



# TESTED, COST-EFFECTIVE AND PRACTICAL

SECURING THE LAND RIGHTS  
OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND  
LOCAL COMMUNITIES IS A KEY  
SOLUTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE



**RAPID CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE THREAT IT POSES TO LIFE ON EARTH IS AMONG THE FOREMOST CHALLENGES OF OUR TIMES. GOVERNMENTS, MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS, AND CORPORATE ACTORS HAVE A TESTED, COST-EFFECTIVE, AND PRACTICAL SOLUTION TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE AT THEIR FINGERTIPS: POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT SECURE THE LAND RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES.**



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- » **GOVERNMENTS** should include actions for securing indigenous and community land rights in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to reduce carbon emissions under the Paris Agreement on climate change.
- » **FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND CORPORATIONS** should include actions for securing indigenous and community land rights in their climate, environmental, and social policies, and comply with them across their operations.
- » **GLOBAL BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL CLIMATE FINANCE INITIATIVES** like the Green Climate Fund should ensure protection of land rights, expand funding streams for tenure reform, provide direct access to Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and recognise their rights in safeguards.

Photo: ©ILC/Jason Taylor, Nicaragua

Securing indigenous and community land rights not only improves the lives of community members by fighting poverty and protecting cultures,<sup>1</sup> but also plays a fundamental role in mitigating climate change and helping communities adapt and be resilient to its adverse impacts. At a time when temperatures are rising and humanity is over consuming natural resources,<sup>2</sup> respecting these rights helps ensure the stability of our planet, and to avoid disastrous impacts for peace, economic growth, biodiversity protection, and human mobility.

## THE INTERTWINED CRISES OF CLIMATE AND LAND TENURE

Up to 2.5 billion people globally depend on collectively managed indigenous and community lands, which make up over 50 percent of the land on our planet. These lands have been used, managed, and conserved for generations by Indigenous Peoples and local communities—small farmers, pastoralists, forest-dependent people, fisherfolk— yet governments formally recognise ownership to just one-fifth of these lands.<sup>3</sup>

This leaves 40 percent of our planet's land surface vulnerable to commercial pressures<sup>4</sup> and environmental destruction. Estimates say that since 2000, up to half of the documented cases of major land deals have involved land claimed by communities and Indigenous Peoples, and have largely happened without the consent of affected communities.<sup>5</sup> Research also suggests that more than 93 percent of the territories allocated for commercial use are inhabited.<sup>6</sup>

How we address the land tenure crisis has important implications for our ability to tackle the current climate crisis!

- 1 Oxfam, International Land Coalition, and Rights and Resources Initiative. 2016. Common Ground. Securing Land Rights and Safeguarding the Earth. Oxford: Oxfam. Available at <http://www.landrightsnow.org/en/common-ground/>.
- 2 Stockholm Resilience Centre. Undated. The Nine Planetary Boundaries. Available at <http://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/planetary-boundaries/about-the-research/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>.
- 3 Rights and Resources Initiative. 2015. Who Owns the World's Land? Washington, D.C: Rights and Resources Initiative. Available at [www.rightsandresources.org/publication/whoownsthe-land](http://www.rightsandresources.org/publication/whoownsthe-land).
- 4 W. Anseeuw, L. Alden Wily, L. Cotula, and M. Taylor. 2012. Land Rights and the Rush for Land. Findings of the Global Commercial Pressures on Land Research Project. Rome: International Land Coalition. Available at <http://www.landcoalition.org/en/resources/land-rights-and-rush-land>.
- 5 K. Nolte, W. Chamberlain and M. Giger. 2016. International Land Deals for Agriculture. Fresh Insights from the Land Matrix: Analytical Report II. Bern, Montpellier, Hamburg, Pretoria: Centre for Development and Environment, University of Bern; Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement; German Institute of Global and Area Studies; University of Pretoria; Bern Open Publishing. Available at [http://www.landmatrix.org/media/filer\\_public/ab/c8/abc8b563-9d74-4a47-9548-cb59e4809b4e/land\\_matrix\\_2016\\_analytical\\_report\\_draft\\_ii.pdf](http://www.landmatrix.org/media/filer_public/ab/c8/abc8b563-9d74-4a47-9548-cb59e4809b4e/land_matrix_2016_analytical_report_draft_ii.pdf).
- 6 A. Alforte, J. Angan, J. Dentith, K. Domondon, L. Munden, S. Murday and L. Pradela. 2014. Communities as Counterparties. Preliminary Review of Concessions and Conflict in Emerging and Frontier Market Concessions. Washington, D.C: Rights and Resources Initiative. Available at [http://www.rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/Communities-as-Counterparties-FINAL\\_Oct-21.pdf](http://www.rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/Communities-as-Counterparties-FINAL_Oct-21.pdf).



