and the planet – and how the EU should react.

The Norwegian Parliament votes to exclude biofuels based on high deforestation-risk feedstocks, from 2020. It is the first country in the world to do so. The EU has made a similar decision, but this will not come into force until 2030.

## July

Fern brings together experts in the field of trade, due diligence, land rights and deforestation to discuss how the EU could regulate deforestation in supply chains.

## August

## September

Fern welcomes a ground-breaking **European Parliament** report which echoes our and the NGO community's calls for a holistic **EU Action Plan to Protect Forests and Protect Rights**, and for faster progress on implementing the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs).

## October

After eight years of negotiation, **Vietnam** and the EU sign a **VPA** to promote the trade in legal timber and improve forest governance.

Fern is among the 500 government, private sector and civil society representatives from **Africa, Asia, Europe** and **North America** at the 11<sup>th</sup> **Forest Governance Forum (FGF)** in **Brazzaville, Republic of Congo**.

## November

Fern is one of the 120 organisations from 40 countries involved in a day of action warning that the rapid growth of the so-called bio-economy poses a grave risk to climate, nature and human rights.

The EU launch of the landmark CLARA report (see October), organised by Fern, takes place in Brussels. Experts, including **Dr Jean-Pascal Ypersele**, former IPCC vice-chair, and **Kelsey Perlman** from Fern, take part in a discussion on the role that forests and land can play in limiting warming to 1.5 degrees – and what the EU should do.

## December

**Belgium** becomes the seventh EU Member State to call on the European Commission to act on deforestation, following a letter sent by **Denmark, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands** and **Italy**.

In the wake of this, and other calls to action, the European Commission publishes a roadmap announcing plans to “step up European Action against Deforestation and Forest Degradation”. It suggests that a new Communication will be issued in the second quarter of 2019 to “develop a more coherent and comprehensive approach to the problem”.

Activist blockade in Bialowieza forest. Photo: Friends of the Earth



## Forests and Consumption

**“Personally I’m optimistic because it’s clear that the public and some forward-looking companies are in favour of EU regulatory action to tackle deforestation linked to our consumption, and care passionately for forests.”**



**Nicole Polsterer** Sustainable Consumption and Production Campaigner

“Every year the world loses roughly 10 million hectares of forests. The EU is the biggest importer per capita of products which have caused deforestation so it bears a huge responsibility. But it has only tackled its role in illegal logging.

Hope for an EU Action Plan on Deforestation has been building in Civil Society for many years, and the campaign to achieve it has been a real roller-coaster. The EU has given signals that it will act, but then repeatedly failed to say what path it will take.

But we kept pushing. In 2018 we really increased the pressure – and finally, in December, the Commission produced a roadmap for action. The pressure came from various fronts. For a start, there’s a growing public awareness that people can’t rely on companies to tell them if what they’re buying is fair and sustainable, or helping destroy the planet.

A petition calling for an EU Action Plan, which we helped launch in May, was a great illustration of the strength of public feeling on this: more than 200,000 people eventually signed it, and it was delivered to the European Commission’s Vice President’s office by a delegation of Indigenous Peoples.

In 2018 we also organised an exhibition featuring artists from Brazil and Colombia. It spoke to hearts and minds, because you could see the destruction of the Amazon in their work, and hear from them about its impact on forests and peoples. MEPs from different parties stood shoulder to shoulder with the artists, saying how unacceptable it was that the EU hadn’t acted.

Companies also felt the pressure in 2018. For example the investigative report, The Avoidable Crisis, which we released in March with our partners Mighty Earth and Rainforest Foundation Norway, revealed the devastating impact in South America of the soy the EU imports for its feedstock. It got a lot of media attention, including in *El Pais*, *Le Monde* and various TV channels.

Another front for pressure on the Commission came from governments and politicians. The Amsterdam

declaration group – France, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Norway and the UK – told the Commission that the EU needed to act, because individual governments could not stop deforestation alone. Belgium later joined them in this call. The European Parliament was also very vocal in co-operating with civil society.

Changes in the geo-political landscape gave momentum – and urgency – to the campaign for an EU Action Plan on Deforestation. Specifically, the election in Brazil of [Jair] Bolsonaro, was rightly seen as a huge threat to Indigenous Peoples and the environment. And given the EU’s close trading ties with Brazil, it put the spotlight on what the EU can practically do – using its diplomatic and trade clout – in an environment where laws are being changed and human rights are not being respected.

While the Commission’s roadmap is a significant breakthrough, we still have everything to fight for. The Commission doesn’t say anything about how the EU will really curb its consumption so it’s unclear whether the EU will take strong action.

It took five years for the Commission to publish its plan of action, and it may take a similar time before a concrete policy is formulated. We need to be vigilant in making sure that the Commission doesn’t let this slip.

Personally I’m optimistic however, because it’s clear that the public and some forward-looking companies are in favour of this approach, and care passionately for forests.”

June 2018: Indigenous leaders and human rights activists from Liberia, Indonesia and Colombia delivering the petition to a representative of the European Commission. The petition later reached more than 200,000 signatures.







## The long road to legal, sustainable and transparent supply chains

Agriculture is the biggest cause of forest destruction in the world.

The EU's central role was laid bare in a 2013 European Commission [study](#), which found that between 1990 and 2008, the EU as a whole was the largest single destination for crops and livestock products which had caused deforestation.

The EU's complicity was further exposed in 2015, when Fern published *Stolen Goods*, showing that in a single year (2012) the EU imported roughly a quarter of all internationally traded soy, beef, leather and palm oil that been grown on illegally cleared forest land.

The need for an ambitious EU Action Plan to protect forests and respect human rights could not have been clearer. Yet the path towards meaningful regulation has been slow and tortuous.

In 2018, however, political and civil society pressure grew significantly, culminating in the Commission publishing a roadmap at the end of the year:

**January:** A [study](#) by the International Sustainability Unit reinforces earlier findings showing that voluntary commitments by companies to end deforestation in their supply chains are insufficient.

**February:** NGOs, including Fern, publish an [open letter](#) calling on the EU Commission to develop a formal action plan, including legislative measures, as soon as possible.

**February:** The Amsterdam Group [urges](#) the Commission to adopt an ambitious strategy to combat imported deforestation. Our partner from Ghana is invited to give a key note speech.

**March:** The Commission publishes its [feasibility study](#) on options for ending the EU's role in agricultural deforestation one year later than expected. Nicole Polsterer outlined Fern's response in an [opinion article](#).

**March:** 47 MEPs call for an EU Action Plan on Deforestation in a [letter](#) to the Commission.

**March:** Release of *The Avoidable Crisis*, published by Mighty Earth, Fern and Rainforest Foundation Norway.

**April:** World Cocoa Forum (private sector) [calls for](#) human rights due diligence to be strengthened across the supply chain, including through potential regulatory measures by governments.

**May:** Fern and allies launch a [petition](#) addressed to Jean Claude Juncker demanding an EU Action Plan to put public pressure and show citizens' endorsement.



