

# SECURE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND COMMUNITY LAND RIGHTS AS A NATURE-BASED SOLUTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

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## **I. RATIONALE**

Insecure, contested, and unjust land and forest tenure undermines international efforts to protect, sustainably manage, and restore ecosystems essential to the realization of climate and sustainable development goals. [Research](#) shows that lands managed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities with secure rights experience lower rates of deforestation, store more carbon, hold more biodiversity, and benefit more people than lands managed by either public or private entities.

## **II. OVERVIEW OF THE CONTRIBUTION**

Indigenous Peoples and local communities—2.5 billion people—customarily manage over 50% of the global land mass, but legally own just [10%](#), rendering them and their lands vulnerable to the economic pressures that drive land use and land cover changes worldwide. Scaling-up efforts to close this gap and secure community land rights represents the world’s single greatest opportunity to simultaneously increase carbon stores, restore degraded land, reduce emissions, improve food security, diminish the likelihood of conflict, and enhance ecosystem resilience on the basis of equity, and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.

## **III. HOW THE CONTRIBUTION LEVERAGES NATURAL SOLUTIONS TO AVERT CLIMATE CHANGE**

Clear and secure tenure rights are essential for the sustainable management and effective conservation of tropical forests and other carbon-rich ecosystems (peatlands, grasslands, and coastal wetlands). They underpin the ability of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to exercise self-governance, adapt to their changing environment, and steward the ecosystems they depend on by incentivizing maintenance and restoration, and by mediating the risk of conflict and illegal appropriation by others.

Growing recognition of the importance of secure rights by state and non-state actors make efforts to secure community tenure rights a replicable, scalable, and measurable natural climate solution. Gains in the recognition of community-based forest tenure across Africa, Asia and Latin America increased by 40% (or at least 152 mha) between 2002 and 2017. By implementing existing legislation in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, and Indonesia, the world could double the gains made in the past 15 years and benefit at least 200 million people. Much more could be achieved if other countries followed their lead.

Current estimates show that communities steward [at least 22% of the forest carbon found in tropical and subtropical countries](#). A third of this carbon lies in forestlands where Indigenous Peoples and local communities lack legal recognition of their tenure rights, leaving communities, their lands, and the carbon stored therein at risk. Given that the world’s remaining natural lands and forests are home to millions of rural peoples who rely on collective tenure arrangements to support their livelihoods, actual community contributions to the sustainable use and conservation of critical ecosystems are known to be far greater than what can be assessed through available data. Significant progress toward more effective, equitable, and sustainable climate actions could be achieved if current levels of support were increased to match existing demand, capacity, and opportunities.

## **IV. SUPPORT OF CLIMATE AND OTHER BENEFITS**

Secure community land rights are vital to meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, global biodiversity and conservation targets, and the Bonn Challenge and associated restoration efforts. Indigenous and community statutory rights [directly contribute to](#):

- [Lower rates of deforestation and higher counts of carbon](#) than lands managed by other entities.
- Annual contributions to [local conservation efforts](#) of approximately US\$1.71 billion, safeguarding biodiversity at a fraction of the costs of government protected areas.
- The [livelihoods of nearly a third of the world's poorest](#), generating over 80% of the food consumed in the developing world while creating essential economic opportunities above and beyond traditional large-scale investment schemes.
- Reduced risks of [conflict, violence](#), and landgrabs, as well as [reduced operating costs of companies and investors](#).
- Ecosystem services [worth billions in long term benefits](#) (from approximately \$54.1 billion in Bolivia to \$1.2 trillion in Brazil), while avoiding the annual release of at least 42.8–59.7Mt CO<sub>2</sub> from deforestation at a cost of less than 1% of the total benefits.
- Achievement of SDG 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, and 16; Aichi targets 4, 5, 7, 14 and 18; ILO 169. UNDRIP, the UN's Voluntary Guidelines for the Governance of Tenure, and the NY Declaration on Forests among others.

## V. INVOLVEMENT OF COUNTRIES AND GOVERNMENTS

At least 54 countries out of 58 studied currently have community-based tenure regimes recognizing communities as forest owners, and others are making progress in developing requisite regulatory frameworks and reform policies. The need to secure collective tenure rights in the context of emission reduction efforts is now acknowledged by nearly all participating REDD+ countries.

## VI. STAKEHOLDER VOICE

Indigenous Peoples, communities, and their organizations and networks are at the forefront of local, national, and global efforts to obtain legal recognition for their land and resource rights. In addition to sitting on the boards of dedicated institutions, coalitions, and funding mechanisms, they are leading efforts to engage public and private sector actors at all levels; document their land; develop enabling policies and regulations; and accelerate progress towards the realization of national and international climate and development commitments. Similarly, companies and investors are realizing that clarifying community rights substantially reduces their exposure to tenure risks and associated conflicts, making them critical allies of essential land reforms.

## VII. WHERE THE CONTRIBUTION CAN BE APPLIED

Securing collective tenure rights involves a continuum of action, applicable to nearly any country and/or context. Opportunities for high impact transformations center on countries with adequate legal frameworks; demonstrated political will and/or capacity to implement collective rights; and an informed/capable network of civil society and indigenous organizations with relationships to government institutions, policymakers, and key allies.

