



RIGHTS AND RESOURCES INITIATIVE

Request for Proposals

Research Consultancy: Are carbon initiatives serving the interests of communities?

The Rights and Resources Initiative is requesting proposals for consulting services beginning **September 2026**. If interested in providing services to our organization, please review this request and submit a proposal by **August 30, 2026**.

About RRI:

The Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) is a global coalition of over 200 organizations dedicated to advancing the forest, land, and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, local communities, and the women within these groups. RRI leverages the power of its global coalition to amplify the voices of local peoples and proactively engage governments, multilateral institutions, and private sector actors to adopt institutional and market reforms that support the realization of rights. Its members capitalize on each other's strengths, expertise, and geographic reach to achieve solutions more effectively and efficiently. By advancing a strategic understanding of the global threats and opportunities resulting from insecure land and resource rights, RRI develops and promotes rights-based approaches to business and development and catalyzes effective solutions to scale rural tenure reform and enhance sustainable resource governance.

Background

In the context of growing public and private support for voluntary solutions over regulated emission reductions and the failure of developed countries to honor their financial pledges to poorer nations, carbon markets are increasingly promoted as a Pareto efficient pathway to resolving the climate crisis whilst generating urgently needed financing. For Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities who customarily own and manage the majority of the lands and territories targeted by land-based emission reduction schemes in the global south, carbon markets have the potential to generate both positive and negative impacts. Yet, despite sector-wide claims—across jurisdictional and project-based investments—of meeting or surpassing the highest standards for social and environmental integrity, the evidence supporting such ends remains fragmented, and uneven across regions, project types, legal contexts. As countries invariably turn their attention to market-based solutions to meet their climate commitments and financing needs, greater attention needs to be placed on understanding the actual impacts of these schemes on those who are most closely affected.

To strengthen rightsholder demands for equity and justice in the decisions and investments that affect their territorial and livelihood rights, and more effectively inform the future of market-based carbon transactions, RRI seeks a qualified professional or team to undertake a systematic global review of the documented evidence surrounding the positive and negative experiences of communities with carbon markets. Building on prior evidence of [persistent challenges in safeguarding local rights](#), the analysis should broaden the level of inquiry to include effects on livelihoods, recent evidence from a wide range of resources (including peer-reviewed studies, grey literature, relevant case law), analyses of project and jurisdictional approaches, and investments in all biome-types (i.e., forests, rangelands, grasslands, wetlands and other land-based emission reduction schemes such as bioenergy and carbon capture and storage schemes).

Hence, to better understand whether carbon initiatives truly serve the interests of communities, this call for proposals calls for systematic review of the dominant trends, evidence gaps, rights risks, and conditions under which carbon initiatives either benefit or undermine the wellbeing and rights of affected communities, including Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, local communities, and the women and youth associated with these communities.

Terms of Reference

RRI seeks a qualified consultant or consultant team to develop a concise literature review and research paper addressing the overarching question: **Are carbon initiatives truly serving the interests of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities?** The study should examine what benefits and harms have been documented, under what conditions positive outcomes occur, and where there are gaps in the evidence.

For this study, “carbon initiatives” should be understood broadly to include initiatives that generate carbon credits from project-level and jurisdictional REDD+, including voluntary carbon market projects, and Article 6-related initiatives across land-based interventions, independent of the biome-type involved. The study should include documented evidence stemming from all relevant initiatives, independent of their maturity or stage of implementation (i.e., planned, ongoing, completed, or abandoned interventions).

To assess the relative benefits and drawbacks of interventions as perceived by communities, analytical focus should be placed on evidence of community experiences relative to planned or anticipated results. In doing so, the study should develop a working model of what a successful carbon initiative looks like for communities and identify the conditions under which carbon initiatives tend to contribute to or undermine the rights and

wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities. This should include a set of criteria for evaluating community-centered success that considers rights, livelihoods, tenure security, participation, benefit sharing and compensation, cultural values, and community-defined well-being.

The final research paper, to the extent possible, should seek to understand global trends regarding the conditions under which carbon markets are benefiting or harming communities. The research paper should also serve as the potential basis for a future research proposal for a global community-led research initiative to document, analyze, and share their experiences with carbon markets.

Consultant Activities

The consultant will:

- Review existing previous meta analyses, including studies undertaken by RRI and its partners, to refine the research questions, analytical framework, geographic parameters, and workplan. The inception memo should also include a research strategy with proposed databases and source types, and inclusion and exclusion criteria.
- Conduct a targeted update of peer reviewed literature, grey literature, policy reports, media investigations, community and civil society documentation, and relevant case law, prioritizing newer sources while incorporating foundational sources where needed. Sources should include English sources as well as sources in other languages based on the consultant's language capabilities (French, Spanish, Portuguese, or other as appropriate).
- Develop an evidence matrix that would include the positive and negative outcomes of different carbon initiatives, key characteristics of the initiative (scale, type of initiative (project, jurisdictional, PES, etc), type of proponent, governance model, certification standard, status of initiative), and information on the source of evidence itself (type of source, method of production, relationship to carbon initiative).
- Assess evidence on the conditions under which carbon initiatives are assisting community wellbeing, respecting rights, supporting fair benefit sharing, enabling meaningful participation, respecting FPIC, and strengthening or undermining land, territorial, and carbon rights.
- Compare evidence from project-level carbon initiatives and jurisdictional REDD+ and other approaches, including where approaches differ in governance, benefit sharing, safeguards, and community participation.
- Participate in virtual check-in meetings with RRI as needed during the research and drafting process and revise deliverables based on consolidated feedback from RRI and key stakeholders.
- Prepare a standalone analytical paper capturing the key findings of the assessment that can also serve as the basis for a future funding proposal, including research gaps and follow up research questions.