## SECURING INDIGENOUS AND COMMUNITY LAND RIGHTS IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT TO LIMIT GLOBAL TEMPERATURE RISE TO 1.5 DEGREES CELSIUS

Lack of tenure security undermines the capacity of communities to protect their ecosystem, preserve soils and water sources, and conserve biodiversity.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, it endangers community stewardship over forests, one of the most important terrestrial carbon sinks. A tipping point on deforestation, with a foreseeable acceleration of the Earth's warming, is approaching fast,<sup>8</sup> and securing community rights over forests is key to halting this.

Climate change is taking its toll on lives and livelihoods worldwide. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recently found that the impacts of climate change on agriculture and food security are already alarming.<sup>9</sup> In Pakistan, for example, it is estimated that over the past two decades, 141 climate-related extreme events have caused an average of 500 deaths per year and an average annual economic losses of more than US\$2 billion, equivalent to nearly half the bilateral Official Development Assistance to Pakistan in 2014.<sup>10</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has identified Indigenous Peoples, women and others dependent on natural resources as groups who are likely to be particularly vulnerable.<sup>11</sup>

According to FAO, climate stresses like droughts push rural people to migrate,<sup>12</sup> with estimates of hundreds of millions of people needing to flee their homes as a result of climate change between now and 2050.<sup>13</sup> The world is already facing a refugee crisis—if measures are not taken to mitigate the climate crisis, we will see far worse in the future.

7 J. Rosendahl, M. A. Zanella, J. Weigelt, and J. Durand. 2015. Pro-Poor Resource Governance Under Changing Climates. Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development. Available at <https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/84220ddf-3be7-45aa-a6ed-dc05ae473e62>.

8 Stockholm Resilience Centre. Undated. The Nine Planetary Boundaries.

9 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2016. The State of Food and Agriculture. Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6030e.pdf>.

10 International Institute for Sustainable Development 2013, in Oxfam. 2016. Food, Climate Change and Women. Women Farmers Key to Reversing Agricultural Decline in Pakistan. Oxfam Pakistan Briefing Paper.

11 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2007. Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at [https://www.ipcc.ch/publications\\_and\\_data/publications\\_ipcc\\_fourth\\_assessment\\_report\\_wg2\\_report\\_impacts\\_adaptation\\_and\\_vulnerability.htm](https://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_ipcc_fourth_assessment_report_wg2_report_impacts_adaptation_and_vulnerability.htm)

12 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2016. The State of Food and Agriculture.

13 International Institute for Environment and Development 2010, in Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2016. The State of Food and Agriculture.

## INCREASING INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS – BUT A FAILURE TO ACT

Consensus is growing on the importance of indigenous and community land rights in sustainable development, environmental protection, and the fight against climate change. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include explicit commitments to secure land rights to end poverty (Goal 1), eradicate hunger (Goal 2), and achieve gender equality (Goal 5). Secure indigenous and community land rights also contribute to protecting water ecosystems (Goal 6), combating climate change (Goal 13), reducing inequality (Goal 10) and protecting life on land (Goal 15). The 2015 Paris Agreement emphasises the role of “traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems” in climate change adaptation actions. Evidence shows that Indigenous Peoples and local communities greatly contribute to the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity under the Convention on Biological Diversity.<sup>14</sup> In 2016, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature called on businesses “to respect all categories of protected areas as ‘no-go’ areas for environmentally damaging industrial activities” and highlights the need for respect of Indigenous peoples’ right to free, prior, and informed consent.<sup>15</sup>

14 Forest Peoples Programme, the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. 2016. Local Biodiversity Outlooks. Indigenous Peoples’ and Local Communities’ Contributions to the Implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. Moreton-in-Marsh, England: FPP. Available at <http://localbiodiversityoutlooks.net/>.

