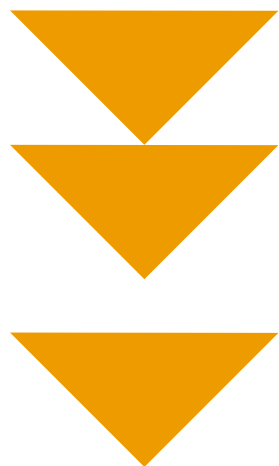


20TH ANNIVERSARY REPORT



20 *years*
IN SOLIDARITY
FOR CHANGE

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Cover photos, clockwise from top right:

Women gather to prepare food outside of Tebat Pulau, Sumatra, Indonesia.

Photo by Jacob Maentz for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2022.

Indigenous Ashaninka women from the Waypancuni community, Peru.

Photo by Juan Llasca for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.

A Maasai man of the Maji Moto Group Ranch in Kenya stands near his cattle.

Photo by Tony Wild Photography for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2023.



FOREWORD

By Solange Bandiaky-Badji and Mina Setra

Dear friends,

It is a sincere joy to write these lines as we mark 20 years of the Rights and Resources Initiative. Twenty years of solidarity to build a more just and sustainable planet for Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant Peoples. Twenty years of carving out space, changing norms, and challenging legal systems. This isn't just about celebrating an institution, but a movement built and nurtured by our communities—for this planet and all of its peoples.



The world looks very different for Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant Peoples today than it did in 2005, when RRI was born out of a bold idea that seemed practically utopian at the time: to position Indigenous Peoples and local communities as a central pillar of global development, climate action, and conservation.

It was utopian because at that time, while each of these groups was advocating for self-determination, community rights remained largely obscure in legislation as well as to human rights and environmental organizations. Today, we have come a long way from that. Between 2015 and 2020, the area legally designated for and owned by Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities increased [by more than 100 million hectares](#). Their contributions to conservation and climate change, once neglected by governments and international environmental organizations alike, are now clear components of the UN's climate and biodiversity frameworks. Their rights, once invisible to corporations and investors, are now part of major international accountability frameworks.

But perhaps most importantly, RRI's member organizations, once disconnected from each other, are monumentally stronger through

global and regional alliances we all built together. Despite once fighting for the bare minimum of public and private funding support, many now lead their own granting mechanisms like the Nusantara Fund in Indonesia, the Shandia Platform, and the Mesoamerican Territorial Fund.

There are also more women than ever before leading these changes. Women's voices and leadership in communities, governments, and global development fora—once a box to check—have become an undeniable cornerstone of collective rights discourse.

As the first generation of women to occupy leadership roles in our own organizations, we are inspired by the courageous women in the RRI coalition. Whether it's the women occupying seats in Nepal's Parliament to represent local forest communities or those tirelessly patrolling the forests of West Kalimantan to stop deforestation; the ones fighting industrial encroachment to protect the Amazon rainforest or carving out gender provisions in their national land policies in the DRC and Liberia—we are proud to follow their lead.

A handful of examples don't do justice to all that has been accomplished by Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities and their allies with little support from governments and others. **This report is a small snapshot of what we have achieved while working together, and an inkling of what we can achieve with the right resources and capacity.**

No one alone can take credit for the advances communities have made in the last 20 years. They are the real heroes of their generational struggles against marginalization and oppression. But by raising global ambition, mobilizing their mutual trust and solidarity, and increasing their access to the highest levels of political, climate, and corporate decision-making, our coalition can be proud of the role it has played in strengthening these struggles and those driving them.

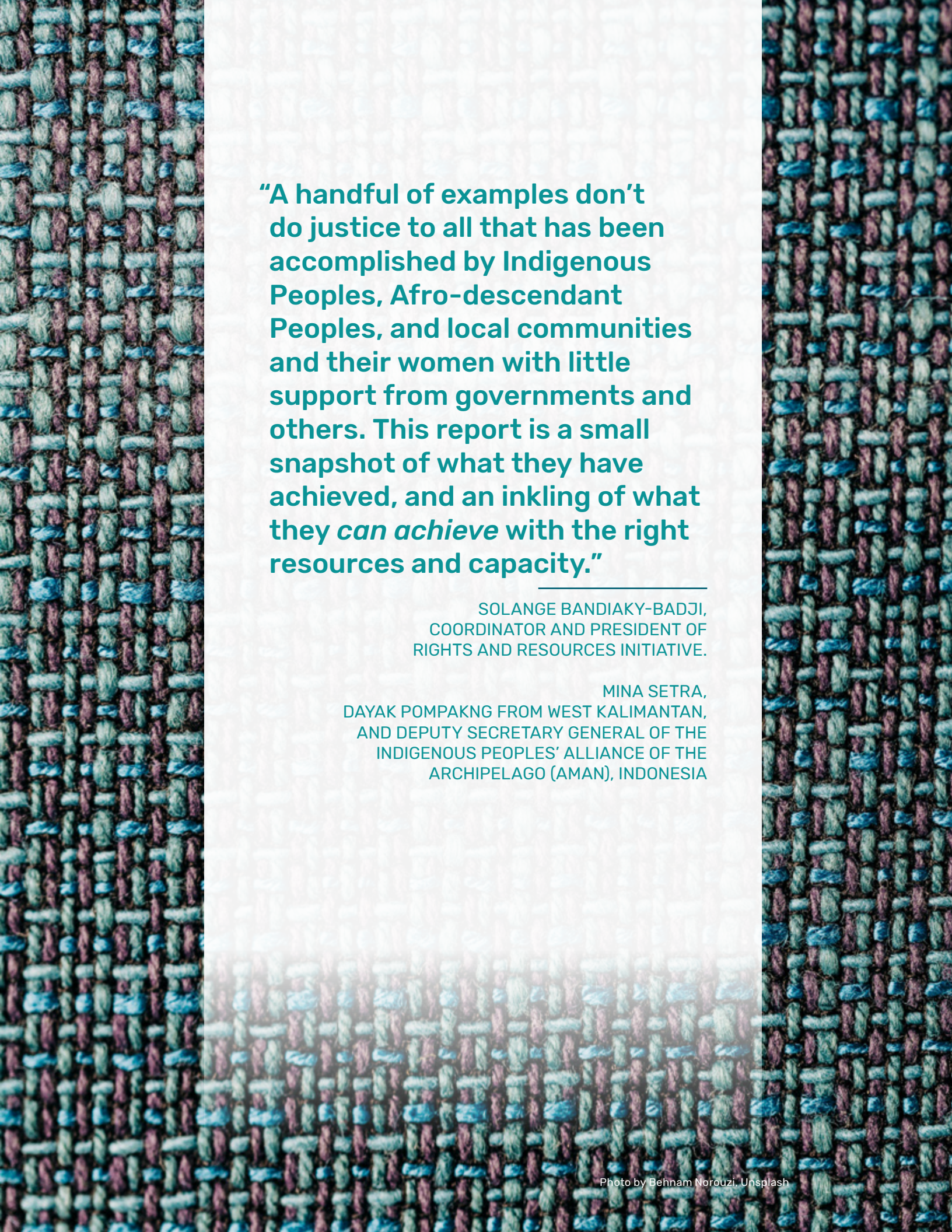
RRI, which began with just five institutions in 2005, is today over 200 members strong, including Indigenous networks, Afro-descendant leaders, women and youth activists, research scientists, foresters, and allies across the world. **As the world's largest solidarity network for Indigenous, local community, and Afro-descendant rights today, this report is a celebration of how far we have come as a unified force for change.** It is a testament to what our journey truly amounts to: the power of collective action and the common spirit of responsibility and ancestral wisdom taught so well by our elders—so clearly needed in today's divided and turbulent world.

In solidarity,

Solange and Mina

Solange Bandiaky-Badji is the Coordinator and President of Rights and Resources Initiative.

Mina Setra is Indigenous Dayak Pompakng from West Kalimantan, Indonesia, and Deputy Secretary General of the Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN).



“A handful of examples don’t do justice to all that has been accomplished by Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities and their women with little support from governments and others. This report is a small snapshot of what they have achieved, and an inkling of what they *can achieve* with the right resources and capacity.”

SOLANGE BANDIAKY-BADJI,
COORDINATOR AND PRESIDENT OF
RIGHTS AND RESOURCES INITIATIVE.

