

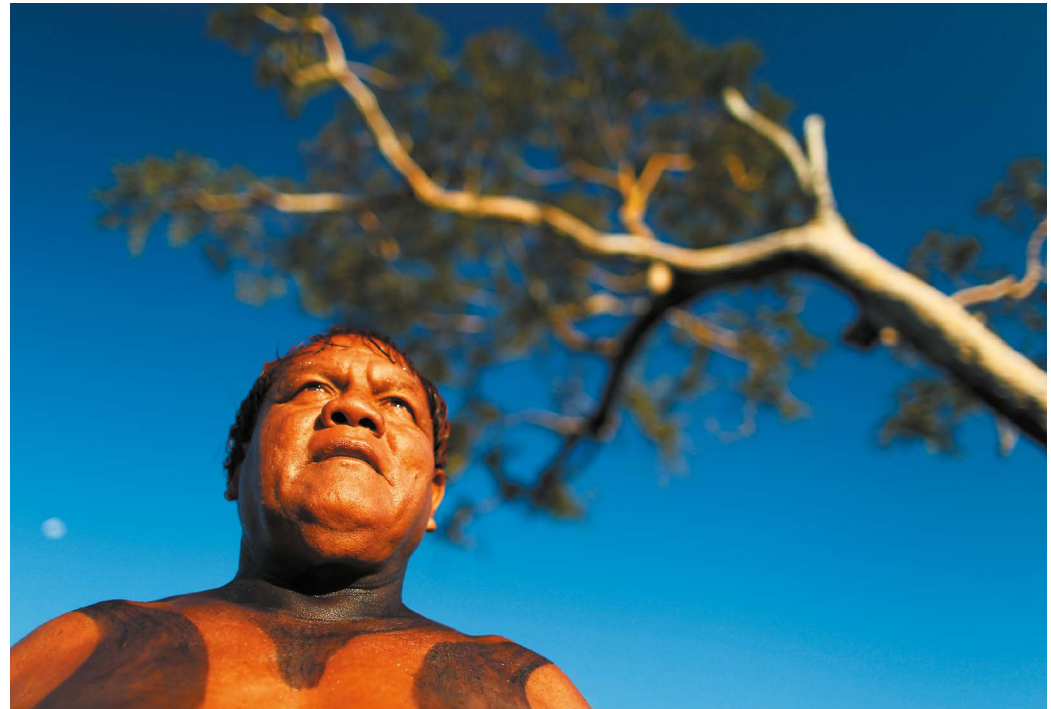
Correspondence

Green investments need global standards and independent scientific review

Total assets in 'sustainable investing' have more than doubled from US\$13.3 trillion to \$30.7 trillion since 2012. But the risks of greenwashing – and competence washing – are growing (go.nature.com/3gpqdb). There are no global standards, definitions or regulations regarding environmental, social and governance (ESG) investment factors. And few people with natural-sciences expertise are involved in the sustainable-finance sector. Therefore, Independent scientific review is needed.

High-level financial-sector stakeholders have set up numerous bodies to develop industry guidelines for green financial products, including ESG-aligned bonds, funds and indexes. In theory, such products should exclude projects and activities that involve, for example, carbon-intensive fossil fuels (E), human- or labour-rights violations (S) or instances involving management corruption controversies (G; see go.nature.com/31fj3kq).

However, rating agencies, independent verifiers, auditors and data aggregators have been creating their own proprietary ways to measure, evaluate and report on the impacts of ESG investments (S. Kotsantonis and G. Serafeim *J. Appl. Corp. Finance* **31**, 50–58 (2019); K. Schumacher *et al. J. Sustain. Financ. Invest.* **10**, 213–246; 2020). These methodologies are often inconsistent and lack transparency, which impedes the objective assessment of their quality (see go.nature.com/3kymddz).



UESLEI MARCELINO/REUTERS

Chief Aritana Yawalapiti, one of Brazil's most influential Indigenous leaders, died this month of COVID-19.

They are designed and used mostly by people with financial, business, management and accounting experience, who frequently possess little expertise in areas such as greenhouse-gas emissions, biodiversity, hydrology, atmospheric science or marine biology.

This is a concern. Non-financial performance metrics and data are crucial for evaluating society's achievement of the 2015 Paris climate agreement and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, I advocate the introduction of a new benchmarking mechanism for sustainable finance, akin to peer review in academic-journal publishing or public research funding.

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Bolsonaro has driven Brazil's Indigenous peoples to the brink

Even before their existence was imperilled by COVID-19, Brazil's Indigenous peoples had faced such hostility from President Jair Bolsonaro that two human-rights organizations had reported him to the International Criminal Court for incitement to genocide.

Since taking office, Bolsonaro has drained power from the National Indian Foundation; sacked inspectors of the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources; and eroded both the Unified Health System and the National Policy for Attention to the Health of Indigenous Peoples.

As a result, illegal mining and logging have brought COVID-19 to Indigenous peoples of the Amazon rainforest who were meant to be protected. Thousands have caught the disease and hundreds have died, across communities often comprising only a few hundred people.

Indigenous movements, opposition parties and civil-society organizations have been trying to stem the terrible tide. For example, the supreme court upheld an emergency support plan for Indigenous peoples that Bolsonaro had several times attempted to veto. But his undermining of the safety of the forest and its inhabitants has created a momentum that many fear might be unstoppable.

That the pandemic threatens Brazil's Indigenous peoples is the cruellest of ironies. They, like others worldwide, have been ecosystems' strongest line of defence against human destruction – which is accelerating climate change and raising the likelihood of animal diseases such as COVID-19 crossing into people.

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