15 International Union for the Conservation of Nature. 2016. Protected Areas and Other Areas Important for Biodiversity in Relation to Environmentally Damaging Industrial Activities and Infrastructure Development. IUCN WCC-2016-Rec-102. Available at <https://portals.iucn.org/congress/motion/026>.



## WHY ARE INDIGENOUS AND COMMUNITY LAND RIGHTS SO CRUCIAL FOR COMBATING CLIMATE CHANGE?

A growing body of evidence shows that legal recognition of indigenous and community land rights has a major impact on mitigating climate change, and on adapting and building resilience to its adverse effects.

## INSECURE INDIGENOUS AND COMMUNITY LANDS STORE VAST STOCKS OF CARBON

- » Community forestlands hold at least one quarter of all above-ground tropical forest carbon, 54,546 million metric tons, which is equivalent to four times the total global carbon emissions in 2014.<sup>16</sup>
- » At least one-tenth of total carbon in the world's tropical forests—approximately 22,322 million metric tons—is located in indigenous and community forestlands lacking formal recognition.<sup>17</sup>
- » Grasslands store approximately 34 percent of global terrestrial stocks of carbon,<sup>18</sup> but indigenous and nomadic pastoralist communities managing them rarely have secure land rights.<sup>19</sup>

## SECURING INDIGENOUS AND COMMUNITY LANDS CAN SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE CARBON EMISSIONS

- » Secure indigenous lands have lower deforestation rates than similar areas without tenure security and land with other tenure types, such as government protected areas.<sup>20</sup> In the Brazilian Amazon the deforestation rate is 11 times lower in Indigenous Peoples' and community forests. In the Guatemalan Petén, it is 20 times lower, and in the Mexican Yucatan, it is 350 times lower.<sup>21</sup>

16 Rights and Resources Initiative 2016. Toward a Global Baseline of Carbon Storage in Collective Lands. Washington, D.C: Rights and Resources Initiative. Available at <https://www.rightsandresources.org/en/publication/global-baseline-carbon-storage-collective-lands/>.

17 Rights and Resources Initiative 2016. Toward a Global Baseline of Carbon Storage in Collective Lands.

18 C. Neely, S. Bunning and A. Wilkes 2009, in D. McGahey, J. Davies, N. Hagelberg and R. Ouedraogo. 2014. Pastoralism and the Green Economy – A Natural Nexus? Nairobi: International Union for the Conservation of Nature and United Nations Environment Programme. Available at <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/44878>.

19 International Land Coalition. 2016. Nomadic Custodians: A Case for Securing Pastoralist Land Rights. Rome: International Land Coalition. Available at <http://www.landcoalition.org/en/regions/global-including-europe/resources/nomadic-custodians-case-securing-pastoralist-land-rights>.

20 H. Ding, P. Veit, E. Gray, K. Reyntar, J. Altamirano, A. Blackman and B. Hodgdon. 2016. Climate Benefits, Tenure Costs. The Economic Case for Securing Indigenous Land Rights in the Amazon. Washington, D.C: World Resources Institute. Available at <http://www.wri.org/publication/climate-benefits-tenure-costs>.

21 C. Stevens, R. Winterbottom, J. Springer, and K. Reyntar. 2014. Securing Rights, Combating Climate Change. How Strengthening Community Forest Rights Mitigates Climate Change. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute and Rights and Resources Initiative. Available at <http://www.wri.org/publication/securing-rights-combating-climate-change>.

