



## The Rights and Resources Initiative – Quarterly E-mail Update

January - March 2013

Development approaches based on natural resource exploitation at the expense of local communities have repeatedly proven inadequate for long-term, equitable development. In large part this is because ownership of a majority of all forest and rural lands in the developing world remain deeply contested. Yet, many development institutions and governments have failed to fully understand the development potential that exists if local land rights are secured.

On the eve of the World Bank Land and Poverty Conference that drew more than 800 experts from around the world—the most in the conference’s history—the [World Bank issued a statement](#) acknowledging that secure land rights are critical for addressing global poverty, a sign of growing appreciation for the role of land rights in development. The statement commits the Bank to strengthen its safeguards and integrate better project risk assessments on land tenure for World Bank investments, but until operationalized, the statement remains a letter of intent rather than a policy that can have real impact.

At the same time, across the developing world, poor people continue to be dispossessed from their lands in increasing numbers by agribusiness, mining, and infrastructure development projects, and the lives and livelihoods of countless others stand to be affected by the [reliance](#) of many developing nations on the extraction of natural resources as a “[quick-fix](#)” development solution.

Particularly at risk are countries transitioning to democracy—such as Myanmar—who will face growing demands for their land and resources as barriers to trade and investment are relaxed. Given Myanmar’s and its relatively untouched resource wealth and location between China and India, it comes as little surprise that Myanmar’s Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation’s Department of Agriculture Planning stated that in January 2010, concessions totaling more than 708,000 hectares had been granted to 216 companies, some in partnership with foreign firms. Furthermore, a 2012 report by the Myanmar-based Transnational Institute quoted a former director of the agriculture department as saying only about 20 percent of the total concession area was being planted. Though Myanmar is undertaking important reforms, recent large scale land acquisitions have occurred at the expense of local peoples. As Southeast Asian populations and consumption grow, and the demand for resources increases, we are left with little hope that mechanisms to track and monitor these major land transfers keep pace.

However, dispossessing the rural poor of their land to make way for investments in agriculture, mining and other sectors is an injustice that can be prevented. The increased attention to the issues of forest and land rights by global agencies makes this a timely moment for affected communities, governments, forward-looking private investors, and organizations engaged in the struggle to secure community land rights and make responding to this crisis a global development priority. All of these actors have a stake in the lands at risk. Together we can take advantage of this moment to mobilize new alliances and promote development models that fully respect local peoples’ rights.

## - Rights and Resources Initiative

P.S. Learn more about RRI's work to this end from [January - March 2013](#), and [RRI's Rationale for Engagement](#) in our 17 priority countries.

### Global Level Strategic Analysis and Action

- Noting the multiple threats to the tenure security of millions of the world's poor and a welcome growing awareness of the importance of land rights for development, participants at a recent event in Bellagio, Italy, identified opportunities for coordination and collaboration amongst leading civil society organizations and networks to scale up actions to secure land rights around the developing world. The meeting was convened by RRI, the International Land Coalition, and Oxfam International. The participants developed a common framework to generate enhanced and accelerated global and national actions to support community land rights. At the meeting's conclusion, participants agreed to work towards the creation of an informal alliance to secure community land rights. [Read their statement](#). Contact [Jeffrey Hatcher](#).
- On March 9-10, RRI's Communications and Outreach team organized, in collaboration with Cameroon Ecology, a site visit to selected villages in Southern Cameroon for five journalists representing regional and global media outlets. The visit's objective was for the journalists to hear from community representatives from villages that almost lost their land for a logging concession, but then [received a reprieve from the government](#) – illustrating the up and down nature of the struggle to secure the land tenure of rural communities in Africa. Today, these villages still have no permanent guarantees of land rights. The visit was praised by the journalists, who have now agreed to work together in Cameroon to continue raising awareness of community land rights violations in the country. Media coverage resulting from the visit and accompanying outreach efforts in Cameroon can be seen [here](#). Contact [Jenna DiPaolo](#).
- On February 19-21, RRI participated in the *National Validation Workshop for the Land Governance Assessment Framework in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, co-hosted by the DRC Ministry for Land Affairs, CODELT, The World Bank, UN-HABITAT, GLTN, and RRI in Kinshasa, DRC. RRI and Forest Peoples Programme (FPP) presented an overview of the ongoing Tenure Baseline Study for the DRC (TBS-DRC) and established the potential value-added of the study to the country's ongoing Land Code reform. After the Workshop, RRI hosted a strategic planning meeting for the TBS-DRC researchers and collaborating organizations to establish a strategic plan for the completion of the study, which should be published by mid-2014. Contact [Alexandre Corriveau-Bourque](#).
- On February 5, RRI released its annual review on the state of rights and resources for 2012-2013, [Landowners or Laborers: What choice will developing countries make?](#) The review identifies the key choices and challenges that emerged in 2012 for forest rights and tenure globally. It was launched at a panel discussion attended by over 110 people, co-hosted by RRI and FPP at the Royal Society in London. RRI also launched another new analysis at the same event, [The Financial Risks of Insecure Land Tenure: An Investment View](#). This paper investigates the real financial consequences of investing in land with disputed tenure rights. The findings demonstrate that companies and their investors can face substantial risks when they overlook