June 2018: Action in front of the European Commission.

**June:** Fern and Forest Trends release a new [study](#) showing that voluntary corporate commitments are no substitute for government action against illegal forest destruction. [Nicole Polsterer](#) outlined the findings in an [opinion article](#).

**June:** Indigenous Peoples deliver a petition signed by 150,000 + people (it then reached 200,000 signatures) calling for EU Action.

**September:** The European Parliament [develops](#) a resolution calling for "regulatory measures to ensure that no supply chains or financial transactions linked to the EU cause deforestation".

**November:** The Amsterdam group [calls for](#) tough action on deforestation to meet the 2020 UN goal.

**Mid November:** Pressure mounts on the EU to act as France [calls for action](#) on deforestation.

**December:** Belgium [joins countries](#) calling on the European Commission to act on deforestation.

**December 18:** European Commission finally [outlines its thinking for action](#) on deforestation. The real work begins...

**“For us, cocoa is a place to start the conversation on the need to regulate agricultural commodities in general, and to explore what that regulation could look like.”**



**Julia Christian** Forest Campaigner

“Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana together produce more than half of the world’s cocoa, and the impact on forests in those countries is intense.

The EU has a very clear responsibility to act: it consumes about 60 per cent of global cocoa imports, an unusually high figure, which is partly down to Europeans’ historic, cultural love for chocolate.

As well as driving deforestation, cocoa has a big child labour problem. The cocoa industry has attempted to address child labour for almost 20 years via voluntary commitments, and they’ve completely failed.

Now companies, and the main certification standards in the chocolate sector, acknowledge the need for regulation and legal enforcement – both in producer

countries, and in major consumer regions like the EU. For us, cocoa is a place to start the conversation on the need to regulate agricultural commodities in general, and to explore what that regulation could look like. That is why, as part of the consumption campaign, we worked actively on cocoa in 2018.

The chocolate sector also tends to buy other forest risk commodities: such as large amounts of palm oil. So when you start a conversation with them around cocoa – which is where they’ve received the most negative pressure because of child labour – it leads quite naturally into a wider conversation around the need for environmental and human rights legislation for other commodities. We only really started working on cocoa at the beginning of the year, and we’ve

## A day in the life of a Fern partner

### Vansy Senyavong

I was a national volunteer for the UNDP for a year. Then I worked as a programme manager for nine years for VECO in sustainable agriculture and income generation in Bokeo, supporting Lao upland communities to improve their livelihoods.

Then [after a landmark government decree 115 on Associations at the end of 2009] the space for local people to establish civil society organisations really opened up, and I started MHP.

MHP tries to address the gap between rich and poor: we want our poor people to truly be equal citizens in developing our country.

We have 17 staff, with two working on the FLEGT process [in April 2017 the EU and Laos held their first face to face VPA negotiations].

We work at a grassroots level in Bokeo [which is around 100km from the China border] which gives us greater impact by being closer to the community. We try to help build the capacity of poor rural people, particularly women, so that they can take control of their destinies in sustainable ways and improve the quality of their lives.

One way we do this is through the natural forest tea co-operative we founded in 2016. Subsistence farmers are struggling to survive because overseas investors are buying up land and forests for banana plantations – but we found a donor to support villagers to secure tenure to their tea forest, so that it will be protected for future generations. The co-operative is giving meaningful employment to people.

*We try to help build the capacity of poor rural people, particularly women, so that they can take control of their destinies in sustainable ways and improve their quality of their lives.*

We are also on the committee of the Lao Civil Society Organisation (CSO) FLEGT network, which is giving civil society the chance to influence forest governance policies for the first time. We are one of the parties helping formulate a new timber legality definition for the country.

We’ve worked with Fern since 2015.

After the Lao government expressed interest in engaging in a VPA process, Fern came to Laos to meet



positioned ourselves as a key actor in the debate: we've already been invited to speak at events by the European Parliament, the German and French governments, the chocolate industry, and NGO coalitions in Brussels and the UK.

We're working in close collaboration with other NGOs and allies who have contacts in different constituencies to us. We joined the VOICE Network, which is the association of European organisations working on cocoa. One positive thing to emerge from that collaboration is that the final declaration of the World Cocoa Conference (the leading event for the global cocoa sector) referred to the failure of voluntary approaches and stated that governments should consider regulatory measures. This was a big step forward, which we were able to use throughout the year to raise policy-makers' awareness that the cocoa sector wants regulation.

In July we facilitated the attendance of our Ghanaian partner to join a panel in a hearing in the European Parliament on tackling deforestation and human rights



Photo by Yvonne / flickr.com CC

abuses in cocoa supply chains, which got great media coverage including in Reuters and the New York Times.

There was an incredible consensus at that hearing, thanks to a groundwork by us and our allies before the event. You had all the MEPs asking, 'Why aren't we regulating the sector?' and Mondelez, which is the



**Vansy Senyavong is the director of Maeying Houamjai Phathana (MHP) (Women Participating in Development), which she founded in 2010. MHP works with indigenous communities in Bokeo, Laos' northern province, specifically focusing on building poor rural women's capacity. MHP also provides technical services to other NGOs throughout Laos, and is part of the civil society network involved in discussions over the shape of the Laos Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) deal with the EU. Vansy previously worked for the Belgian NGO Rikolto (formerly VECO), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). MHP has been a Fern partner since 2015.**

local NGOs and explain the VPA and the opportunities for local NGOs to engage in the process, so as to contribute to better policies which protect forests and improve the livelihoods of forest communities.

The first activity we conducted with support from Fern was the launch of radio programmes in several provinces of Laos to raise awareness of the VPA. Then we developed a joint programme together with Fern and four other members of the network, which we are currently implementing.

Now we are doing research into transparency to bring an informed position from a Lao NGO's perspective into the VPA discussions. This is a new and very

interesting work area for us but also politically quite sensitive.

Fern has shared lessons with us on transparency from other VPA countries and provided guidance to develop research questions.

Our aim is to improve forest governance in Laos. It is a land locked country and 75 per cent of the land is covered with forests. Most poor people depend on forests for their livelihoods. If forest governance is weak, inequalities between rich and poor people will grow.



world's second biggest chocolate company, made a clear call for a Human Rights Due Diligence approach.

Heidi Hautala, one of the European Parliament's Vice Presidents, approached us and said she wanted to organise a follow-up, smaller discussion to go into more detail.

We held the follow-up hearing in November, and it brought together a range of stakeholders, including four major chocolate companies, all the main European NGOs, and certification initiatives. The stakeholders' desire for regulation was made clear, and the Commission seemed taken aback.

In terms of policy progress, France came up with its National Strategy on Deforestation, and called for an EU Due Diligence Regulation on forest risk commodities – specifically calling attention to cocoa – saying that we should develop something on cocoa relatively quickly because it's clearly ripe for regulation.

