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SEPTEMBER 10, 2018, 6:00 A.M. GMT**

## **California Global Climate Action Summit Factsheet**

Forest Tenure & Carbon Storage Update

### **Key Messages**

- Recognizing and respecting the land rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities is a vital solution to climate change. **Legally recognized indigenous and community [forests](#) are associated with lower rates of deforestation and higher levels of carbon storage.**
- Indigenous and community lands hold at least **293,061 million metric tons of carbon (MtC)—equivalent to 33 times global energy emissions in 2017**. This new study of 64 countries, representing 69% of forest carbon globally, reflects an expanded global analysis of aboveground, belowground, and soil carbon. It reveals that indigenous and local communities manage 5 times more carbon than previously estimated in aboveground tropical forests only.
- **Communities are not only protecting the carbon in their trees; they are also protecting huge reservoirs of soil organic carbon that would be released into the atmosphere if their forests were destroyed.** Forest soils hold 65% (113,218 Mt) of the total carbon found in community-managed tropical forests and nearly 90% (105,606 Mt) of the total carbon associated with non-tropical community forests.
- **At least one third of community-managed carbon in the tropical and subtropical countries analyzed lies in forestlands where Indigenous Peoples and local communities lack legal recognition—and the real number is likely much higher. Yet Indigenous Peoples and local communities only have legally recognized rights to 15% of forests globally** (across 41 countries), despite having customary claim to much more.
- **The rate of government recognition of Indigenous Peoples’ and local communities’ rights has remained slow since 2008.** Governments continue to legally own nearly 70% of forestlands, much of which is claimed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. **Despite limited progress overall, the forestlands recognized over the four years from 2013-2017 have much stronger protections for community rights than those recognized during the previous 5 years.**
- **The gap in community rights recognition is driving a human rights crisis.** 2017 was [the deadliest year on record](#) for land and environmental defenders, and a recent [report](#) from the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples found a drastic increase in violence and legal harassment (“criminalization”) of Indigenous Peoples defending their land rights.

### **Indigenous and Community Land Rights as a Climate Solution**

- **Indigenous Peoples and local communities manage at least 293,061 Mt of forest carbon globally** (across 64 countries that represent 69% of global forest carbon)—**equivalent to nearly 33 times global emissions in 2017**. In tropical and sub-tropical countries featured in this

assessment, community lands hold at least 22% of the total forest carbon. Most of this forest carbon is stored in the soil, which communities prevent from being released into the atmosphere by preserving the forests above.

- **A third of community-managed carbon in tropical and subtropical countries lies in forests where communities lack formal recognition of their tenure rights**—and the real number is likely much higher. Failure to legally recognize indigenous and local community land rights puts forests and the carbon they contain at risk, and threatens the people who rely on forests for their livelihoods and cultures.
- **Legally recognized indigenous and community forests are associated with lower rates of deforestation and store more carbon** than forests managed by either public or private entities. The rate of tree cover loss is less than half in community and indigenous lands compared to elsewhere. Where rights are recognized, the difference is even [greater](#). As global forest cover [declines significantly](#)—including in areas where communities have rights but those rights are not protected—recognizing indigenous and community land rights and investing in them as forest guardians is a global imperative to mitigate the climate crisis.
  - In the Peruvian Amazon, legal recognition of indigenous and community forest rights [reduced deforestation](#) by up to 81% in the year following titling, demonstrating that titling can have immediate climate effects.
- **Communities are effective and efficient guardians of the forest.** They [are investing substantially in conservation](#)—up to US\$1.71 billion in the developing world—and they achieve at least equal conservation results with a fraction of the budget of protected areas, making investment in communities the most efficient means of protecting forests.

## The Current State of Indigenous and Community Land Rights

- RRI's forest tenure database includes 58 countries covering nearly 92% of the world's forests. Across a subset of 41 countries where RRI has tracked forest tenure since 2002, Indigenous Peoples and local communities legally own or have more limited rights to 15% (521 million hectares, mha) of that forestland, a 147 mha—or nearly 40%—increase from 2002. However, they historically manage substantially more forestland. Across the 33 low- and middle-income countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America with data since 2002, the area [“owned by” and “designated for”](#) communities increased from 19% (337 mha) in 2002 to 28% (484 mha) in 2017.
- Government recognition of Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' rights has remained slow since 2008. Governments continue to legally own nearly 70% of forestlands, much of which is claimed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. A large proportion of this forestland is allocated to concessions or classified as protected areas.
- Despite limited progress overall, forestlands recognized over the four-year period from 2013-2017 have much stronger protections for community rights (by RRI's methodology, more forestlands were recognized as “owned by” rather than “designated for” communities over the time period) than those recognized in the previous 5 years. Along with new laws in some countries establishing legal pathways for communities to legally own their forests, this may signal an increase in legal recognition of community forest ownership.

- The gap in community rights recognition is driving a human rights crisis. 2017 was [the deadliest year on record](#) for land and environmental defenders, with 207 people killed for protecting their lands. A recent [report](#) from UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Victoria Tauli-Corpuz found a drastic increase in both violence and legal harassment (“criminalization”) toward Indigenous Peoples defending their land rights.

## Indigenous and Community Land Rights at the Regional Level

- **Latin America:** Forest area owned by Indigenous Peoples and local communities across 9 countries increased from 171 mha (21%) in 2002 to 236 mha (30%) in 2017. Since 2013, Indigenous Peoples’ and local communities’ ownership rights have been recognized over an additional 11 mha of forestland (including 7 mha in Brazil, 3 mha in Colombia, and nearly 1 mha in Honduras).
- **Africa:** Community forest rights recognition across 11 countries with complete data in Africa continues to lag behind progress made in Asia and Latin America, despite positive steps by some countries. Less than 31 mha of forests are recognized as “designated for” or “owned by” communities as of 2017, much of which is in Tanzania. Notably, there is insufficient data to determine the amount of forestland owned by communities in Kenya, Mali, and Mozambique—three countries that recognize customary forest ownership without requiring formal registration.
- **Asia:** The forest area legally recognized as owned by communities across 13 countries in Asia increased just under 25 mha over the last 15 years, with over 85% of these gains in China. Outside of China, progress has been limited: India, Indonesia, and the Philippines each had an increase of less than 1 mha of forest recognized as owned by communities since 2013. Given that the potential for rights recognition in India and Indonesia collectively exceeds 80 mha, the current rate of recognition is relatively quite low.

## Recommendations from Indigenous and Community Leaders to Policymakers

- **Significantly scale up recognition of community-based tenure**—with a particular focus on recognizing Indigenous Peoples and local communities as owners of their lands and forests;
- **Secure the free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC)** of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and rural and indigenous women;
- **Improve and continuously expand Indigenous Peoples’ and local communities’ access to critical knowledge;**
- **Prioritize bilateral and multilateral investments** in indigenous- and community-led initiatives; and
- **End the criminalization and persecution of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.**

*“World leaders have a powerful solution on the table to save forests and protect the planet: recognize and support the world’s Indigenous Peoples. We have stood as a proven solution to climate change for generations. Recognize our rights, and we can continue to do so for generations to come.” – UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Victoria Tauli-Corpuz*