or underestimate the land tenure contestation in rural areas. [Read press release or](#) watch the webcast in [English](#), [French](#), or [Spanish](#)). Contact [Madiha Qureshi](#).

## **Country and Regional-Level Analysis and Action**

### **Asia**

- In March, the All China Women's Federation (ACWF), a leading advocate of women's rights in China, formally presented a proposal to China's State Forest Administration and Ministry of Agriculture urging the central government to strengthen protection of women's forestland rights. Landesa assisted in the proposal drafting process. While ACWF has proposed recommendations for improving gender equality in rural development and land legislation, this proposal officially marks the first time that forestland rights were included in an official ACWF proposal. The proposal called for scaled up efforts to formally register women's land rights and equitable compensation for land acquisitions, clarity in co-ownership of rights to forest resources to ensure both men's and women's names are on the official title, and efforts to standardize implementation at the local level. Earlier this year, Landesa also assisted ACWF in drafting a policy proposal during the 18<sup>th</sup> annual session of the National People's Congress and the Chinese Political Consultative Conference. Contact [Xiaobei Wang](#).
- The Land Issues Working Group (LIWG) of Lao PDR and local civil society organizations submitted key recommendations for the country's draft National Land Policy, which is expected to be completed by the end of June 2013. Recommendations were presented to the National Assembly, Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry at a stakeholders meeting on March 22. While the existing draft policy appears to recognize the importance of community and ethnic minority tenure rights as a foundational principle, the manner in which these rights will be fully realized and implemented remains ambiguous; however, the LIWG's ability to present and increase civil society voices in the political space in Lao is significant. Contact [Hanna Saarinen](#).

### **Africa**

- On March 5-7, RRI held the 13<sup>th</sup> Regional Dialogue on Forests, Governance and Climate Change for Central and West Africa in Yaoundé, Cameroon. It was co-organized by the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the Cameroon Ministry of Forest and Wildlife (MINFOF). The Dialogue, titled "*Harmonizing Tenure and Resource Policies in Central and West Africa's Changing Landscape*" generated a dynamic discourse among policy makers and development experts in Central and West Africa on the social, economic, and environmental impacts of land deals or concessions in Africa—particularly on former forest land and woodland, or with land with conflicting community or customary rights over it. This Dialogue was the first time that government officials from ministries besides forest and land gathered to discuss the social, economic, and environmental impacts of land deals or concessions in Africa. In particular the Agriculture and Mining ministry representatives from Gabon, DRC, and CAR were particularly engaged. Discussions during the Dialogue show that enhanced coordination between

the ministries of mining, forestry and land will help ensure that development initiatives throughout Africa are sustainable, and based on respecting the rights and cultures of all citizens. Participants in the Dialogue agreed to initiate a regular monitoring of progress in land and tenure reforms, distill a practical index from existing assessment tools that governments and civil society can use to track this progress, and reconvene countries on a regular basis to discuss progress on reform. Details and resources on the event can be found in [English](#) and [French](#). Andy White presented [opening](#) and [closing](#) remarks framing the discourse on the progress of tenure reform in Central and West Africa in the context of large-scale land acquisitions. Contact [Solange Bandiaky-Badji](#) or [Augusta Molnar](#).