A month later, Belgium made the same call, and more recently Germany has come out with a 10-point action plan on cocoa where they've called attention to the need for EU regulation.

Now we are trying to focus on getting the debate further within the higher levels of the European Commission.

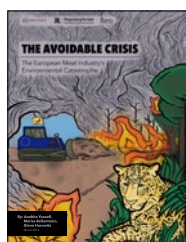
Ultimately they will be responsible for initiating any regulation and I think that they're the most reluctant to do so, because the onus is on them.

On the other hand, there is some movement coming from people working on corporate governance within the Commission, towards an EU Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence Regulation covering all commodities.

There are also increasingly powerful campaigns in a number of European countries – Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, Switzerland – to call for such legislation, often bringing together a wide range of voices, from national political parties to NGOs, to companies, to trade unions. I have a growing feeling that a regulation like this, at the EU level, is all but inevitable within the next few years.

## Our publications

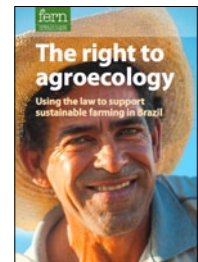
**The Avoidable Crisis** published by Mighty Earth, Fern and Rainforest Foundation Norway, revealed the devastating environmental and social impact in Argentina and Paraguay of producing the soy which is feeding the German and



French market. The report was widely covered in the international media (including Le Monde, Corriere de la Serra, El Pais, and various TV channels).

### **The Right to Agroecology: Using the law to support sustainable farming in Brazil**

written by Gladstone Leonel Júnior, outlined a vision whereby existing national and international frameworks could support sustainable agriculture in Brazil – which would reduce the pressure to convert forests to large plantations.



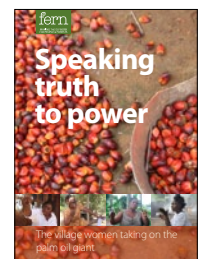
### **Getting the 'bads' out of goods: Evolution from voluntary to regulated approaches in reducing the undesirable impacts of global trade**

by Duncan Brack and Michael Wolosin, analyses and gives an overview for how a number of 'global bads' associated with international trade have been addressed, drawing lessons from them to show ways to tackle deforestation driven by demand for agricultural commodities.



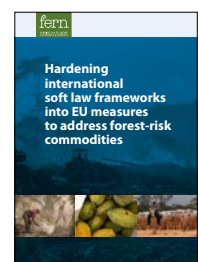
### **Speaking truth to power: the village women taking on the palm oil giant**

Award-winning Cameroonian journalist Madeleine Ngeunga and Fern's Indra Van Gisbergen visited villages in the shadow of two of Socapalm's oil palm plantations, to see if the problems driving a dispute between locals and the company are being resolved.



### **Hardening international soft law frameworks into EU measures to address forest-risk commodities**

proposed a raft of demand and supply-side measures to address the environmental impact of EU imports of food and non-food commodities.



## Film

### **We need an EU Action Plan on deforestation now!**





## Forests and Climate

**“I think that Fern played a fundamental role in getting the Commission to widen its perspective on how to tackle climate change”**

**Kelsey Perlman** Forest and Climate Campaigner



“Forests are now a huge battleground in the climate debate, because in 2018, policymakers accepted that – more than ever – they have to be at the heart of international climate strategies.

Throughout the year, we really tried to help shape this debate: by alerting people to the dangers of following the wrong policy paths, and by presenting a positive vision for forests.

The early part of our year was spent transitioning campaigns around the EU’s new Renewable Energy Directive (RED) for the period 2021 -2030, and its new Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Regulation as they are both now in the implementation stage.

We also did an investigation into forest destruction in Kuzbass in Siberia. This was a follow-up on our earlier work on forests and coal, and it revealed the deadly impact that coal mining is having on the indigenous Shor people and their forests, and how the EU is a huge market for coal from Kuzbass. Destroying forests for coal is obviously a double whammy in climate terms.

After that, we built towards big moments later in the year.

Central to the climate campaign is raising awareness about good and bad ways of using forests to pull emissions out of the atmosphere, so-called ‘negative emissions’. A ‘negative emissions’ technology which is touted as a “saviour” in some quarters is Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS). In September we published a briefing highlighting its dangers and uncertainties. It generated quite a bit of interest, including from Leonardo DiCaprio!

In October the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its report warning that we’ve only got 12 years to stop a climate catastrophe. In the same month, as part of the Climate Land Ambition and Rights Alliance (CLARA), we published what was effectively a ‘shadow’ IPCC report, pulling together a huge body of scientific evidence to show how we can achieve the Paris Agreement’s goal of keeping warming below 1.5°C by strengthening land tenure rights, reducing our consumption, protecting

and restoring natural ecosystems, and improving agricultural practices.

The report attracted international media coverage, as it was the first blueprint for how we can tackle the overlapping crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and land rights violations. We organised a launch event in Brussels in October, outlining what the report means for an EU audience.

At the end of November, the European Commission published its long-term climate strategy for how the EU can reach net zero emissions by 2050. It recognised the risks of scaling-up forest-based bioenergy, and underlined the crucial role that forests and land should play in fighting climate change.

I think that Fern played a really fundamental role in getting the Commission to widen its perspective of how to tackle climate change, and that will only grow with the attention now given to the biodiversity crisis. The Commission’s vision of a climate neutral society – though far from perfect – recognised the risks of BECCS and promoted restoring forests to fight climate change. This change in tone was the culmination of years of research, reports and events which hammered home the message that we need to reduce reliance on negative emissions technologies and promote forest protection and restoration.

What I love about my role is that it involves the translation of science to action, whether through laws or supporting communities. Between science and action there’s a tonne of differing opinions, some better than others. Frequently that opinion is concealed behind technical wording, which has to be disentangled. I see that disentangling as an important part of my work. In a way I see my job partly as being a bridge between policymakers, scientists and the public: trying to translate some very complicated terminology and concepts to the wider public as these are issues which will affect them for decades.”

**“We need to present a new, modern vision for forests that embraces the climate ambition that we have under the Paris Agreement, as well as forests’ other benefits, including providing jobs, enhancing our health and biodiversity protection”**



**Linde Zuidema** Forest and Climate Campaigner

“The evidence is now irrefutable that burning woody biomass for energy can harm forests and the climate. But if you take 2005 as a starting point, when the EU adopted the first biomass action plan, the odds of forcing a complete U-turn on such a new policy within a little over a decade were always slim – due to the insecurity that would entail for investors and the uncertainties about EU laws.

Fern saw a need to flag this as a problematic issue from the start. We researched the subject, and eventually built a campaign around it. With few other NGOs working on the issue in the EU, there was a real need for us! I think we’ve really helped increase understanding of the risks involved.

In 2018, though, the EU continued to cling to the policy. There were two key legislative moments in the year that we focused on by writing articles for the media; publishing reports and briefings; and organising meetings.

The first moment was in January, when MEPs voted on the new Renewable Energy Directive for 2021-2030, and chose to support a very weak sustainability framework for burning biomass. Then in June, after 18 months of negotiations, the EU formalised this decision.

