



Recognition of Indigenous Peoples', Afro-descendant Peoples', and local communities' land from 2015–2020

Amidst continuing violence against Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities, and dramatic political shifts in countries across Latin America, the need to secure communities' land rights has never been more urgent. Mounting evidence concludes what communities have long maintained—that they are the best managers of their lands and resources.

The Second Edition of *Who Owns the World's Land?* by the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) analyzes the amount of land legally recognized by national governments as owned by or designated for Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities around the world, including 10 South American and six Mesoamerican countries. It also reports on progress over the first five years (2015–2020) of adopting of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement.



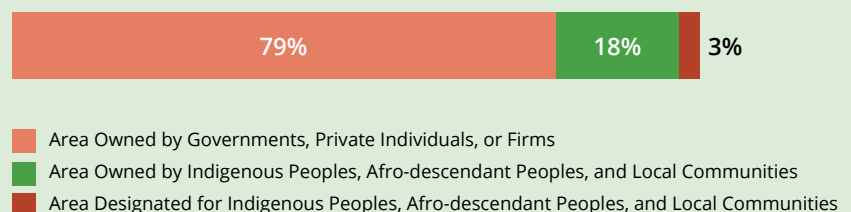
Landscape of Valledupar, municipality in northeastern Colombia. Credit: William Martinez, RRI

The Positives

- + Following decades of national and international advocacy by Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities, land tenure security for communities, and especially community women, is now recognized as an integral component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, without which the objectives of the SDGs, the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Paris Agreement cannot be achieved.
- + Recognition of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities' land tenure rights are enshrined in the constitutions of several countries in Latin America, including Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Peru.
- + All six Mesoamerican countries in the analysis, as well as nine of the 10 South American countries, have at least one legal framework in place for recognizing collective land tenure rights. This suggests that targeted investments to promote and scale up implementation have the potential to achieve rapid progress.
- + In Panama, the rights of the Naso Tjër Di Indigenous People to over 160,000 hectares of land were recognized in 2020, setting a new precedent for the titling of Indigenous lands that overlap with protected areas. Guyana recognized the Kanashen Amerindian Protected Area in 2017, the first of its kind in the country, covering 3% of its land area.

But despite these positive developments, communities in Latin America experienced considerable threats of rollback during 2015–2020 and increases in legal recognition of communities' collective lands remain marginal to nonexistent in many countries.

Distribution of statutory land tenure in 16 countries in South America and Mesoamerica



Across the 16 countries analyzed, the area designated for Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities increased by just 4 Mha (from 3.0% of land in 2015 to 3.2% of land in 2020). The area owned by Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities increased by 17 Mha (from 16.7% of land across the region in 2015 to 17.6% of land in 2020).

	Country	Total Land Area	Land area legally recognized as owned by or designated for communities		Community lands where rights are not legally recognized	
			2020 Area (Mha)	% of land area	2020 Area (Mha)	% of land area
Mesoamerica	Costa Rica	5.11	0.33	6.46	0.80	15.71
	Guatemala	10.72	1.99	18.55	4.20	39.19
	Honduras	11.19	2.14	19.15	1.85	16.53
	Mexico	194.40	99.71	51.29	0.87	0.45
	Nicaragua	12.03	3.78	31.45	3.58	29.74
	Panama	7.41	1.90	25.65	0.80	10.73
	Mesoamerica Subtotal	240.85	109.85	45.61%	12.10	5.02%
South America	Argentina	273.67	3.56	1.30	11.44	4.18
	Bolivia	108.33	36.15	33.37	16.39	15.13
	Brazil	835.81	149.71	17.91	18.91	2.26
	Chile	74.35	2.65	3.57	10.55	14.19
	Colombia	110.95	39.84	35.91	9.43	8.50
	Ecuador	24.84	6.37	25.66	1.53	6.17
	Guyana	19.69	4.57	23.20	10.46	53.11
	Peru	128.00	41.89	32.72	30.95	24.18
	Suriname	15.60	0.00	0.00	10.50	67.31
	Venezuela	88.21	3.28	3.72	42.85	48.58
	South America Subtotal	1,679.44	288.02	17.15%	163.00	9.71%
Latin America Total	1,920.29	397.88	20.72%	175.10	9.12%	

Notable legal and political developments across Mesoamerica and South America since 2020

Two Indigenous Reserves covering

1.2 Mha

were recognized in Peru in 2021

10 Indigenous *Resguardos* covering nearly

300,000 ha

were titled in Colombia in 2022

Six Indigenous territories covering over

612,000 ha

were demarcated in Brazil in 2023

Constitutional recognition of Afromexican peoples as part of the pluricultural composition of Mexico in 2019, and their explicit inclusion in subsequent laws, opens up

new opportunities

for advancing Afro-descendant Peoples' collective rights

In Colombia, Francia Márquez was elected as the first Afro-Colombian Vice President in the country's history, and the administration has pledged to title

1 million hectares

of Afro-Colombian lands

Legal victories awaiting implementation

Communities' rights remain far from secure, and significant gaps in implementation remain:

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has ruled in favor of the land claims of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant Peoples in Argentina (Lhaka Honhat Association), Honduras (Garifuna Triunfo de la Cruz Community and its Members), and Suriname (Kaliña and Lokono Peoples), but national governments have not yet implemented these decisions.



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This data is from the Second Edition of *Who Owns the World's Land?* published by Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) in June 2023. You can download the full report at rightsandresources.org. For more information, please contact Chloe Ginsburg, cginsburg@rightsandresources.org or David Kroeker-Maus, dmaus@rightsandresources.org.