MINA SETRA,
DAYAK POMPAKNG FROM WEST KALIMANTAN,
AND DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ ALLIANCE OF THE
ARCHIPELAGO (AMAN), INDONESIA

INTRODUCTION: TWENTY YEARS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION AND THE ROAD AHEAD

Twenty years ago, Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities were defending their lands, preserving biodiversity, and resisting the systems that sought to displace them. But despite stewarding over half of the world's land, their struggles were invisible to their governments, their voices not respected in laws and policies, and their rights sidelined in international development assistance, climate action, and conservation. The Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) was created in 2005 in response: not to replace collective rights movements, but to stand with them as a solidarity network that would open doors, channel resources, and catalyze systemic change from policy to implementation.

This report marks a moment of reflection and recommitment. It traces the arc of a global coalition --from its ambitious early targets for legal reforms to precedent-setting court victories and the creation of global financing mechanisms. It offers a sweeping view of the progress made and an honest look at the work still to be done. It centers the voices of the men, women, and youth on the front lines to remind us that lasting change is never top-down; it is cultivated in community and carried forward across generations.

RRI is a coalition of over 200 organizations across regions, sectors, and disciplines—Indigenous federations, women's associations, youth movements, Afro-descendant networks, research institutions, and social justice organizations. It has accelerated the movement of collective tenure rights from the margins to the center of sustainable development, conservation, climate, and human rights agendas, and it has done so through thoughtful approaches that encour-

age ambition and hope, and demonstrate what's possible when donors, governments, policymakers, and private sector actors work with grassroots leaders for systemic changes at all levels.

At the heart of RRI's strategy has been the understanding that secure tenure underpins self-determination, dignity, climate resilience, and gender justice. It is also rooted in the idea that rights don't stop at legal reform—rights without the ability to benefit from resources are unsustainable.

Today, Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities legally own over [11 percent of land](#) across 73 countries, encompassing over 85 percent of the world's land area. Despite this, their tenure rights remain precarious even where legal recognition is in place. Global Witness reports that [nearly 2,000](#) land and environmental defender s were killed between 2012 and 2022, many while protecting their territories from encroachment or extraction. And despite broad recognition of their role in climate solutions, they still receive [little direct support](#) from donors for their tenure, climate, and conservation projects. This disparity underscores the ongoing urgent need for transformative approaches that ensure that those most affected by climate change are at the forefront of decision-making and resource allocation.

Over the last 20 years, RRI's strategy has been grounded in five key pillars: i) raising ambitions for change at the national and global levels ii) building credible evidence and analysis; iii) connecting key actors -- including national and regional movements; iv) incubating innovative solutions and networks; and v) channeling resources to help communities respond to threats and opportunities.

RRI's strategic analyses have provided evidence-based foundations for policy shifts in international policy arenas. From its global data sets on Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' legally recognized forests (*[Who Owns the World's Forests?](#)* and *[Who Owns the World's Land?](#)*), to data on [forest communities' rights to carbon](#) on their territories and new benchmarks on legally recognizing women's forest tenure rights (*[Resilience and Resistance](#)*), RRI's analyses have informed national land laws, multilateral donor strategies, and local advocacy for policy reforms.



Photo taken during the religious celebration in honor of Yemanjá, Queen of the Water, an entity revered by African-based religions in Salvador, Brazil.
Photo by Rafael Martins for Rights and Resources Initiative.

Regionally, these included a groundbreaking report analyzing the state of [rights-based conservation](#) in Asia; in Latin America, a historic mapping of [Afro-descendant Peoples' territories](#) that coincide with critical biodiversity hotspots; a first tenure baseline study for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); and a series of timely [analyses](#) mapping Liberia's community lands to equip activists with data to advocate for legal reforms.

These analyses were effective because they not only identified the changes desired by communities, but also the strategic leverage points for interventions needed to bring those changes to life.

In tandem, RRI cultivated unique spaces for dialogue and coordination between communities and the broad ecosystem of actors impacting them: from forest ministries and national land agencies to investors and donors. At UNFCCC COP26 in 2021, [Path to Scale](#)—RRI's network for funders' intermediaries and allies—played a key role in catalyzing the \$1.7 billion donor pledge to advance forest tenure rights in tropical countries. At the 2024 Convention on Biological Diversity (COP16) in Cali, Colombia, RRI's mapping of Afro-descendant Peoples' lands and support over the last 13 years to their broader movement in Latin America and the Caribbean encouraged the [formal recognition of Afro-descendant Peoples](#) in Article 8(j), formally granting them political influence in negotiations and access to international financing.

In Africa, RRI spearheaded the establishment of the African Land Institutions Network for Community Rights ([ALIN](#)), which brings together land agencies from across the continent to share strategies and accelerate reforms that recognize community tenure rights. In Indonesia, RRI helped create the Tenure Coalition, a key player that successfully engaged with the Indonesian government and civil society for a decade to stall legislation that could negatively impact community land tenure.

The coalition's work in its focus countries operated in close synergy with its global interventions, leveraging each other's progress. In Liberia, RRI contributed to the [passage and implementation](#) of the 2009 Community Rights law and the landmark 2018 Land Rights Act, two of Africa's most progressive land laws. In Indonesia, RRI supported Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN) in the lead-up to the 2013 Constitutional Court ruling (MK35), which redefined customary forests as distinct from state lands. In Peru, RRI worked with the Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana (AIDESEP) to title community lands and install satellite-linked monitoring hubs. In the DRC, coalition members supported the shaping of its historic [Law on the Rights of Indigenous Pygmy Peoples](#), National Land Policy, and a [Land-Use Planning Law](#) — all of which contain unprecedented protections for communities and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).

RRI's interventions in countries went beyond legal reform; they encompassed communities' climate, gender justice, conservation, and livelihoods projects. Some examples include supporting an Afro-descendant Women's Association in Colombia to establish 10,000 hectares of community-led conservation areas; and local women in Sumatra, Indonesia to launch their non-timber forest enterpris-

es in a protected park. From training communities in sustainable agriculture to amplifying their national advocacy, these wide-ranging projects have always been guided by the communities' own priorities. They also constantly benefitted from and informed RRI's analyses, networks, and tools.

RRI has also created and incubated unique institutions, tools, and networks that now drive global change in their own right. Each was borne out of a need for a new, non-colonial and self-sustaining architecture of global support for Indigenous Peoples and local communities. One of these was the International Land and Forest Tenure Facility, created in response to a demand by the coalition for greater levels of funding to implement rights recognition in countries with existing legal frameworks. In 2024 alone, the Tenure Facility funded 33 projects in 20 countries, expanding collective tenure reforms on over 33 million hectares.

The Community Land Rights Climate and Conservation Finance Initiative (CLARIFI) was another institutional innovation in community finance. Officially aunched by RRI and Campaign for Nature in 2022, it began channeling direct, flexible and innovative finance for community-led conservation and rights initiatives across the world.

CLARIFI was preceded by the Strategic Response Mechanism (SRM), a financial mechanism designed by RRI in 2008 to provide grants that enable communities to respond quickly to unforeseen opportunities and threats. It has since funded over 220 timely interventions in 35 countries—supporting communities' litigation, advocacy, conservation, and movement-building projects. From enabling Indigenous-led conservation zones in Cameroon to winning lawsuits against mining in Guatemala and enshrining Indigenous conservation methods into law in Nepal, the SRM has ensured rapid support for communities in moments of crisis.

Among the many groundbreaking tools created by RRI to support advocates and policy-makers was LandMark, which quickly became the go-to global platform for mapping Indigenous and local community lands and visualizing over a third of the world as subject to collective tenure systems. RRI also helped launch Land Rights Now, a global campaigning platform co-convened with Oxfam and the



Shree Bindeswari Community Forest User Group near Kathmandu, Nepal. Names of the women photographed from left to right): Ganga, Lila, Sita, Jayanti, Yashoda.

Photo by Asha Stuart for Rights and Resources Initiative. March 2025.

International Land Coalition to accelerate recognition of community land rights around the world.