- At the 13<sup>th</sup> Dialogue, RRI launched two new analyses exploring trends in large-scale land acquisitions and community land rights policies in West and Central Africa. The first of the two reports analyzes the *Social and Environmental Impacts of Agricultural Large-Scale Land Acquisitions in Africa*, with a focus on West and Central Africa. It is available in [English](#) and [French](#). The second explores *Réformes de Tenure Forestière et Foncière en Afrique Centrale et de l'Ouest : Une Evaluation Préliminaire des Avancées Post-Yaoundé 2009* [Land and Forest Tenure Reforms in West and Central Africa: A Preliminary Assessment of Progress Made since the Yaoundé 2009 Conference]. It is available as a policy brief in [English](#) and [French](#). For more details, [click here](#). Contact [Madiha Qureshi](#).

## Latin America

- On March 21-22, RRI held its 14th Regional Dialogue on Forests, Governance and Climate Change in Bogotá, Colombia, titled, *Extractive Industries, Communities and Territorial Rights: Implications for poverty reduction and climate change* in collaboration with Asociación Ambiente y Sociedad (AAS). The discussion concluded that the region needs new public policy approaches, as well as an alternative vision of development founded on a rights-based approach and the sustainable use and protection of natural resources. About 150 participants from a wide range of organizations attended the event, and 377 people from 19 nations followed the live webcast online. As RRI's second regional Dialogue in Latin America, RRI gained further visibility in the region, identifying key NGOs and prospective collaborators working on the issues of community rights affected by extractives industries, as well as noting ways forward for progress. See the event's summary in [Spanish](#) or [English](#). Contact [Claire Biason](#) or [Omaira Bolaños](#).
- At the 14th Dialogue, RRI launched a new analysis on [The Impact of Extractive Industries on the Collective Land and Forest Rights of People and Communities](#) prepared by Asociación Ambiente y Sociedad (Colombia) and commissioned by RRI. It focused on Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, and Panama, and reveals that governments in Latin America have returned to natural resources extraction to fuel development, while paying scant attention to the impact mining, oil exploration and other activities have on the environment or on the people who own the land. The full report and its summary are available here. Contact [Omaira Bolaños](#) or [Margarita Flórez](#).

## New Publications

- **Landowners or Laborers:** What choice will developing countries make?
  - [English](#) | [French](#) | [Spanish](#)

- **Social and Environmental Impacts of Agricultural Large-Scale Land Acquisitions in Africa – With a Focus on West and Central Africa**
  - [English](#) / [French](#)
- **Réformes de Tenure Forestière et Foncière en Afrique Centrale et de l’Ouest** [Land and Forest Tenure Reforms in West and Central Africa]
  - [French](#) / [English](#)
- **Impacto de las Industrias Extractivas en los Derechos Colectivos sobre Territorios y Bosques de los Pueblos y las Comunidades**
  - [Report in Spanish](#) / [Policy Brief in English](#) / [Policy Brief in Spanish](#)

#### **Recent and Upcoming Events**

- **May 27-31, 2013: Oaxaca, Mexico – Next Generation of Forest Agency Leaders:** Global Issues in Governance. [Event Details](#)
- **September 18-20, 2013: Interlaken, Switzerland – Scaling-Up Global Efforts to Secure Community Land and Resource Rights:** An International Conference to Take Stock of Current Efforts, Identify Promising Strategies, and Catalyze New Alliances and Action. [Event Details](#)

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