It’s worrying that after 2020, EU Member States will continue to support bioenergy that will come from increased harvesting of forests for biomass, as well as the burning of whole trees and stumps. But that fact that the EU adopted a sustainability package on the use of woody biomass, and adopted restrictions for the use of woody biomass in inefficient power installations, were positive developments. Plus, the new policy allows Member States to adopt stricter requirements, something we can build on.

We would have liked to have seen much stricter requirements that would result in capping the use of forest biomass for energy. But while we didn’t get this, there was a significant shift, especially considering it is less than 10 years since this policy was introduced.

To mitigate climate change, we have to capture more carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in forests, while also capturing more carbon in wood products. The EU is today, however, (only) supporting direct burning of wood,

resulting in the immediate release of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. This is not a sustainable use of a limited resource which gives a home to the vast majority of the world’s terrestrial biodiversity.

We will have to live with the EU’s new renewable energy framework until 2030. But during this time we can build understanding of its impacts on the climate, as well as on forest and communities. We need to present a new, modern vision for forests that embraces the climate ambition that we have under the Paris Agreement, as well as forests’ other benefits, including providing jobs, enhancing our health and biodiversity protection.”

## Our publications

### **Implications of new research for the IPCC 1.5°C Special Report, with a focus on land use**

assembled the key findings from various papers that appeared in the second half of 2017 in relation to the climate and land sector use.



### **Covered in smoke: Why burning biomass threatens European health**

by Dr Mike Holland, showed how tens of thousands of EU citizens are dying prematurely every year as a result of exposure to air pollution from burning solid biomass, mainly wood, to provide heat and electricity.



**Six problems with BECCS** showed the massive environmental, social and economic costs of relying on Bioenergy with Carbon Capture (BECCS), and why policymakers planning decarbonisation pathways to 2050 should not opt for it.



**Slow Death in Siberia**, an investigation in the Kuzbass region of southern Siberia by Daria Andreeva and Anne Harris, revealed the devastating impact coal mining is having on the area’s indigenous Shor people and forests.





### **Missing Pathways to 1.5°C: the role of the land sector in ambitious climate action,**

published by the Climate Land Ambition and Rights Alliance (CLARA), which Fern is a member of, provided a ground-breaking scientific route out of our three overlapping crises: climate change, biodiversity loss and land and other rights abuses of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The report, which was released shortly after the IPCC's **Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C**, featured in coverage by Reuters, AFP, Bloomberg, the BBC and the Sydney Morning Herald.



### **Protect and Restore: How forests can help the EU tackle climate**

**change** set out a clear path to help the EU protect and restore land and forests, by increasing the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> its land and forests absorb from the atmosphere.



### **Film**

#### **Putting down roots: the forest communities fighting climate change**



Coal mine that replaced forests in Siberia. Photo: Slava Stepanov

## **“We’re starting to get some outside recognition for how we have been trying to step up our gender work”**

**Rudi Kohnert** Monitoring, Evaluation and Gender Expert



“As an organisation that thinks that social and environmental issues are intertwined, who believes in *people and forests*, I would have expected that gender would always have featured prominently in our work. Since we are all about the rights of people whose voices don’t get heard, our projects should automatically be addressing gender dimensions. But until two or three years ago, people didn’t always look for the link between campaigning on sometimes fairly technical EU policies, and the different impacts those policies could have on women and men.

The problem was that we didn’t have anything to say about what those differences were, because we hadn’t looked for the evidence! Generally I don’t like

to categorise people into boxes, but if you don’t have the data to know how different groups – and not just women – are affected by policies, then you can’t design interventions which address those differences. So a few years ago, a former Fern colleague organised some gender training for Fern staff, which led to a realisation that we needed to address the issue more seriously.

First, we established a small team, whose function was to promote gender in Fern, encouraging staff to take it into account in their strategies. Then we hired a consultant to review some of Fern’s partners to see if there were lessons we could learn from how they approach gender, and how Fern compared. The

consultant has continued to provide expertise and guidance and act as a sounding board for the gender team which has since more than tripled in size.

Currently we're working on three complimentary strands:

1. updating our organisation's internal policies and procedures to promote diversity and shun discrimination, including how we recruit, induct and appraise staff.
2. introducing gender awareness in our campaigning by prompting campaigners to take into account the social dimension of a particular policy or outcome that we're campaigning on.
3. using our communications to spotlight women as drivers of change, telling their stories and ensuring their voices are heard, and ensuring we have women on panels at our events.

We're starting to get some outside recognition for how we have been trying to step up our gender work including from the UK Department for International Development in relation to our forest governance work. This is encouraging and helps us keep up momentum. The next step will be to look at the social impact of our work beyond just gender."

## Our publications

**How do forest NGOs deal with gender in their work?** This study was funded by Fern to analyse the extent to which forest NGOs take gender into account and how they design their programmes to ensure women and men's different needs are taken into account.



## In memory of Fern's partner Priso Regis Christo: 1981-2018

On December 7, 2018, our campaigner Indra Van Gisbergen flew into Yaoundé, Cameroon's capital. She was there to work with Fern's local partner, the Centre for Environment and Development (CED), on our joint efforts to protect Cameroon's disappearing rainforests and strengthen the rights of those who live in them, specifically by formalising our 2019 workplan. A central figure in this plan was her friend and colleague, Priso Regis Christo.



Priso, who worked for CED for many years, was the coordinator of our CoNGOs Project, which promotes community forest management. He was meant to pick Indra up at the airport so they could start work together that night. But he never made it. His car was hit by a logging truck en route, and he died before reaching the hospital.

Priso was 37-years-old, and left a wife, Larissa, and three young children, Samuel aged five, Charles-Aurelian aged three and one-year-old Divine-Odetta. His death was the second that month on the road to the airport caused by the same logging company. And he was one of the more than 6,000 people – according to the [World Health Organisation](#) – who are killed on Cameroon's roads annually. As Indra wrote at the time: "There is a terrible irony that a man who worked to protect forests and people, was killed by a logging truck; that someone who worked to make Cameroon's forest sector accountable was killed by its recklessness."

For Indra – and many others who knew and loved him – Priso's death was a heart-breaking example of how Cameroon's poor governance and culture of impunity puts its population at risk. "Priso might not have died if logging companies were held accountable when they fail to respect the law. And the poor governance which

causes such a high death toll on Cameroon's roads, is mirrored in the way the country manages its natural resources, including its tropical forests," Indra said.

Priso was born in Douala and had a degree in hydrobiology and the environment. As well as his work for CED he worked for Lights for All, which encouraged the use of solar energy. He was a charming, positive and caring man with an infectious laugh, who dedicated years of his life to making the world a better place. In March last year, he was part of a delegation of campaigners from tropical forested countries who toured Brussels, Paris and Bonn, conveying the realities of illegal logging and poor forest governance to EU policymakers, and – since the EU is a major importer of timber from Cameroon – discussing how they could help root out these problems. A fitting legacy for Priso's life and work would be for EU policymakers to redouble their efforts to properly implement the VPA in Cameroon, and enforce the EU Timber Regulation – thereby improving the lives of currently dispossessed forest communities, and protecting one of the world's most important rainforests.