Increasingly over the years, gender justice has become a vital cross-cutting theme across RRI's advocacy and research, given women's vital role in building communities' resilience to climate change and other development crises. In Nepal, women's federations now lead forest governance and land policy reform. In the DRC and Liberia, coalition members have successfully pushed for legal reforms to guarantee women's inheritance and decision-making rights for the first time. And in 2022, to amplify community women's voices and direct funding access in global climate and conservation arenas, the Women in Global South Alliance (WiGSA) was launched, mobilizing 23 grassroots women's organizations and networks from 59 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America

As RRI enters its third decade, the stakes are high, but so is the momentum. **Its mission is to support Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities' struggles and self-determined development by promoting greater global commitment and action toward policy, market, and legal reforms that secure their rights to own, control, and benefit from natural resources, lands, and forests.** RRI's two global indicators of progress are:

- At least half of low- and middle-income countries' forest areas are owned by or designated for use by communities by 2030; and
- Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities—including the women within them—have recognized rights to manage, conserve, use, and trade forest products and services in 100 percent of the area under their ownership or designated use by 2030.

Between 2020 and 2030, RRI's aims to secure 400 million additional hectares of Indigenous and community forests; to ensure that communities—especially women and youth—can benefit from their ecosystem products and services while protecting themselves from rollback, land-grabbing, and criminalization. This requires at least \$10 billion in new funding in support of this agenda. Achieving these targets is the first step: it must be followed by a dramatic scaling up of actions to make rightsholders key contributors to the 2050 global transformation agenda.

The collective rights movement has undeniably changed since 2005, whether it's in the new laws passed by countries, greater annual funding for communities, or unprecedented visibility in climate and conservation agendas. This change has been driven by rightsholders themselves, who continue to bravely advocate for their rights and hold governments and corporations accountable. By raising global ambition, mobilizing mutual trust and solidarity, and strengthening their access to the highest levels of decision makers, the RRI coalition is proud to have played a role in their success. Twenty years on, the community rights struggle remains unfinished, but it is also unmistakably alive.

Chhekampar Village of Tsum Nubri within the Shyagya Zone, Nepal. In 2023, the Indigenous Tsum Nubri community won legal recognition for its traditional conservation practice of "Shagya," which prohibits violence against all species.
Photo by Center for Indigenous Peoples' Research and Development.



Indigenous woman learns to weave at Maria
Community Indigenous School, Indonesia.
Photo by Rachel Watson for Rights and Resources
Initiative, 2024.



CLOSING THE GAP: A JOURNEY OF TWO DECADES

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities in the Global South were organizing to defend their rights. They were making historic legal advancements in a few countries like the Philippines, Bolivia, Colombia, Tanzania, and Uganda—but despite these milestones, their rights remained largely unrecognized in national laws as well as global development, forest, and climate agendas. These were hard-fought victories, achieved by communities that had long resisted displacement and invisibility, but many of their gains remained on paper, vulnerable to rollback, and disconnected from global policy agendas.

At the same time, development narratives were at a tipping point. Emerging global discourses on rural poverty, deforestation, and climate had rarely placed communities at the center, but with forests increasingly seen as investment opportunities and a stabilizing force for the climate, some development actors saw the absence of community tenure as a growing threat. But despite widespread environmental degradation and violent conflict between communities and external actors threatening their lands and livelihoods, the issue was largely ignored by the global development community, deemed too political for intervention.

RRI was born out of this gap. It was formally launched in 2005, bringing together like-minded institutions and individuals who were determined to uplift the isolated struggles of millions across the Global South and raise global awareness and ambition to support them.

These included Forest Trends (United States), which provided the coalition its first home; the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR, Indonesia); the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); RECOFTC, the center for people and forests (Thailand); the Central American Indigenous and Peasant Coordination Association for Community Agroforestry (Costa Rica); and the Foundation for People and Community Development (Papua New Guinea).

These founding institutions empowered RRI's three co-founders—Arvind Khare, Andy White, and Augusta Molnar—to establish the coalition and capitalize upon its members' fearless pursuit of collective tenure reforms. Arvind, Andy, and Augusta recognized the power of collective action; of consolidating dynamic yet isolated movements and creating a bigger force for change. Over the next 15 years, they would go on to lead RRI using strictly bottom-up and collaborative approaches; their priorities guided and shaped by rightsholders' own priorities..

Arvind, a natural resource management specialist who had worked extensively on forest tenure and legal reform in his native India, helped shape RRI's political analysis of rights as a question of power, not just policy. His previous work had focused on policy analysis and development in infrastructure, forestry, social and tribal development, and watershed sectors for India's state and central governments. Just before RRI, Arvind had also chaired the External Advisory Group of the World Bank on Forest Sector Strategy Implementation.

Andy had worked for years with community organizations in Haiti, and then with the World

“Bringing together resources and voices allowed us to have a much bigger impact than a single NGO could ever achieve.”

ARVIND KHARE,
CO-FOUNDER, RRI



From right to left: Andy White, Augusta Molnar, and Arvind Khare tell the story of RRI's founding.
Photo by 4th and C for RRI.

“The context we founded RRI in was that Indigenous Peoples and local communities were largely invisible to international development and forest sectors. We created the coalition to help make them more visible, to create more political space for them.”

ANDY WHITE,
CO-FOUNDER, RRI

Bank, International Food Policy Institute, the Inter-American Foundation, and Forest Trends. From both outside and inside the system, he saw how deeply entrenched patterns of exclusion were and how the conventional development organizations and NGOs were not designed to recognize or support local organizations, much less the recognition of their land rights and sovereignty.

For Augusta, an anthropologist by training, RRI's founding was deeply informed by decades of work in community forestry, particularly in Nepal, Mexico, and Central America. Augusta had worked with the World Bank for over 20 years, where her research and advocacy had long challenged top-down conservation and forestry models that failed to recognize the legitimacy of community land governance.

This founding team helped define what RRI would become: a coalition and a strategic catalyst. From the start, RRI aimed to be lean, fast, and focused by combining strategic analysis, high-level convening, and responsive funding to support rightsholder-led movements. It was a model deliberately designed to avoid the bureaucratic slowdowns and institutional silos that had undermined so many reform efforts before.

A set of passionate organizational leaders chipped in the early days to help the coalition set up its secretariat. By contributing their guidance, organizational logos, and endorsements, they gave RRI credibility with both communities and donors and a solid ground to take off. These leaders were David Kaimowitz, Stewart Maginnis, Michael Jenkins, Yam Malla, Yati Bun, and Alberto Chinchilla.

RRI's intellectual direction was also shaped by a wide circle of researchers, forest scientists, and movement thinkers. Among them were **Deborah Barry**, a rural development and environment specialist who launched RRI's work in Latin America; **Owen Lynch**, a lawyer who created its framework for including community land rights in global tenure tracking; Ghanaian civil rights lawyer **Kyeretwie Opoku**; and **Doris Capistrano**, an expert on natural resource governance who chaired RRI's first Board of Directors.

Liz Alden Wily, one of RRI's first research Fellows and a land tenure specialist, also helped strengthen the coalition's understanding of the relationship between legal systems and collective action and catalyzed the creation of the LandMark mapping platform. Her insight underscored the need not just for recognition on paper, but for enduring political strength and community mobilization to realize those rights.

"Our job was to connect local struggles with international mechanisms, to bring the world's focus to these communities. That's how we made change."

AUGUSTA MOLNAR,
CO-FOUNDER, RRI

"RRI recognized that legal frameworks, while essential, needed the force of collective action behind them to work," said Wily.

From its first convening in Stockholm in 2004 and the public launch of the coalition in 2005, RRI set out to center community tenure in

What are Tenure Rights?

Community-based tenure denotes "arrangements in which the right to own or govern land and/or natural resources (such as freshwater) is held at the community level by Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and/or local communities," whether or not these arrangements are legally recognized. Throughout this report, we use "tenure rights" in an all-encompassing manner to discuss communities' rights across all ecosystems—which may include lands, forests, territories, freshwater, wetlands, and/or rangelands.



national and global debates. It amplified the evidence that communities are the most effective stewards of the world's ecosystems. It challenged the dominant assumption that governments or markets alone should define the future of rural lands. And it created the political and financial space for new coalitions to form—coalitions that would go on to change law, shift funding flows, and unlock long-stalled reforms.

Importantly, this founding period coincided with a growing international push around forests—first through conservation, then increasingly through climate finance. RRI anticipated the risks of these agendas if they continued to ignore tenure rights. As the international community began to invest billions into REDD+ and forest-based climate mitigation, RRI worked to ensure that rightsholders would not be pushed aside in the name of “green growth.”