Consultant Deliverables

- **Deliverable 1: Inception memo:** Inception memo should include refined research questions, analytical framework/research methodology, and proposed outline for research paper.
- **Deliverable 2: Updated Outline:** Methodology and outline incorporating all feedback received from Inception Memo.

- **Deliverable 3: Draft research paper:** draft paper capturing the key findings, including concise synthesis of recent academic, grey literature, policy, and case law, with an annotated bibliography and evidence matrix.
- **Deliverable 4: Final research paper:** final paper incorporating feedback from RRI and key stakeholders.

Proposed Timeline

September 2026-November 2026

Phase	Activities	Duration
Phase 1	Kickoff, document review, research question, scope, and methodology refinement, and development of inception memo (including proposed outline for research paper).	Deliverable 1 - 2 weeks
	Updated methodology and outline for paper based on feedback from RRI and relevant stakeholders.	Deliverable 2 - 1 week
Phase 2	Draft research paper, including updated literature review, annotated bibliography, and evidence matrix.	Deliverable 3 - 6 weeks
Phase 3	Incorporation of feedback from RRI and key stakeholders, revision of draft research paper, finalization research paper	Deliverable 4 3 weeks

Eligibility Criteria

Minimum Qualifications

- At least 5 years of experience conducting research or policy analysis related to climate finance, carbon markets, REDD+, land rights, Indigenous Peoples' rights, or community-based natural resource governance.
- Experience working with or alongside Indigenous Peoples', Afro-descendant Peoples', local community, women's rights, or territorial governance organizations.
- Prior experience conducting academic or policy-oriented research, including literature reviews, with the ability to synthesize complex academic and grey literature into clear, well-structured written outputs for policy or advocacy audiences.
- Demonstrated familiarity with rights-based approaches, including land and territorial tenure, carbon rights, FPIC or consultation standards, benefit sharing, grievance mechanisms, and community governance.
- Strong writing skills and ability to produce concise, well-structured, publication-quality English-language outputs.

Preferred Qualifications

- Ability to conduct research in at least one of the following languages: Spanish, French, or Portuguese.
- Familiarity with both project-level carbon initiatives and jurisdictional REDD+ or results-based climate finance.

Key Contract Terms

Contract Type

This will be a deliverable-based contract.

Expenses

No travel or fieldwork is anticipated under this initial scope. The consultant is responsible for including all expected costs in the financial proposal. If RRI later requests additional activities requiring expenses, those expenses must be approved in advance and documented according to RRI procedures.

All other projected costs/expenses must be included in the consultant's proposal. Consultant is responsible for ensuring that they have all required insurance, certifications, and/or licenses, and that they meet all legal requirements to provide services in the location where the work is being performed.

Equipment and Supplies

Unless stated otherwise in the proposal, the consultant is responsible for providing all equipment, software, and/or supplies required to perform the services.

Budget

The anticipated budget for this project is up to US\$20,000-\$25,000.

Cost reasonableness and comparison will be used to evaluate proposals. We encourage submissions to reflect value for money.

Submission Requirements Proposal must include:

- **Technical proposal** (up to 3 pages) describing the consultant's understanding of the scope, proposed approach, methodology, and how rights-based and community-led principles will be reflected in the work.
- **Proposed workplan** and deliverable schedule aligned with the deliverables above.
- **CV or resume** for the lead consultant and, if applicable, team members. CVs should be no longer than 2 pages each.
- **One or two relevant writing samples**, preferably demonstrating literature review, policy analysis, carbon market, land rights, or Indigenous/community rights research experience.
- **Financial proposal** in U.S. dollars showing the total fixed price and proposed payment schedule by deliverable based on estimated level of effort.

Please submit your proposal and required documents by email to: tpaterson@rightsandresources.org with the subject line "Proposal: Community Experiences with Carbon Initiatives."

The deadline for submission is 5:00pm ET on August 30.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be scored based on the following parameters:

- Proposed approach and methodology (35%)
- Consultant work history and experience (20%)
- Understanding of the sector, including carbon markets, REDD+, land rights, FPIC, benefit sharing, and Indigenous and community rights issues (15%)
- Quality of writing samples (5%)
- Costs (25%)

Ethical Behavior

RRI is committed to maintaining the highest standards of integrity, transparency, and ethical conduct in the procurement process. We expect all vendors and consultants to adhere to ethical business practices and comply with applicable laws and regulations. Any attempt to influence the procurement process through unethical means, including but not limited to fraud, bribery, or conflicts of interest, will result in immediate disqualification.

RRI's procurement processes are fair and open and allow all vendors/consultants equal opportunity to win our business. If any individual or organization becomes aware of potential violations of ethical standards related to this procurement process, we encourage prompt reporting to our hotline at www.lighthouse-services.com/rightsandresources. By submitting a proposal, the bidder acknowledges this commitment and agrees to conduct all interactions with RRI in an ethical and transparent manner.