## Forests and Development Aid

**“It was significant that civil society in the Congo Basin was able to participate effectively in forest legal reforms in 2018.”**



**Marie-Ange Kalenga** Forest and Development Campaigner

“The overall picture in the Congo Basin is that local communities and forests are under acute threat. This is because the national governments want to become emerging countries ([market] economies), so they’re trying to attract investors with tax incentives and by giving them significant rights to exploit large areas of forested land. This is not just happening in the forest sector – the Congo Basin is becoming a new frontier for agribusiness, mining and large infrastructure projects like dams for electricity and energy.

But despite this worrying backdrop, local civil society is trying to have a stronger voice. In the Congo Basin countries, civil society’s participation in public debates has historically been very timid, and they have operated in a very restricted space. However the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the EU has paved the way for a multi-stakeholder approach to developing public policies.

That’s partly because of support from organisations like Fern and other NGOs working in the region, and also because the nature of the VPA requires that all stakeholders are at the table and have a say in negotiations.

It was significant that civil society was able to participate effectively in forest legal reforms in 2018 that were instigated by the VPAs. In the Republic of Congo (RoC), for example, civil society contributed to the draft Forest Code. They were able to include recommendations related to community forestry and the halting of the illegal conversion of forests.

Our partner OCDH (*Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l’Homme*) also had a big policy success in October

2018, when the government of the RoC adopted a regulation banning large agricultural projects in forested areas.

In the Central African Republic, thanks to the advocacy efforts of our local partners, CIEDD (*Centre pour l’Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable*) and GRDNE (*Platform Durable des Ressources Naturelles et de l’Environnement*), as well as ourselves, communities were able to participate directly in VPA meetings for the first time since the process was launched. This helped them feel empowered enough to protest abuses and rights violations by logging companies.

In March our partners visited the EU and where were able to have a constructive and open dialogue with EU decision makers.

And in France Fern and its local partners from African VPA countries and Vietnam were commended by policy-makers for our expertise on forest governance and for making an effort to have a dialogue with EU decision-makers, giving them first-hand information on the challenges on the ground, and the impact of EU policies on people and forests.

Another 2018 highlight was the event we initiated in November at the European Parliament on the new EU budget and what it means for forests and communities. We were able to provide information to the Parliament on the importance of the environment in the new EU development budget.

We also hosted an event with EU parliamentarians in Brussels in March – which was the first of its kind – highlighting the importance of forest governance in VPA countries’ in reducing their emissions as part of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Climate Agreement.

It’s really important that we continue informing the public and EU decision-makers about the impact of forest destruction and land grabbing on local communities; and that we convey the voices of marginalised communities to them. Not by being spokespersons, but by trying to improve people’s understanding of the challenges they’re facing. If we don’t do this work who else is going to?”



Cameroon children collecting waste in villages in the shadow of oil palm plantations. Photo: Indra Van Gisbergen

**“With the proper support and secure land rights, community forestry is better at providing income and food security than industrial logging. It’s also better at protecting forests for future generations.”**



**Indra Van Gisbergen** Forest and Development Campaigner

“We work with our partners in Cameroon to address illegal logging and illegal forest conversion and convince EU policy makers to prioritise these issues.

We try to build bridges between what our partners do and what we do, so that we have a common and complementary strategy that achieves the same goal: protecting forests and people.

Key EU Member States such as Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands import timber from

Cameroon, but it seems easy for them to close their eyes to what’s happening on the ground.

Corruption is a big hurdle. Another is that a lot of people who depend on forests are excluded from decision making.

But addressing these sensitive issues in a country where there’s political turmoil and limited democracy can be risky. For example, last year we worked with a person fighting for his land against encroaching palm

## A day in the life of Fern’s communications manager

### Richard Wainwright

One thing everyone knows about me is I absolutely love Fern. At our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary party two people said: ‘Fern seems like an amazing place to work. Is it really as good as it seems?’ And for me it certainly is.

Fern is very supportive of the ups and downs that all staff go through, and its flat structure has given me the freedom to try new things and change how Fern communicates.

Communication is integral to everything Fern does.

We’re not able to be collaborative unless we can communicate well: unless we can explain complicated issues in ways that encourage people to understand, care, and get involved. So in the last few years we’ve focussed on producing material that explains issues linked to forests, climate change and human rights in a way that most people could understand.

The beauty of working for Fern is that no day is the same.

I often come in to an extremely full [email] inbox. A typical day would involve Skyping or chatting with people about exciting new ideas that need to be turned into reality and proposing communications tools that might help – everything has to be tailored to its audience – and then, at the other end of the spectrum, I could be going through the final proof of

a beautiful new report, checking the images and the captions, and making sure that it’s convincing.

*“Fern is about opening the space for others to have their voices heard.”*

Even when I’m travelling, which is a lot, there’s a wide variety of activities: from working with filmmakers to produce videos, overseeing the building of our new website, or training up an intern.

The unexpected can rear its head at any time: when my colleague was in Russia investigating coal mining’s terrible impact on forests and local people, I got spammed by 5,000 emails in a day. We sourced the attack to Russia; hacking is something we’re facing a lot more of.

Eleven years ago [when I joined Fern] we had no Twitter, no Facebook, no social media at all. We had a relatively simple website and sent out our newsletter by post. We would print virtually everything.

Now we communicate in a very different way: much more film, more storytelling, more blogs, social media, humanising the issues, and putting the campaigners at the front of the work we do. Everybody is expected to be a communicator now.



oil companies – and he’s under serious threat. But by creating networks around him, and publishing reports about the situation – and others who are courageous enough to speak out – it at least provides some protection.

Illegal logging hasn’t stopped in Cameroon. There’s a lot of forest conversion, especially for agricultural use. Most of it is happening illegally. When you go there, you see hundreds of trucks on the road laden down with huge logs, and ask yourself, how is that possible?