RRI's earliest work in countries at various critical junctures of community rights reform set the grounds for pivotal victories years later. Whether it was Liberia's 2018 Land Rights Act or restoring collective titling for Afro-descendant Peoples in the Caribbean Island of Barú, Colombia, the groundwork was set through decades of analysis, advocacy by coalition members, and creating spaces for community leaders to connect directly with policymakers. This model

of coordinated analyses, strategic dialogue, and coalition-led communications gave it unusual influence in national and global spaces.

RRI broke new ground by connecting evidence to influence in real time. Coalition members worked together to analyze legal gaps and deliver timely guidance to governments and donors. Early publications laid out a clear narrative: securing community tenure was not only a matter of justice but a prerequisite for sustainable development, conservation, and climate resilience.

Over the next two decades, the coalition would grow to over 200 organizations. It would support legal and policy reforms in over 35 countries, incubate new institutions and networks like the Tenure Facility, Interlaken Group, the Women in Global South Alliance, Path to Scale, the Africa Land Institutions Networks (ALIN), LandMark, and the Land Rights Now campaigning platform, and contribute to securing the legal recognition of millions of hectares of community land.

But the foundations were laid in those early years—by a small group of individuals and institutions who knew that collective land and resource rights were not an optional add-on, but the condition for a more just and sustainable future.

IN MEMORIAM

Owen J. Lynch (1953–2024)

Owen J. Lynch was a lawyer, activist, former RRI Fellow, and an early pillar of the now global movement to legally recognize Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' land rights. He became an internationally influential lawyer and activist after falling in love with the people of the Philippines while serving as a Peace Corps volunteer from 1980 to 1984, responding to Filipino Indigenous communities' demands for legal assistance to secure their land rights.

Owen and his passionate students from the University of the Philippines College of Law, where he taught for nearly a decade, were architects of the legal strategy to [recognize Indigenous Peoples' rights](#) in the Philippines. They also championed a case eventually upheld by the Supreme Court in 2000. It was the first time in Asia that a national government legally recognized Indigenous Peoples' territorial rights.

For over 30 years, Owen fostered and mentored public interest legal organizations in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, supporting their work with advice, funding, and connections. His conceptual framework of "community-based property rights" was the inspiration for the report [Who Owns the World's Forests?](#) by Forest Trends and CIEL in 2002, which generated wide public awareness of the growing role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Owen will be remembered not only for his long list of achievements in supporting marginalized communities, but also for his kindness, generosity, and unconditional love of others. One of his favorite sayings was, *"It's better to light a flame than to curse the darkness."* Owen lived by this truth and inspired many to light their own flames and fight the darkness.

Yati Bun (* - 2014)

Yati Bun was a pioneering advocate for community forestry and enterprises in the earliest days of the international sustainable forestry movement. He was a fearless pathbreaker in his native country of Papua New Guinea where he founded the Foundation for People and Community Development (FPCD), calling out the illegal logging industry and corrupt government actors, and arguing for community-led forestry and development.

Bun served on the Boards of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which he helped co-found and the Civil Society Advisory Group of the International Timber Trade Organization. He also helped found RRI, with FPCD becoming one of its first partner organizations.

Yati passed away suddenly on February 14, 2014 while attending an FSC meeting in Mexico. He is fondly remembered for his cheerful demeanor, generosity, and unique ability to grasp the realities of communities in other geographies despite living so far east.

Indigenous Pygmy man in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Congo Basin.
Photo by EnviroNews RDC for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.



A LEGACY OF CHANGE 2005–2025

RRI's work is grounded in the conviction that locally driven solutions and strong legal protections are essential for lasting change. As it marks its 20th anniversary, it recommits to scaling its impact by mobilizing youth, consolidating hard-won gains, channeling resources where needed, advocating for more direct funding to local organizations and women, and amplifying movements.

Over two decades, RRI has played a pivotal role in reshaping the global landscape of tenure rights. From conducting timely analyses and forming grassroots partnerships to informing policy frameworks and changing narratives around communities' contributions, it has put land, forest, and resource rights at the center of equitable climate, conservation, economic, and human rights solutions.

But no program stands alone: RRI's strategic analyses are catalysts for political action; its data empowers champions on the ground and in governments; and its global and regional convenings create momentum for accelerating reforms and action at the country level.



Building the Evidence Base

RRI's timely analyses have laid the foundation for global shifts in how equity, tenure, climate, and conservation actions are understood and addressed. They have often acted as catalysts for political action plans to create long-lasting changes at local and global levels.

Prior to RRI's founding, Forest Trends published a groundbreaking report, [Who Owns the World's Forests?](#) (2002), authored by Alejandra Martin and Andy White. This report provided the first-ever global data set on the distribution of forest tenure inclusive of communities' ownership and management rights. It provided



Top: Community women carry water in canteens on their heads, India.

Middle: Handicrafts created by the Indigenous Ipeti-Emberá community of Panama. Photo by Tova Katzman for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2023.

Bottom: A drone photo of a village customary forest of the Ipeti-Emberá community, Panama. Photo by Asha Stuart for Rights and Resources Initiative. March 2025.

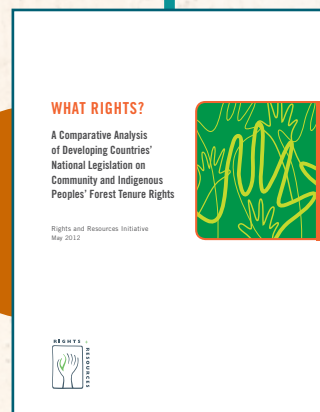
TENURE TRACKING: FLAGSHIP REPORTS

2002



Who Owns the World's Forests?

2012



What Rights?

2014



What Future for Reform?

2015



Who Owns the World's Land? (1st edition)

2018



At a Crossroads

2017



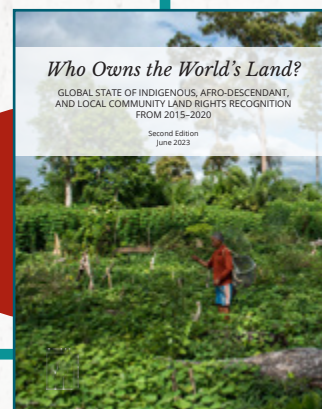
Power and Potential

2020



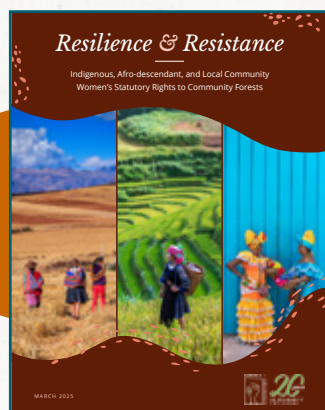
Whose Water?

2023



Who Owns the World's Land? (2nd edition)

2025



Resilience & Resistance

a framework for monitoring trends in forest tenure as an accountability mechanism for governments. With its founding, RRI not only took charge of maintaining and updating this critical resource but also expanded its depth and reach over time.

Today, RRI's global Tenure Tracking data monitors the strength, content, and gender-sensitivity of communities' recognized natural resource rights.

In 2012, coinciding with the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Forests and Fisheries (VGGT), [What Rights?](#) provided an analytical framework for monitoring the communities' bundle of rights to community forests. By analyzing global trends through both qualitative and quantitative analyses, [What Future for Reform?](#) (2014) challenged assumptions about the real pace of recognition. Both quickly became a cornerstone for both policy advocacy and donor strategies.

At the same time, RRI was building a business case for respecting community tenure through analyses quantifying risks to investors from unresolved tenure conflict and developing guidance for companies on how to respect rights, mitigate tenure risk, and operationalize the VGGT.

In 2014, RRI and the World Resources Institute published [Securing Rights, Combating Climate Change](#), framing collective tenure as not just a justice issue but a climate imperative. Subsequent iterations leveraged LandMark and RRI Tenure Tracking data in collaboration with Woodwell Climate Research Center, Environmental Defense Fund, the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities, and others to estimate carbon stored in community forests and other lands.