- » Reduced deforestation in secure indigenous lands and other protected forests in the Brazilian Amazon could protect an estimated 27.2 million hectares of forest land by 2050, avoiding the equivalent of about 3 years-worth of carbon emissions from all Latin American and Caribbean countries.<sup>22</sup>
- » In Brazil, community forests contain 36% more carbon per hectare than non-community forests.<sup>23</sup>
- » Secure land rights are vital for sustainable management of global grasslands, which have the potential to sequester about 10 percent of annual carbon emissions from human activity.<sup>24</sup>
- » In Mongolia, greater access and community control over pastures has rehabilitated rangelands and improved biodiversity and ecosystem services, while also increasing incomes for pastoralists.<sup>25</sup>

## INSECURE LAND RIGHTS INCREASE VULNERABILITY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO CLIMATE CHANGE

- » Lack of secure land tenure has prevented Indigenous Peoples displaced by typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines from returning and rebuilding their homes.<sup>26</sup>
- » Increased fragmentation, loss of pasturelands, and blocking of migration routes threatens the highly mobile livelihoods of nomadic pastoralists. Such mobility is vital for maintaining their resilience to unpredictable climates and extreme climatic events.<sup>27</sup>

## SECURE INDIGENOUS AND COMMUNITY LAND RIGHTS ARE A COST-EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Securing indigenous forestlands in the Amazon basin can generate estimated net benefits, in terms of avoided carbon emissions and other ecosystem services, of between \$4,559 -10,274 per hectare over a 20-year period. This translates into potential total economic benefits of \$700 -1,561 billion for Bolivia, Colombia and Brazil combined. Over the next 20 years, the cost of securing rights in Brazil, Colombia, and Bolivia would be only a few dollars per hectare—less than 1 percent of the total benefits.<sup>28</sup>

22 Stevens et al. 2014. Securing Rights, Combating Climate Change.

23 Stevens et al. 2014. Securing Rights, Combating Climate Change.

24 P.J. Gerber, H. Steinfeld, B. Henderson, A. Mottet, C. Opio, J. Dijkman, A. Faluccci and G. Tempio 2013, in McGahey et al. 2014. Pastoralism and the Green Economy.

25 P. Herrera, J. Davies and P. Manzano (eds) 2014, in McGahey et al. 2014. Pastoralism and the Green Economy.

26 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2014. Typhoon Haiyan: Indigenous People Seek to Break Cycle of Displacement. Available at <http://unhcr.ph/human-stories/typhoon-haiyan-indigenous-people-seek-to-break-cycle-of-displacement>.

27 International Land Coalition. 2016. Nomadic Custodians

28 Ding et al. 2016. Climate Benefits, Tenure Costs.



## GUATEMALA MAYA BIOSPHERE RESERVE

Guatemala's **Maya Biosphere Reserve** was created in 1990 to protect the largest remaining tropical rainforest in Central America. The reserve includes a fully protected core area and more than a dozen multiple use zones where extraction of timber and other forest products is allowed. In effect, this recognises the rights of local communities to use and manage these areas, and gives them a direct stake in their protection.

Between 2002 and 2007, deforestation rates in the reserve's community forests was only one-twentieth that of the rest of the reserve. At the current rate, almost 40 percent of the reserve's forests will be lost by 2050 and most of the remaining forest cover will be in community-run areas. The experience of Guatemala's community forests illustrates the strong climate change mitigation impacts of integrating community land rights into conservation strategies.<sup>29</sup>

29 D. Hughell and R. Butterfield 2008, in Oxfam, International Land Coalition, and Rights and Resources Initiative 2016. Common Ground.





## AVOIDING FALSE SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Many 'solutions' proposed for mitigating climate change in fact violate indigenous and community land rights and cause significant carbon emissions.

Large scale projects in Africa, Asia, and South America to meet rising European demands for biofuels have exploited insecure land tenure rights. Clearing of lands for these projects greatly contributed to carbon emissions.<sup>30</sup>

Large hydropower projects also generate significant carbon emissions and cause irreversible damage to river and forest ecosystems.<sup>31</sup> They have also resulted in large scale displacement and human rights violations against local communities.<sup>32</sup>

Many protected areas are established on communities' biodiverse lands. The false belief that protected areas must be devoid of people has fed a century of forced evictions. A 2016 UN report found that these evictions continue to this day, violating the rights of communities and preventing them from continuing to act as environmental guardians.<sup>33</sup>

To be effective, projects that mitigate climate change need to respect indigenous and community land rights.

## RISING THREATS TO LAND AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS

Indigenous Peoples and local communities are at the forefront of the protection of lands and natural resources and often face extreme risks for their peaceful action. As the global land rush intensifies, so have these risks.

