In this presentation we set out the preliminary findings of a systematic search of the scholarly literature highlighting allegations of abuses of the rights of indigenous peoples in the context of the readiness and implementation of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+). Our review reveals a series of situations in the REDD+ frontier (the national and local contexts in which REDD+ is being rolled out) in which the rights of indigenous peoples have been transgressed, based on international rights conventions. Although the most common allegations of rights abuses in the context of REDD+ national readiness and/or subnational implementation were related to self-determination, there were also a few cases of open violence against indigenous groups by government and private forces.

Based on our results, we propose two main preliminary conclusions. Firstly, although all the allegations of rights abuses in the literature may not have been caused by REDD+, there is still a need for greater awareness that the REDD+ frontier overlaps contexts of abuses, displacement, and dispossession, as well as of repression and assassination of environmental activists. REDD+ has often proven ill-prepared to navigate these tensions. And secondly, although REDD+ may be an innovative global solution for a global problem, it must still be implemented locally. We found a lack of attention to the different political, economic, environmental, and social issues at play in the national and local contexts of REDD+, which reveals a need for a more reflective engagement with this contextual specificity. We argue that this emphasizes that whether or not a rights-based REDD+ is applied depends not on how it has been conceived at the level of the UNFCCC or project coordinators, but on the regulatory framework of the state and the level of organization of indigenous peoples in the varied contexts in which it is being readied and implemented.

Our ongoing review is intended as a follow-up to early warnings that REDD+ might violate indigenous rights, to provide input into ongoing related discussions in scholarly and practised-based circles.