RRI dramatically expanded its geographic monitoring scope in 2015 with [Who Owns the World's Land?](#)—the first global baseline of Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' land rights in over 60 countries. This report exposed the vast discrepancy between customary tenure and

statutory recognition, serving as a catalyst for legal reform, donor funding, and international attention. Another analysis of global forest tenure trends, [At a Crossroads](#) (2018), explored this gap's implications, estimating that implementation of existing laws in just a handful of countries could lead to the recognition of 175 million additional hectares of community lands.

In 2017 and 2020, RRI expanded its Tenure Tracking initiative by developing innovative frameworks to analyze Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's rights to community forests and resources ([Power and Potential](#)), and how communities legally access and govern freshwater ([Whose Water?](#)). Developed with the Environmental Law Institute, that report rekindled global discussions around the importance of water tenure.

In 2020, as the world grappled with the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, RRI published two groundbreaking reports: [The Opportunity Framework](#) and [Rights-based Conservation: The Path to Preserving Earth's Biological and Cultural Diversity?](#) The Opportunity Framework delivered national governments, donors, rightsholders, and their allies strategic guidance on opportunities and entry points for scaling up collective land rights in tropical forested countries. It also enabled open-access tracking of global progress on local peoples' collective rights.

The report on rights-based conservation estimated that over 1.65 billion Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant Peoples live in critical biodiversity hotspots. It analyzed national-level evidence to demonstrate the urgent need to replace colonial conservation models with community rights-based approaches to prevent a global biodiversity collapse.

In 2022, [Funding with Purpose](#) outlined clear “fit for purpose” criteria for donors to ensure that funding for local organizations was mutually accountable, flexible and long-term, gender inclusive, and timely and accessible. This report laid the groundwork for the launch of the [Path](#)

[to Scale Funding Dashboard](#) in collaboration with Rainforest Foundation Norway, an innovative tool for donors, NGOs, and rightsholders to identify gaps and opportunities in communities' projects to secure rights and combat the dual climate and biodiversity crises. The Dashboard is now informing an ongoing bottom-up re-research effort led by WiGSA, which assesses the level of funding reaching grassroots community women's organizations.

In 2023, the second edition of [Who Owns the World's Land?](#) expanded RRI's scope to 73 countries and 85 percent of the world's land, offering deeper insights into the legal status of rights. That same year, RRI published a rich analysis of the vibrant Indigenous and community youth movement in Asia. [Learning and Living Our Elders' Wisdom](#) captured youth voices from five Asian countries, showing how ancestral knowledge and mentorship are fueling a new generation of land defenders.

Later that year, another pathbreaking study mapping [Afro-descendant Peoples' Territories in Biodiversity Hotspots across Latin America and the Caribbean](#) identified the severe gap in their collective land tenure rights, creating a significant shift in the discourse surrounding their long-neglected contributions to climate and conservation efforts.

Earlier this year, RRI's update to its 2017 study on Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's community forest rights, [Resilience and Resistance](#), shined a light on the limited progress made on achieving gender justice. It revealed that despite some legal advancements in community women's recognition, not a single country is meeting its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to recognize and protect their membership, governance, inheritance, and dispute resolution rights.

Together, these analyses and others across RRI's focus regions have strengthened the global



An Indigenous woman in Peru stands in the forest.

evidence base on community rights, shaped policy discourse and mobilized new champions.



Convening and Connecting

RRI's unique ability to bring diverse stakeholders together—community leaders, national governments, civil society networks, and private sector actors—has led to landmark policy shifts on community rights on both national and global scales.

At national and regional levels, RRI's convenings, always instigated and co-developed by local organizations, have capitalized on key political moments, created spaces for candid cross-sectoral dialogue, shared critical analyses, and challenged conventional development models.

In China between 2005 and 2008, RRI co-developed a series of analyses and convenings with the State Forestry Administration and the Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy at Peking University. These analyses deepened the country's historic collective forest tenure reform process initiated in 2005, which had strengthened the collective land rights of at

least 300 million people. Another major regional conference in 2008 helped the Chinese forestry department to improve its regulatory framework and provided a rare opportunity for international participants to learn from China's tenure reform experience.

In 2009, for the first time in Central and West Africa, a major conference in Yaoundé, Cameroon assembled government leaders, communities, traditional authorities, and donors to set out a time-bound plan for systematically expanding community forest tenure and enterprise in Africa. Co-organized with local partners in Cameroon and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), it shared undeniable evidence showing that African communities had far less control over their lands than those in other tropical nations, which led to unprecedented commitments from forest and land agencies and parliamentarians to support forest tenure.



Indigenous women farmers stand in rice fields, Vietnam.
Photo by iStock.

In 2011, coalition members in Indonesia co-organized a major convening on forest tenure governance and enterprise in Lombok with ITTO and the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry. It contributed to a historic declaration by the Indonesian government to launch a long-awaited forest tenure reform process, the result of a long-standing struggle by AMAN and other Indigenous organizations. While the country's Indigenous rights bill has [remained stalled](#) for over a decade, this convening was a catalytic moment for the Indigenous movement and a precursor to its greater visibility and engagement in the country's politically fluid post-Suharto years.

Across Africa, RRI has organized and supported high-level convenings that have reinforced regional leadership for years. Since 2017, RRI has spearheaded and co-hosted the [ALIN](#) conferences in Ghana, Madagascar, Togo, and Tanzania. ALIN is a community of practice that brings together national land agencies to reinforce capacities, foster dialogue, and promote information sharing, serving as an accountability mechanism to measure progress toward securing community rights. In the Republic of Congo

in May 2023, the Network of Indigenous and Local Populations for the Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa (REPALEAC) co-convened the [First Forum of Indigenous and Local Community Women in Central Africa and the Congo Basin](#). This Forum was a rare chance for Indigenous and local community women leaders to address international donors and African leaders directly and highlight their critical role in the Congo Basin's conservation. And in October 2023, in Namibia, RRI co-organized the first-ever [Community-led Conservation Congress](#) in

Africa, attended by participants from 47 countries, setting the foundation for a rights-based conservation agenda for Africa.

At the international level, RRI's analyses and convenings have influenced global biodiversity and climate policy. They were the source for the narrative text and research cited in the annual UNFCCC and [IPBES](#) reports in 2019 that stated, for the first time, that recognizing Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' rights was a critical climate mitigation and biodiversity protection strategy.

At UNFCCC COP26 in Glasgow (2021), RRI, through its [Path to Scale](#) network, was instrumental in instigating the \$1.7 billion donor pledge to support Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' forest rights. This breakthrough elevated community tenure as an effective climate solution, and was a precursor to continued advocacy by coalition members at subsequent COPs around increasing direct and fit-for-purpose funding to rightsholders, stronger safeguards, and monitoring of implementation on existing pledges.

The next year, the Continental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas (ECMIA) gathered to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous women's input in the [CEDAW General Recommendations 39](#), issued in October 2022. This was the first time the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) had recommended a focus on the individual and collective rights of Indigenous women and girls—a direct result of years-long advocacy by the coalition's women leaders.

At COP16 of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Colombia in 2024, RRI supported the Afro-descendant movement and the governments of Colombia and Brazil to successfully campaign for the [formal recognition](#) of Afro-descendant Peoples as distinct actors in global biodiversity frameworks. This historic moment came after many years of advocacy by Afro-descendant organizations across Latin America—facilitated by RRI—following a strategic roadmap created

by the organizations themselves to influence national and international spaces.

“One of RRI’s most important contributions was helping secure the formal recognition of Afro-descendant communities in Latin America within the Convention on Biological Diversity. That opened doors—not only for participation, but for a rightful place in global governance.”

—**Margarita Flórez**, environmental lawyer and RRI Fellow

These convenings were not one-time events—they became embedded in national processes and global movements. From the forests of the Congo Basin to the policy halls of the UN COPs, RRI has consistently created spaces where communities can lead and rights-based solutions can take hold.

“RRI doesn’t just support projects—it builds movements. With RRI’s backing, we gathered the evidence, built grassroots power, and won back land that had been grabbed from our community.”