Because the unsustainable projects they oppose are often backed by powerful interests, attempts to marginalise them and discredit their actions are common. They and their families face death threats, intimidation, and harassment, but receive little or no protection. In 2015, at least 185 land and environmental rights defenders were killed as a result of their work—more than three killings each week. 40 percent of the victims were Indigenous Peoples.<sup>34</sup>

Securing indigenous and community land rights will help protect against such threats.

30 Oxfam. 2016. Burning Land, Burning the Climate. The Biofuel Industry's Capture of EU Bioenergy Policy. Oxfam Briefing Paper. Available at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/burning-land-burning-climate>; Stevens et al. 2014. Securing Rights, Combating Climate Change.

31 International Rivers. 2015. 10 Reasons Why Climate Initiatives Should Not Include Large Hydropower Projects. Available at <https://www.internationalrivers.org/node/9204>.

32 International Rivers 2015. 10 Reasons Why Climate Initiatives Should Not Include Large Hydropower Projects.

33 United Nations. 2016. Conservation and Indigenous Peoples' Rights. Report to the General Assembly, 2016. Available at <http://unsr.vtaulicorpuz.org/site/index.php/en/documents/annual-reports/149-report-ga-2016>.

34 Global Witness. 2016. On Dangerous Ground. 2015's Deadly Environment: The Killing and Criminalization of Land and Environmental Defenders Worldwide. London: Global Witness. Available at [https://www.globalwitness.org/documents/18482/On\\_Dangerous\\_Ground.pdf](https://www.globalwitness.org/documents/18482/On_Dangerous_Ground.pdf).

## RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>35</sup>

There is no strong commitment to securing indigenous and community land rights in the national plans for tackling climate change under the Paris climate agreement of 167 countries. Especially concerning is the fact that many of the largest forested countries with high rates of deforestation —such as Brazil, DRC, and Indonesia— do not include clear commitments.<sup>36</sup>

On Earth Day 2017, the Land Rights Now campaign calls on all stakeholders to take strong policy action to include secure indigenous and community land rights as a tested, cost-effective, and practical solution to climate change:

- 1 GOVERNMENTS** should include actions for securing indigenous and community land rights in their Nationally Determined Contributions to reduce carbon emissions under the Paris treaty.
- 2 FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND CORPORATIONS** should include actions for securing indigenous and community land rights in their climate, environmental and social policies, and comply with them across their operations.
- 3 GLOBAL BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL CLIMATE FINANCE INITIATIVES** like the Green Climate Fund should ensure protection of land rights, expand funding streams for tenure reform, provide direct access to Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and recognise their rights in safeguards.

We also encourage the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to consider and assess the growing evidence on the role that secure indigenous and community land rights play in mitigating climate change during the preparatory work towards its Sixth Assessment Report.

35 For the wider set of recommendations of the Land Rights Now campaign, please see Oxfam, International Land Coalition, and Rights and Resources Initiative 2016. Common Ground.

36 Review of 161 Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) submitted on behalf of 188 countries for COP 21, in Rights and Resources Initiative. 2016. Indigenous Peoples and Local Community Tenure in the INDCs: Status and Recommendations. Washington, DC: Rights and Resources Initiative. Available at: <http://rightsandresources.org/en/publication/indigenous-peoples-local-community-tenure-indcs/>.





Photo: © ILC/Jason Taylor, Uganda



## **ABOUT LAND RIGHTS NOW**

Land Rights Now is an international campaign that aims to secure indigenous and community land rights worldwide. Since its launch in March 2016, over 500 organisations and thousands of individuals from all corners of the world have joined the campaign (more info on [www.landrightsnow.org](http://www.landrightsnow.org)).

Participants of Land Rights Now are mobilising across more than thirty countries on Earth Day 2017 to stand in solidarity with land rights heroes that fight against climate change.

Land Rights Now is part of the Global Call to Action on Indigenous and Community Land Rights, a solidarity movement of organisations and communities united to promote the land rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities by working with them to mobilise, communicate, advocate, monitor and nurture strategic initiatives. The Global Call to Action is co-convened by the International Land Coalition, the Rights and Resources Initiative and Oxfam.