

We would like to take this opportunity to raise an important issue with the European Commission regarding the use of negative language in this Action Plan. It is crucial to consider how the language one uses on a formal and informal level may fit into wider structures reinforcing negative or discriminatory attitudes, emotions and actions. The use of the term “brown finance” or “brown taxonomy” carries such a weight.

As outlined [by Rev. Lennox Yearwood](#): “brown is not just another colour like green. It is a colour associated with people, and in particular people of colour.” Match this with the connotation that brown finance is negative, dirty or bad, while white is clean, one can spot “significant racial undertones”.

As the European Commission draws up ambitious plans for a recovery from COVID-19, it has acknowledged that people – their well-being, health and resilience – must be at the centre. So too must environmental degradation be addressed, not least because of the known protection biodiversity gives us against zoonotic diseases.

It is well documented that climate breakdown, along with COVID-19, hits marginalised communities of colour the hardest – but that they also play a leading role in protecting valuable ecosystems. Research shows that indigenous-managed lands have lower deforestation rates and better biodiversity outcomes, than conservation zones that exclude or dispossess indigenous peoples.

Yet insecure land tenure, irresponsible business practices and policies that prioritise extractive economies at the cost of human rights are putting these people, and their land, at risk. Often implicit in these approaches is the expectation the poorest, most oppressed groups in our community must sacrifice for a vaguely articulated “greater good”. Continuing to legitimise language that oppressed communities of colour, and frames them as lesser or more dirty is inappropriate, especially at a time where expectations on tackling institutionalised racism are rapidly shifting.

At this time of heightened attention on global structures of racial injustice, the European Commission has the opportunity to show leadership, stop using this terminology and find alternatives before more damaging norms are created. The use of the term “brown finance” or “brown taxonomy” and its inclusion in this public consultation risks the mainstreaming of these terms in ongoing and future discussions on the Action Plan. Therefore, The Commission should accurately reflect the aims of this Action Plan and if an economic activity or financial investment is deemed to be “unsustainable”, then this widely understood and accurate term should be used consistently and publicly instead.