KIMAREN OLE RIAMIT,
MASSAI LEADER AND
FOUNDER, ILEPA

IMPACT IN 40 COUNTRIES



Latin America

Bolivia	Guatemala
Brazil	Honduras
Chile	Mexico
Colombia	Nicaragua
Costa Rica	Panama
Dominican Republic	Paraguay
Ecuador	Peru
El Salvador	Suriname

Africa

Burkina Faso	Mali
Cameroon	Nigeria
Central African Republic	Republic of Congo
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Senegal
Gabon	Sierra Leone
Kenya	South Sudan
Liberia	Tanzania
Madagascar	Togo
	Uganda

Asia

Cambodia
China
India
Indonesia
Nepal
Philippines
Thailand



Catalyzing Movements

Across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, RRI's country-level engagement has supported rightsholders in achieving legal recognition, operationalizing reforms, and building governance rooted in community priorities and customary law. Since 2005, coalition members have been raising their ambition to convince others that change is possible.

In Indonesia, AMAN played a central role in advocating for Indigenous Peoples' tenure rights in the lead-up to the Constitutional Court's landmark 2013 decision (MK35) that recognized customary forests as distinct from state-owned forests. This ruling dismantled decades of exclusionary policy. RRI coalition members have since supported legal frameworks and participatory mapping platforms—such as [Tanahkitaid](#)—that have enabled the formal recognition of millions of hectares of ancestral land.

“This ruling was not just about land. It was about our identity, our culture, and our future as Indigenous Peoples,”

— **Rukka Sombolinggi**, AMAN
Secretary General.

In 2017, the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) led advocacy campaigns around Nepal's first local elections since adopting its 2015 constitution. In a [big win for community forestry and women's rights](#), Nepal elected 1,976 community forestry activists to local government, including 632 women, translating FECOFUN's grassroots leadership into electoral success.

In Liberia, building on their earlier advocacy around a 2009 Community Rights Law, RRI's coalition members shaped the country's 2018 Land Rights Act—one of Africa's most

progressive land tenure laws that [recognizes customary land ownership](#) and gender equality. While implementation challenges persist, RRI continues to support local actors in Liberia through awareness raising, training, land mapping, and policy dialogues to ensure community rights are effectively enforced.

“RRI prioritized consultations and helped set up a coalition in Liberia. As far back as 2005–2006, we held conversations among ourselves and identified our priorities. Together with RRI, we developed actions from the bottom-up.”

— **Alfred Brownell**, Liberian environmental activist and lawyer, and winner of the 2019 Goldman Environmental Prize.

In Kenya, the SRM supported the Maasai community of Maji Moto in reclaiming ancestral land after decades of legal struggle. This struggle was highlighted in a powerful 2023 [documentary](#) produced by the Skoll Foundation's Solutions Inside Out initiative.

“RRI doesn't just support projects—it builds movements. With RRI's backing, we gathered the evidence, built grassroots power, and won back land that had been grabbed from our community.”

— **Kimaren Ole Riamit**, Massai leader and founder, ILEPA

In Peru, AIDSESEP fought to title eight communities and support the creation of nine community-led monitoring centers equipped with drones and satellite internet in Ucayali, Loreto, and Madre de Dios. These centers enable real-time defense against illegal logging and encroachment.

“One of the key achievements has been providing satellite internet to these remote communities. This enables them to connect with the outside world in real-time.”

— **Waldir Azana**, AIDSESEP

In Ecuador, legal support was provided to Indigenous organizations during the [2022 protests](#) that pressured the government to strengthen FPIC protections and pause extractive activities in ancestral territories. In the Andes, RRI partnered with the Latin American Association for Alternative Development (ALDEA) to launch the Land Restoration Lab, a community-led response to REDD+ fraud that trains youth in conservation, mapping, and policy advocacy.

In Panama, the Naso Tjër Di People finalized their Organic Charter, securing governance of a 400,000-hectare comarca—the country's first Indigenous territory overlapping with protected areas. Panama also hosted [WiGSA's first strategy session](#) in 2023 to elevate the role of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women in tenure and climate policy.

“A sustainable future is one where Indigenous and local community women’s voices are not only heard but are integral to achieving meaningful conservation and climate change action.”

— **Sara Omi**, President of the Coordinadora de las Mujeres Líderes Territoriales de Mesoamérica and a member of WiGSA.

In Colombia, litigation and technical assistance strengthened the implementation of Law 70 and the protection of Afro-descendant territories. It also supported the Constitutional Court's recognition of ANAFRO as the national authority for Afro-Colombian communities. RRI additionally supported Afro-descendant communities in self-defining conservation areas in 15 community council territories in the Choc and Northern Cauca regions, a process that has strengthened and demonstrated community-led conservation efforts.

Across all these contexts, RRI has shown that legal reform must be driven by community priorities and strategic alliances. By anchoring its work in local realities while building influence at national and global levels, co-

“RRI designed and established the Tenure Facility and set the foundation for it to become what it is today—the largest single source of funding for Indigenous and community efforts to implement work on the ground to promote their territorial rights and governance. At least one-third of Tenure Facility projects have their origins in previous RRI initiatives, and it still looks to RRI’s current funding for Indigenous and community organizations through CLARIFI as a source of inspiration and lessons.”

DAVID KAIMOWITZ,
CHIEF PROGRAM OFFICER,
THE TENURE FACILITY

alition members are moving from recognition to implementation, and from resistance to governance.

“RRI’s support helped us not only title our collective lands but also establish mechanisms that ensure our communities remain stewards of their territories”

— José Luis Rengifo, Columbia,
Black Communities Process (PCN).



Innovation and Incubation

Over the past two decades, RRI has launched and nurtured institutions, networks, and tools that have filled critical gaps in the global tenure rights ecosystem. These innovations were

born from the concrete demands of communities and movements and have since evolved into powerful platforms that continue to shift global discourse, finance, and practice.

In 2006, RRI established [MegaFlorestais](#), an informal network of public forest agency leaders from the world’s most forested countries. The platform fostered dialogue and trust between leaders in Brazil, China, Indonesia, the DRC, and others, facilitating the exchange of experiences around forest governance, tenure reform, and sustainable forest management. These early conversations helped shape domestic policy environments and build relationships that continue to drive high-level commitments for rights-based forest governance.

RRI’s early engagement on community livelihoods and private sector impacts on community lands began by exploring economic development models that incorporate communities’ production of forest commodities into supply chains. The coalition’s analyses and advocacy around

The Land Rights Standard

Launched at UNFCCC COP27 in Egypt in 2022 by RRI, the Global Landscapes Forum, and the Indigenous Peoples Major Group for Sustainable Development, the [Land Rights Standard](#) (LRS) is a simple set of principles for recognizing and respecting Indigenous Peoples’, local communities’, and Afro-descendant Peoples’ land, territorial, and resource rights in climate, conservation, and development actions and investments.

Building on the rights affirmed in international human rights instruments and the aspirations of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant Peoples, and those of women and youth within these groups, the LRS was developed to ensure that all programs, projects, and initiatives in landscapes are undertaken in equal partnership and solidarity with rightsholders, taking into account and respecting their distinct and differentiated rights, including their autonomy, priorities, and cosmovisions.





Group photo of the Interlaken Group's retreat and 10-year anniversary celebration in the United Kingdom in 2024. Photo by Rights and Resources Initiative.

sustainable community livelihoods highlighted to policymakers the crucial role of successful community-based forest enterprises in rural and global economic systems. For example, in 2014, RRI published the report *Small Scale, Large Impacts* in collaboration with Forest Trends and the University of British Columbia, catalyzing research on new enterprise models emerging from tenure reform. This research was part of an RRI strategic analysis initiative called “Alternative Tenure and Enterprise Models”, or ATEMS. On the ground, advocacy by the Association of Forest Communities of Petén persuaded the Guatemalan Ministry of Environment to re-classify certain non-timber forest products and dramatically reduce high costs for communities selling sustainably produced forest products like ramon and xate seeds.

In the following years, as investors and corporations pushed into increasingly remote rural areas seeking land for agribusiness, energy, mining and infrastructure projects, the coalition saw a growing need for guidance and tools to help companies recognize the material risks posed by insecure tenure on land investments. In 2013, RRI responded to this gap by convening the [Interlaken Group](#), a network of progressive private sector leaders, civil society leaders, and government representatives committed to

respecting community land rights in business operations. The group created [operational guidance](#) and community monitoring tools to help companies implement FPIC and responsible tenure practices. Over time, it helped shift corporate norms, making collective tenure an essential part of responsible investment frameworks.

Building on all these innovations, RRI formally launched [the International Land and Forest Tenure Facility](#) in 2014, following four years of design and successful pilots in Indonesia, Peru, Panama, Liberia, Mali, the DRC, and Cameroon. These pilots secured over 300,000 hectares within one year, proving that rightsholders could deliver results at scale with direct and flexible funding.