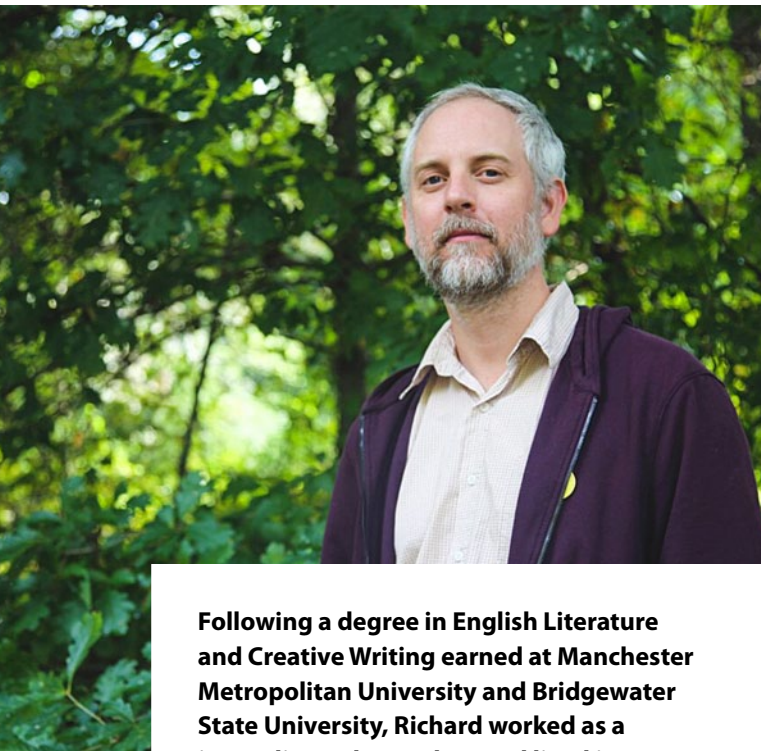
The Voluntary Partnership Agreement moved at a snail’s pace for a few years, but in 2018 there were efforts by donors and also the Cameroonian government to get it back on track.

On the positive side, there’s a new draft of the Forest Code, and in some key areas it reflects what civil

society wants: including a better recognition of customary rights and support for community forestry.

Cameroon was the first country in Central Africa to promote community forestry and adopt a legal framework. Although the practice of Community Forestry on the ground is far from perfect, it enables local communities to directly benefit from forest management, and is a way to help fulfil the aims of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. Lessons learned in Cameroon are inspiring others to move towards viable alternative models contributing to sustainable community livelihoods and the empowerment of women in Cameroon as well as elsewhere in Africa.

With the proper support and secure land rights, community forestry is better at providing income and



**Following a degree in English Literature and Creative Writing earned at Manchester Metropolitan University and Bridgewater State University, Richard worked as a journalist and a teacher, and lived in Japan and Australia. After returning to the UK he lived on a boat and worked at Oxfam, before joining Fern in 2007. He lives with his wife and two daughters in Birmingham, where he retains one of the world’s leading beer bottle top collections.**

Fern is about opening the space for others to have their voices heard.

I think our publications really show what we mean by this. For instance last year, instead of sending people

out to gather stories, we used local journalists to do it – to raise the voices of our partners and communicate about the amazing work they do, and why forest ownership and management is so important to the lives of ordinary people.

2018 has been a great year for the communications team because we’ve had PJ [Pierre-Jean Brasier] join us as Fern’s Strategic Communications Adviser. This has allowed us to increase the languages we work in, improve dissemination, and try new communications tools such as petitions.

Our role is to support the vital and inspiring work of our campaigners, by asking them the sort of questions ordinary people have about our work. Experts often can’t communicate to non-experts, so my role is to never quite understand: the moment I become an expert I’ve failed!

I couldn’t do this job if I wasn’t so involved in the campaigns.

These are issues I really care about: trying to help people understand how forest peoples’ rights lead to strong diverse forests. And how strong diverse forests clean our air, stop climate change and house animals.

I feel like I’m working for an organisation that is enormously beneficial for the environment and for people. And that ending the things we campaign against – such as the over-consumption of meat and soya and palm oil – has no downside. It will help our economies, our health, animals AND the environment. It really is a wonderful place to work.



food security than industrial logging. It's also better at protecting forests for future generations.

We need the support of Cameroonian policymakers as well as donors to make this happen.

Our big challenges in Cameroon are developing a common vision among the many NGOs working on community forestry, and for communities to resist the loggers who are approaching them every day and trying to sabotage the NGOs efforts.

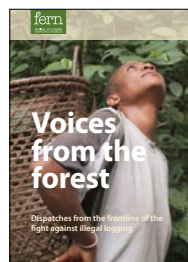
Along with our partner CED, we're supporting communities to develop simple management plans for their forests which respond to their needs, so that they can survive without relying on loggers, but instead by producing, commercialising and transforming non-timber forest products, such as honey, oils and fruits.

Communities want to keep their forests standing, but they also want to profit from them, and they can do this by selling their products, but of course, they then need a market. Even though our focus is on ensuring better policies, we are already seeing benefits in the villages we visit, such as the demand for the honey villagers are producing rising sharply.

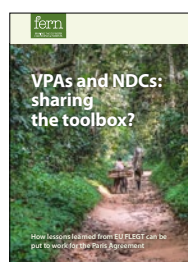
Seeing people benefit from their natural resources like this, and the way in which they are improving their livelihoods, is inspiring."

## Our publications

**Voices from the Forest** featured frontline reportage from forest communities in countries which had signed VPAs with the EU. The pieces – written by local journalists – showed that putting local people in the driving seat of the policies that affect them, is key to keeping forests standing. The articles were picked up by various media outlets including Reuters, Mongabay, AllAfrica.com and national press in Liberia, Indonesia and the Congo basin.

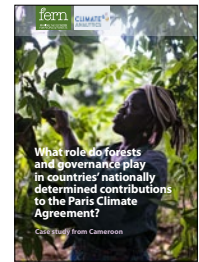


**VPAs and NDCs: sharing the toolbox? How lesson learned from EU FLEGT can be put to work for the Paris Agreement** is a collaborative report produced by Fern and its local partners in five African countries. It analyses the role of forest governance in the NDCs of the five African countries who have entered into VPAs, and examined opportunities and challenges for building stronger linkages between forest governance and climate policies.



## What role do forests and governance play in countries' Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Climate Agreement?

This study analyses the correlation between forest governance and deforestation and aims to improve national understanding of the challenges involved in land-use governance.



**The Long Road to timber legality: taking stock of the EU-Vietnam VPA timber trade deal** analysed the timber trade deal signed by the EU and Vietnam in October 2018, concluding that despite issues which need addressing, stopping the deal would shut down the opportunity for reform, and that reforms will only work if civil society maintain scrutiny and vigilance during the implementation process.



**Learning lessons from FLEGT-VPA to promote governance reform in Ghana's cocoa sector.** In this briefing note, Fern, Tropenbos International, Tropenbos Ghana, EcoCare Ghana, and Forest Watch Ghana seek to provoke a conversation around how producer and consumer countries, as well as the EU, could use legally-binding schemes to tackle these governance issues.



## Films

### Improving lives with fair forest management



### From the forest to the EU



### Community Forests in Cameroon



### Community forests in the Congo Basin





## Forests and Trade

**“Trade is arguably the EU’s *raison d’être*. So if we change it, we can change a lot of things for the better.”**



**Perrine Fournier** Forests and Trade Campaigner

“The EU is the world’s largest trading bloc. As some nations embrace isolationism and protectionism, the EU’s going the other way: signing and negotiating a growing number of Free Trade Agreements, including the world’s largest bilateral trade deal with Japan in 2018, and edging closer to finalising a huge agreement with the Mercosur countries [Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay].

