

Case study: Women’s Voice and Participation Key for Protection of Community Lands and Forests in Peru

“The communities are not poor; the communities are rich.” This was one of the first phrases spoken by a community leader from the Loreto region, in Peru’s Amazon Rainforest, during an interview with the National Organization of Indigenous Andean and Amazonian Women of Peru (ONAMIAP, for its Spanish acronym). The phrase is a call for rural communities to be viewed not as “lacking development,” but as important cultural actors who play a crucial role in the preservation and [management of forests and natural resources](#).

The interview was part of a study initiated by ONAMIAP in 2015, just months after the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) announced that it would grant US\$40 million dollars to the Government of Peru to help finance the third phase of a massive land titling initiative—the *Rural land cadastre, titling and registration project in Peru (PTRT3)*. The project prompted a wave of pushback from Peru’s indigenous groups, who argued that its focus of securing the lands of individual landowners could put at risk approximately 20 million hectares of untitled indigenous lands—including several communities with outstanding land title applications.

Although the PTRT3 project is subject to the gender equality policy of the IDB, on the ground, women received little information about the project and were not consulted about its implementation. Within this context, ONAMIAP sought to illuminate the unique situation and expectations of indigenous and rural women through a series of interviews with leaders across the country.

Findings from the ONAMIAP report, updated in 2017, revealed that several indigenous women interviewed identified the same widespread trend: **“the importance of holding positions and participating in [community] assemblies with voice and vote.”** Indigenous and rural women felt that their ability to exercise control over their lands and resources was tied to their access to community decision-making spaces, but found these spaces difficult to access. The report noted that **“while the normative framework (laws and regulations) is not exclusionary with regard to the possibility for women to be recognized as community members or authorities [...] it does not precisely establish that they have the same rights and opportunities.”**

These observations echo findings from RRI’s new [Power and Potential report](#), which calls attention to the need for laws that provide explicit protections for women’s rights. The report found that while community governance and dispute resolution rights are addressed in most of the legal frameworks regulating community forest tenure analyzed in Peru, women’s rights to vote in community leadership bodies and access dispute resolution mechanisms are not guaranteed. It also cautions that the principles of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) will not be effective or properly applied if women are excluded from community-level governance bodies, and thus not taken into account as representative community members.

As a result of sustained advocacy, national indigenous organizations in Peru succeeded in 2016 in becoming active members of the committee overseeing all stages of PTRT3 implementation. However, the PTRT3 is just one of eight ongoing land titling initiatives—including four REDD+ initiatives—within which communities and women hope to increase their participation and oversight. These circumstances present both a challenge to community land rights and an opportunity to raise awareness about the

importance for indigenous communities and women in Peru to own, access, and control their customary lands.

In addition to serving as an important tool for women to advocate for full participation in the ongoing titling projects, the ONAMIAP report has also helped women share experiences and advance their rights. Some women leaders, for example, have already successfully prompted the change of legal statutes to require greater participation from women at the community level.

“For indigenous women, our land is a sacred space that cannot be sold or divided up,” said Ketty Marcelo, President of ONAMIAP. “By stewarding these lands we play a fundamental role in food security, the preservation of biodiversity, and the governance of our territories. But without voice and vote, women cannot fully use and protect the lands and forests we all rely on.”