To amplify global visibility of Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' lands, coalition members co-developed [LandMark](#). LandMark compiles georeferenced data from local, national, and regional mapping efforts into a unified platform that displays collectively held and used lands around the world. As of 2024, LandMark has mapped 34.7 percent of the world's land and natural resources as held or used by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. This has become a vital tool for researchers, advocates, and governments,

helping increase the recognition, investment, and protection of community lands.

In parallel, RRI also helped launch [Land Rights Now](#), a global campaigning platform co-convened with Oxfam and the International Land Coalition to accelerate recognition of community land rights around the world. Since its launch in 2016, Land Rights Now has mobilized more than 800 organizations and 40,000 individuals across more than 100 countries—amplifying local struggles and building broad global momentum for reform.

David Kaimowitz, who previously directed the Ford Foundation’s global work on natural resources and climate change, sees RRI’s unique comparative advantage as its ability to provide thought leadership, both to the diverse groups within the movement itself and to other relevant stakeholders such as funders and their intermediaries. One example of this is the Path to Scale.

Catalyzed by RRI in 2020 and co-chaired with the Tenure Facility since 2022, [Path to Scale](#) is an informal network that works to scale up global ambition on securing the land and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant Peoples—particularly women—to achieve the 2030 global climate and biodiversity targets. It includes individuals from donor organizations, international financial mechanisms, and their intermediaries committed to supporting international efforts to secure community rights, livelihoods, and conservation of their lands and forests.

Another key innovation was officially launched in 2022, when RRI and the Campaign for Nature co-founded [CLARIFI](#) to address the historic lack of investment in community-led conservation and rights-based climate solutions. The funding mechanism aims to raise and strategically deploying \$10 billion by 2030 to formalize land rights, support conservation, and enhance sustainable governance of community territories. Since its inception, CLARIFI has made 187 grants to rightsholder



An Indigenous Pygmy woman in the Congo.
Photo by REPALEAC.

organizations in 67 countries for advancing rights, livelihoods, and conservation. Notably, it provided over \$1 million in direct, flexible support to nine women-led organizations, enabling them to lead territorial monitoring, strengthen community-based governance, and advance gender justice within climate and conservation policy.

In 2023, RRI convened women’s organizations from Asia, Africa, and Latin America and launched a new advocacy network called the Women in Global South Alliance for tenure and climate (WiGSA). WiGSA has since advocated at key international spaces such as the UNFCCC and CBD COPs, the Global Environment Facility Assembly, and the Commission on the Status of Women meetings for the incorporation of a gender-inclusive lens into global funding architecture and for scaling up funding for grassroots women in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Together, these innovations reflect RRI’s core strategy: to build institutions, networks, and systems that shift power, resources, and decision-making into the hands of communities. Whether influencing private sector standards, global mapping efforts, national policy environments, or financial architecture, each initiative responds to community-defined needs and pushes the entire field forward toward greater accountability, recognition, and justice.

THE POWER OF STRATEGIC AND RAPID RESPONSE FUNDING

Since its launch in 2008, Strategic Response Mechanism (SRM) has provided Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples, and local communities with financial flexibility and speed to respond to unexpected threats, capitalize on political openings, or test innovative approaches. It can disburse up to US\$100,000 to grantees to quickly and effectively shift political landscapes in their constituencies.

So far, the SRM has funded over 220 timely interventions in 35 countries, including 15 regional interventions, worth more than \$10 million USD. It has become a vital tool for ensuring that community voices can influence land and environmental governance when timing matters most, and its strength lies in its responsiveness to rightsholder-defined priorities.

Here are a few examples of what rightsholders can achieve when given the financing and space to lead.

In Peru, the SRM enabled AIDESEP to develop a real-time COVID-19 alert system for Indigenous communities in 11 Amazonian regions. From August to December 2020, AIDESEP collected and disseminated pandemic information through radio, social media, and handbooks in nine languages. Utilizing WhatsApp, they provided daily localized updates and filled the gap left by the Peruvian government. This initiative not only supported communities in combating

STRATEGIC RESPONSE MECHANISM (SRM) HAS FUNDED

220
INTERVENTIONS



ACROSS
35
COUNTRIES

INCLUDING
15
REGIONAL PROJECTS

DISPERSING OVER
\$10 MILLION
USD

the virus but also strengthened AIDESEP's organizational capacity and advocacy to serve Indigenous health needs.

In Colombia, the SRM supported the Afro-descendant community of Barú in restoring its collective land titling process. After the National Land Agency abruptly canceled its titles in 2019, the Barú Community Council, with RRI's support joined the Observatory of Ethnic and Peasant Territories (Javeriana University), PCN, Dejusticia, and other allies in a legal battle to reinstate the process. In 2020, a court ruling mandated a reinstatement of the titles, setting a legal precedent for similar struggles in the region.

In Indonesia, the SRM responded to threats from palm oil expansion in the Bukit Betabuh Forest Reserve, Riau Province. Between 2017 and 2018, local communities conducted forest mapping, managed sustainable crops like Jernang, and identified non-timber forest products. These actions prevented illegal logging, empowered community enterprises, and served as a model for sustainable resource management in protected areas.

In Kenya, IMPACT Kenya, Wumweri Ghodu, and the Ogiek Peoples' Development Program helped communities submit 35 historical land injustice claims to the National Land Commission in 2021. They assisted communities in compiling documentation, providing training, and coordinating FPIC. Their efforts supported claims affecting over 569,000 hectares and about 79,000 people, including the Ogiek and Endorois communities.

Nepal has long been hailed as a global leader in the devolution of forest rights, allowing 22,000 community forestry user groups (CFUGs), who represent about 40 percent of its population, to govern 34 percent of the country's forests as of 2022. RRI funded FECOFUN's advocacy against a triple taxation policy adversely affecting CFUGs.

From 2020 to 2021, FECOFUN, Green Foundation Nepal, and CFUGs conducted workshops, media campaigns, and cross-sectoral dialogue, leading to the removal of burdensome taxes at both federal and provincial levels. This included the withdrawal of a 15 percent national tax on timber species. This victory strengthened the financial sustainability and livelihoods of millions of forest users across Nepal.

In South Sudan, where civil society spaces are often heavily restricted, RRI provided funding and strategic support for the country's first-ever Indigenous Peoples' dialogue on climate and land rights in 2023. Organized by the Equatoria Forest Forum, it brought together government officials, Indigenous representatives, and community leaders to chart a path toward inclusive forest governance and recognition of customary land claims.

In Cameroon, the International Foundation for Development, Education, Entrepreneurship and Environmental Protection (FIDEPE) advocated to protect 150 hectares of sacred forests and ancestral lands in five localities. With funding and technical support, FIDEPE guided community-driven participatory mapping that led to the formal recognition of these areas as Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs). The initiative benefited over 60,000 people and is now being replicated in three additional districts in collaboration with the Rainforest Alliance.

These interventions reflect a broader strategy: to ensure communities can act when it matters most, whether responding to threats, leveraging momentum, or asserting their rights. RRI's SRM continues to be one of the few mechanisms capable of deploying rapid, flexible, rightsholder-driven funding within weeks and ensuring that communities are not left behind during critical political, legal, or ecological transitions.

THE COMMUNITY LAND RIGHTS CLIMATE AND CONSERVATION FINANCE INITIATIVE (CLARIFI)

The Community Land Rights Climate and Conservation Finance Initiative ([CLARIFI](#)) is an international funding mechanism created in 2020 and launched by RRI and Campaign for Nature in 2022. It strategically deploys public and private funds to scale up legal recognition of Indigenous Peoples', Afro-descendant Peoples', and local communities' land rights, conservation, and sustainable resource management.

Since 2022, CLARIFI has funded 182 community-led projects in 29 countries. In 2024, it supported 32 projects in 9 African countries, securing 1.44 million hectares for communities. In Latin America, it supported 24 projects across 7 countries, securing 14.9 million hectares; and provided 16 women-led organizations with over \$1.5 million in direct funding. Additionally, it supported 2 projects in 2 Asian countries.

“CLARIFI addresses a need long felt by Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community organizations for a vehicle that mobilizes funding directly to them for activities not yet supported adequately by any donor.”