Trade is arguably the EU’s *raison d’être*. So if we change it, we can change a lot of things for the better. We believe that these free trade deals can be used as a lever to tackle the deforestation which is linked to imports of forest-risk commodities into the EU market, and we’re challenging a number of aspects of the way we do trade.

The first is the process: there’s a lack of transparency around negotiations, and a lack of participation from key groups, particularly local NGOs in timber-trading countries.

The second is addressing the EU’s trade objectives. Rather than being driven solely by economic growth, gaining market access, and securing investors’ rights – these deals should help achieve sustainable

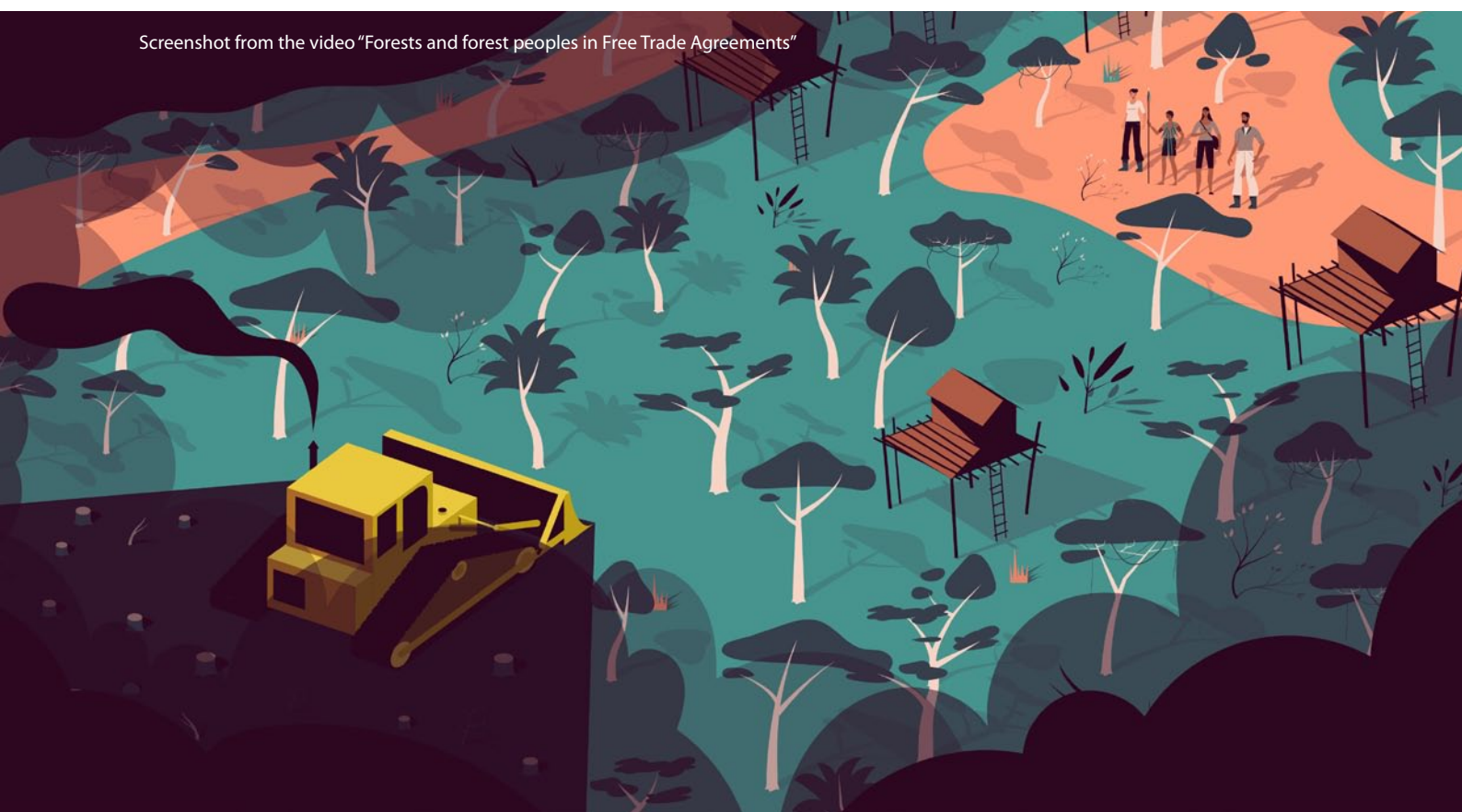
development. This isn’t just desirable, but absolutely necessary in a world facing climate change and ecological collapse.

One reason for launching our trade campaign was we saw an opening when the European Commission released the “trade for all” strategy, which made a commitment to cleaning the EU’s supply chains from environmental harm and human rights abuses. We also felt that Fern could share a lot from our experience of working on FLEGT – because it uses trade as an incentive to tackle those problems. As with the VPA process, we’re working to open space for civil society in the producer countries that the EU is negotiating trade agreements with. The campaign has only been going about a year.

We produced a trade report laying out the evidence of links between trade and deforestation, showing how the free trade deals the EU’s currently negotiating risk undermining its environmental and human rights commitments – and proposing ways to stop this.

I think we’ve come to be seen as a thought leader because we’re the first NGO to approach forests from this free trade angle.

Screenshot from the video “Forests and forest peoples in Free Trade Agreements”



In October 2018 France published its new national strategy to end deforestation caused by its imports of palm oil, soy, beef, cocoa and wood – which is the first EU Member State document that has wording on trade and forests, and which reflects our views. So it's clear to say that there are policymakers who want to change how their countries do trade in relation to the environment and forests in particular.

Now people know we are working on this and they come to us, which was not the case two years ago. For instance, following the election of Bolsonaro in Brazil, lots of NGOs and journalists reached out to us to try to use the EU-Mercosur deal as a lever to put pressure on the EU and Brazil to protect forests and indigenous people there.

The European Commission Directorate General for Trade has also acknowledged that the current provisions to tackle these issues are too weak, especially regarding the Indonesia and Mercosur deals: that there aren't enough environmental safeguards, and that they are not inclusive enough of civil society. While companies and investors can defend their rights, there's no way for victims of trade related human rights abuses and environmental disasters to have recourse to justice.

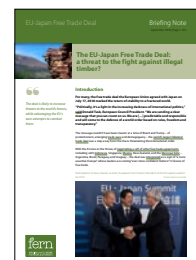
So this campaign is transformative; it's a long process and it's also ambitious but you have the feeling that you are working to change our economic model for the better, whereby trade would become a means – rather than an goal – to achieve social and environmental justice."

## Our publications

**Forests and forest people in EU Free Trade Agreements**, written by Saskia Ozinga and Perrine Fournier, called for policy coherence between the EU's trade policy and its commitments on forests, climate change and human rights. Drawing on a wealth of evidence it showed how the Free Trade Agreements the EU is currently negotiating with Indonesia, the Mercosur bloc of nations and others, could fatally undermine the EU's environmental and human rights' commitments.