Over 30 countries currently present investment opportunities for securing land rights, including many critical countries with high rates of deforestation, such as the DRC, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Nepal,

Indonesia, Guyana, Cameroon, and Burkina Faso. Building on the enabling conditions established by RRI Coalition members, the Tenure Facility alone has successful projects underway in Cameroon, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Liberia, Mali, and Panama and in just two years has advanced tenure security for over 6.2 million hectares of forest area. These achievements can be scaled-up with additional investment.

#### **VIII. HOW THE CONTRIBUTION WILL BE DELIVERED, TRANSFORMATIONAL IMPACT**

To secure the transformative impacts needed to achieve global climate, biodiversity, and sustainable development goals by 2030, Indigenous Peoples and local communities call on the world to secure their rights to at least 50% of total LMIC lands in Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the next decade.

Experience to date (e.g., DGM, FIP, ILFTF, USAID, GCFTF) demonstrates that efforts to secure collective rights are more effective, efficient, and equitable when directed and delivered from the bottom-up.

Evidence shows that the actors and organizations who seek legal recognition are the most creative, frugal, mindful, and thoughtful interlocutors for advancing community tenure rights in the context of existing climate and development goals.

#### **IX. INTERSECTION WITH OTHER CLIMATE ACTION SUMMIT WORKSTREAMS**

Securing the land rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities directly addresses resilience and adaptation, mitigation strategies, youth engagement and public mobilization, and social and political drivers.

#### **X. EXPERIENCE TO DATE, BUILDING OFF OF PAST INITIATIVES**

The proposed contribution is driven by the vision, advocacy, and on-the-ground operational programs of indigenous and community organizations themselves, including AIPP, AMAN, AMPB, COICA, REFACOF, and others. Further, it leverages an increasingly connected platform of instruments instigated by RRI and dedicated to the advancement of indigenous and local community tenure rights ([Interlaken Group](#), [LandMark](#), [Land Rights Now](#), [MegaFlorestais](#), and the [Tenure Facility](#)). Led by a growing coalition of actors and organizations; guided by indigenous and community leaders; and with active involvement from governments, development institutions, companies, and private investors—efforts to scale up collective tenure rights builds on the joint experiences of a well-defined and cohesive community of practice that together has:

- Mobilized support for rights recognition in Panama, Peru, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, China, Liberia, DR Congo, Mali, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Senegal;
- Established a safe space for companies, investors, and rights-based organizations to discuss tenure related challenges and opportunities;
- Created a network of public forest agency leaders to support peer-to-peer learning on common forest governance challenges;
- Spearheaded the development of a global campaign platform to amplify tenure-related advocacy efforts; and
- Advanced tenure security for over 6.5 million hectares of land in two years.

#### **XI. MECHANISMS OF FUNDING**

Securing community land rights is a strategic driver of the change funders seek in gender, climate, poverty, and human rights. A new fundraising strategy designed to better convey the pivotal role of community rights to these audiences is being deployed. In addition, the Tenure Facility was designed to demonstrate

the possibility of immediate results when funding is provided directly to rights-holders and their allies, and also begin to scale-up recognition to the national level, in collaboration with the World Bank and other major donors.

## **XII. MEANS OF STEWARDSHIP AND MONITORING**

RRI houses the world's only longitudinal databases to track worldwide ownership of lands and forests from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. With regular updates every 4 to 5 years, the databases provide an essential baseline from which to measure and report on actual progress. Stewardship of the initiative would be secured through a joint governance platform comprised of indigenous representatives, donor institutions, public agency leaders, and contributing civil society organizations.

## **XIII. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

The communications strategy centers on the ability to speak directly to audiences on the issues they care about most related to secure tenure rights (for example, communication to companies and investors speak to the alleviation of tenure-related risk via best practices) and the interconnectivity of involved institutions. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples credits the almost immediate mobilization and targeted action of the vast coalition with the removal of her name from the "terrorist" list put forth by the Philippines government in 2018.

## **XIV. CONTACT DETAILS OF PROPONENTS**

RRI is a Coalition of 200+ organizations from around the world working to secure Indigenous Peoples and local community land rights, including:

### **Partners:**

- Centre for Environment and Development - <http://www.cedcameroun.org/>
- Center for International Forestry Research - <https://www.cifor.org/>
- Civic Response – <https://civicresponsegh.org>
- Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal – <https://fecofun.org.np>
- Forest Peoples Programme - <https://www.forestpeoples.org>
- Forest Trends - <https://www.forest-trends.org/>
- Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation - <https://www.helvetasusa.org/en>
- International Forestry Resources and Institutions - <http://www.ifriresearch.net/>
- Instituto Socioambiental - <https://www.socioambiental.org/en>
- Landesa - <https://www.landesa.org/>
- Regional Research Program on Environment and Development (Fundación PRISMA) - <https://prisma.org.sv/>
- The Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC) - <https://www.recoftc.org/>
- The Samdhana Institute - <http://www.samdhana.org/>
- Tebtebba – Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education - <http://www.tebtebba.org/>
- World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) - <http://worldagroforestry.org/>

### **Affiliated Networks:**

- Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact - <https://aippnet.org/>

- Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN) - <http://www.aman.or.id/>
- Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (AMPB) - <http://www.alianzamesoamericana.org/>
- Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin (COICA) - <http://coica.org.ec/>
- The International Association for the Study of the Commons - <https://iasc-commons.org/>
- International Family Forestry Alliance - <http://www.familyforestry.net/>
- The African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests (REFACOF)