**The EU-Japan Free Trade Deal: a threat to the fight against illegal timber?** highlighted the dangers of the EU's new trade agreement with Japan, and how it could sabotage the EU's fight against illegal timber.



**From CETA to JEEPA – the variations in the 'trade and sustainable development' provisions in EU Free Trade**

**Agreements** underlines that a new approach is needed for the Trade and Sustainable Development chapters in EU Free Trade Agreements.



## Film

**Forests & Peoples in FTAs**



## 2018: number crunching

**20** – number of blogs published by our campaigners and partners

**30** – number of reports and briefing notes published by Fern

**216** – number of times Fern appeared in the media (including BBC News, Le Monde, The New York Times, The Guardian, Sydney Morning Herald, El Pais, Reuters, Politico and Climate Home)

**20,000** – number of impressions for our tweet commenting on the European Commission's announcement of an action plan on deforestation

**36k** – number of times our partner Sônia Guajajara's interview with The Guardian (facilitated by Fern) was shared

**211,000** – number of people signing the Fern-initiated Petition calling for an EU Action Plan to halt deforestation



# Fern's finances

(January - December 2018) – all figures are in Euros

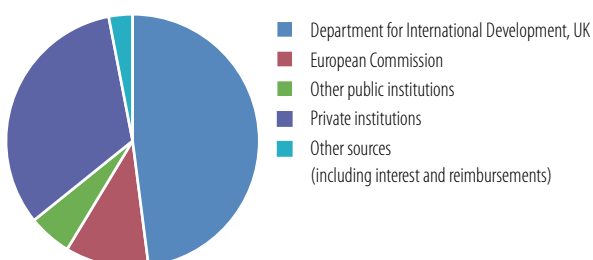
## INCOME

|   | 2018             | 2017             |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| Department for International Development, UK          | 1,228,694        | 1,424,254        |
| European Commission                                   | 273,598          | 822,994          |
| Other public institutions                             | 142,432          | 146,620          |
| Private institutions                                  | 838,692          | 781,160          |
| Other sources (including interest and reimbursements) | 77,809           | 42,071           |
| <b>Total income</b>                                   | <b>2,561,225</b> | <b>3,217,099</b> |

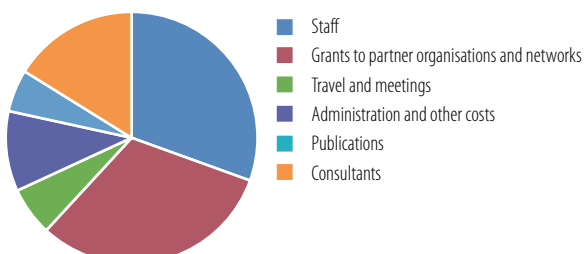
## EXPENDITURE

|  | 2018             | 2017             |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| Staff  | 1,102,971        | 952,405          |
| Grants to partner organisations and networks | 467,880          | 978,414          |
| Travel and meetings                          | 249,913          | 195,402          |
| Administration and other costs               | 120,197          | 321,501          |
| Publications                                 | 112,277          | 169,423          |
| Consultants                                  | 394,230          | 504,288          |
| <b>Total expenditure</b>                     | <b>2,447,469</b> | <b>3,121,433</b> |

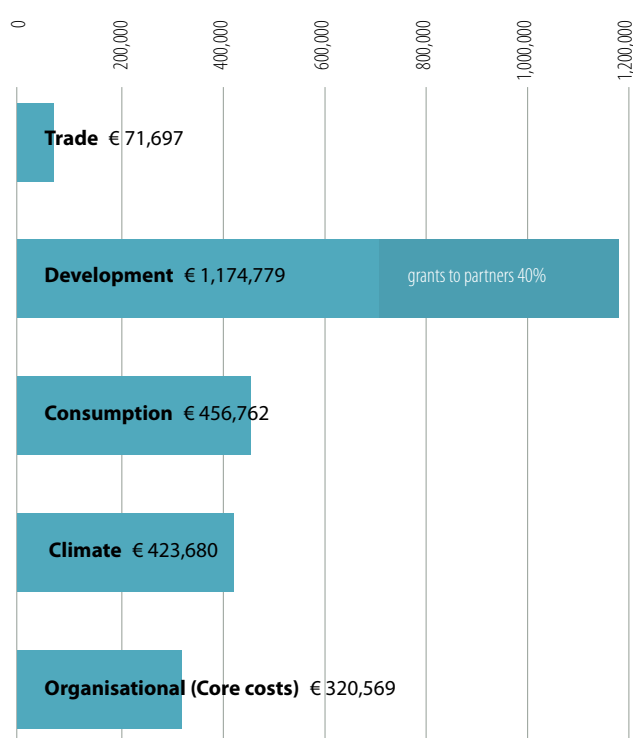
### Source of income



### Expenditure by category



### Expenditure by campaign



To see a complete version of Fern's audited accounts, please visit: [www.fern.org/about-us/audited-finances](http://www.fern.org/about-us/audited-finances)

Fern would like to thank all our funders and partners without whom none of this work would have been possible.

- Delegation of the European Commission in Laos
- Delegation of the European Commission in Liberia
- Delegation of the European Commission in Vietnam
- Department for International Development, United Kingdom
- LIFE+, European Commission
- Ford Foundation, United States of America
- Waterloo Foundation, United Kingdom
- David & Lucille Packard Foundation, United States of America
- European Climate Foundation, Belgium
- James Goldsmith Foundation, United Kingdom
- Climate and Land Use Alliance, United States of America
- United Kingdom Non Governmental Organisation Coalition



## Fern France office

**Fern United Kingdom office**

Twitter: [https://twitter.com/FERN\\_NGO](https://twitter.com/FERN_NGO)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Fern.NGO>

Internet: [www.fern.org](http://www.fern.org)

E-mail: [info@fern.org](mailto:info@fern.org)



**Exhibition of video, acoustic and photographic art**  
presented by Fern

**22 January 2018**  
**18:30 - 20:30**

**In the European Parliament  
Room: JAN 3 Q**

Art show will be followed by introductory remarks by MEP Maria Noireth (EAD), European Parliament Vice President Heidi Hautala (Green)

in the presence of the writer and anthropologist

Three artists offer unique, moving perspectives on the beauty of the Amazon.

**Roberta Carvalho**  
parent is converting the Brazilian Amazon's white-powder  
Brazilian coffee production.

**Barbara Santos**  
sheep and mountain arid have been working with the P  
Pland indigenous community in the Colombian Amazon to

**Daniel Salted**  
 globally recognized nature photographer and wildlife

Biography of the Year 2015

Registration is mandatory. For further information:  
<http://amazon-connection.eventbrite.com/>

Fern organised an exhibition in the European Parliament. Artists from Brazil and Colombia visualised the impact of forest destruction.  
Cover photo by artist Roberta Cavalho