— Pasang Dolma Sherpa, Executive Director of Nepal's Center for Indigenous Peoples' Research and Development (CIPRED) and CLARIFI Steering Committee member

CLARIFI's scope and ambition

CLARIFI aims to contribute to raising \$10 billion between 2022 and 2030 by working with RRI's Path to Scale network of donors and climate/conservation funding initiatives. Its objectives are to help protect at least 30 percent of the planet by 2030 by adding 400 million hectares to

CLARIFI HAS FUNDED



communities' territories; reduce deforestation to help reach the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement; and increase communities' land ownership to at least half of all tropical forests.

CLARIFI supports locally led projects that have the potential to secure rights and achieve conservation outcomes, paying particular attention to women and youth inclusion. Its projects focus on advocacy and legal support; conservation and resource management; organizational capacity building, community livelihoods, and protection for community defenders.

Demonstrating the power of direct finance in Indonesia, the DRC, Peru, and Colombia

In Indonesia, CLARIFI has supported AMAN in strengthening participatory mapping, Indigenous economies, and governance capabilities of Indigenous communities across its local chapters. AMAN mapped 30 customary territories spanning over 350,000 hectares; trained 259 Indigenous cadres; supported seven Indigenous community business groups; established one Indigenous-owned enterprise; and engaged with village governments, which resulted in the drafting of five village development plans related to the Indigenous Peoples.

The same project funded the Oi Bura community's efforts, which revitalised an abandoned coffee plantation through agroforestry. The project was a testament to the power of participatory mapping as an organizing and advocacy tool, leading to improved livelihoods, conservation, and formal recognition of Indigenous rights by village authorities.

In the DRC, Indigenous Pygmy Peoples are the country's first occupants and inhabitants. They are dependent on the forest through hunting, herding, and gathering. With the arrival of the Bantus in the country, the Indigenous Pygmy began practicing traditional agriculture in response to food scarcity. Today, most Pygmy women struggle to make ends meet with subsistence agriculture.

The Association des Femmes Autochtones Pygmées (AFAP) is working to change this dynamic by empowering Indigenous [Pygmy women](#) by adopting more resilient and sustainable agriculture practices to benefit their own communities. Between 2022

and 2024, it helped women sow shelled corn on 15 hectares of land; harvest unshelled maize and groundnuts; plant and distribute 1,500 baskets of cuttings of improved cassava; and sow 2,500 plants of plantain bananas. These small but meaningful changes in agricultural practices are helping women to conserve their territories and combat climate change while also improving their food security.

In Peru, the government does not recognize Indigenous Peoples' territories, nor does it formally register their legal status. Instead, it grants land titles to families settled in specific tribal groups and areas, classifying them as "Native Communities." This leaves out a significant portion of traditional territories open to state control—including where communities roam and hunt. This lack of secure rights routinely exposes them to risks from state-led extractive or infrastructure projects.

With CLARIFI's direct funding, AIDSEP worked with five Regional Agriculture Authorities to lead the [titling process for 11 Native Communities](#) from 2022 to 2024. The project formed nine surveillance committees and trained them to issue real-time alerts about threats to communities' territories. It also provided satellite internet to remote communities, connecting them with the outside world in real-time.

"When there are extractive projects or state infrastructure projects in Peru on lands where Indigenous families are settled, if they do not have legal security, they are at risk of being displaced."

— Waldir Azan, AIDSEP-Peru

In Colombia, a major achievement came from the National Commission of Indigenous Territories (CNTI)'s efforts to restore full ownership rights of 57 Indigenous territories under the tenure Resguardo regime. The CLARIFI project secured land under Indigenous collective property and prevented the rollback of tenure rights under the 1961 law that passed on Indigenous property rights to the state. Now, CNTI and the National Land Agency are working together to restore full tenure rights for five other Indigenous territories, a result of the Colombian government's commitment to the Indigenous Peoples' National Permanent Roundtable.

Women leaders from the Ogiek, Maasai, Batwa, Aweer, Benet, Sengwer, and Yaaku Indigenous communities meet in Mt. Elgon, Kenya for the 2022 East Africa Assembly. Photo by TonyWild Photography for Rights and Resources Initiative.



ADVANCING WOMEN'S TENURE RIGHTS

RRI has taken decisive steps to ensure that tenure reform is gender-inclusive, recognizing that secure rights for women are essential to social justice, biodiversity, and climate resilience. Through long-term partnerships, coalition-building, legal reform, and strategic advocacy, RRI has elevated gender equity from a peripheral concern to a core pillar of natural resource governance.

Established as a stand-alone program in 2012 and building upon years of work at the country and regional levels, RRI's Gender Justice program emerged as a key priority within the coalition as rights began to improve across RRI's focus regions. By building their capacity, coordination, and peer-learning, RRI has positioned Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women as leading voices on national and international stages, seeking to bridge the historical, social, economic, and political injustices that prevent them from enjoying their human and tenure rights.

This transformation has been led by local women themselves. In the DRC, RRI supported the Coalition des femmes leaders pour l'Environnement et le développement durable (CFLEDD) in successfully advocating for the inclusion of strong gender provisions in the 2022 National Land Policy, ensuring women's equal rights to land, inheritance, and participation in decision-making. CFLEDD also organized provincial dialogues with customary chiefs, helping shift local norms and securing support for the recognition of women's rights within traditional systems.

In Liberia, the Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI) helped establish a national gender justice working group that engaged government ministries, land authorities, and community leaders. This work influenced the Environmental Protection Agency to integrate women's land rights into its environmental and climate frameworks and supported widespread community awareness-raising. Radio skits, legal literacy workshops, and town hall meetings reached over 1,600 people—two-thirds of them

women—ensuring they knew their rights under the 2018 Land Rights Act.

In Nepal, RRI worked with FECOFUN to support legal reforms, capacity building, and mentorship models. As a result, new land laws now recognize women's rights to own, inherit, and manage land. FECOFUN also provided hands-on training in negotiation and budgeting for women forest users.

“Women are the backbone of our communities, yet we have been excluded from decisions about our own lands for too long. Thanks to RRI’s efforts, we are now seen as leaders, capable of shaping policies that impact our families and our forests.”

BHARATI PATHAK,
FORMER CHAIRPERSON,
FECOFUN, NEPAL

RRI also supported the establishment of the African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests (REFACOF) during the 2009 international conference co-organized with ITTO and the Government of Cameroon.



Members of the Women in Global South Alliance (WiGSA) pose with RRI's Global Strategy Meeting in Kinshasa, DRC.

Photo by Madiha Waris for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.

“Invisible to donors and often sidelined within their own communities, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women are political actors and stewards of the land. That’s why we helped create WiGSA—to change not just the funding, but the power dynamics.”

OMAIRA BOLAÑOS,
PROGRAM DIRECTOR, RRI

REFACOF is a regional network of women’s organizations in at least 14 countries whose mission is to promote women’s rights in Africa and advocate to shape policies and practices for gender equity in relation to land and forest tenure.

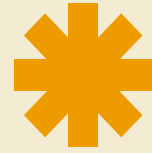
Two cornerstone initiatives are supporting this shift: a new advocacy tool called [Our Call to Action](#) and WiGSA. Launched in 2022, WiGSA is the first transregional platform uniting Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to advocate for

direct funding, gender-responsive policies, and climate justice.

WiGSA’s strategic convenings—first [in Panama in 2023](#), then [in Nepal in 2024](#)—produced a shared advocacy agenda centered on tenure rights, intergenerational leadership, and gender-responsive climate finance. “*All of us need to work together to advocate for our rights and improve our knowledge so we can strengthen policies and have more women leaders,*” said Chouchouna Losale of CFLEDD.

At the grassroots level, RRI has supported women’s leadership trainings in the Amazon, Tropical Andes, Central Africa, and Asia. In Indonesia’s Mentawai Islands, Indigenous women involved in participatory mapping used their traditional knowledge to inform village development planning. In Brazzaville, Republic of Congo in 2023, RRI joined REPALEAC and the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GATC) to co-host the first [Forum of Indigenous and Local Community Women in Central Africa and the Congo Basin](#). The Forum convened the region’s women leaders with international donors and African ministers for the first time, underscoring their critical role in improving the region’s climate resilience and biodiversity conservation.

Women in Global South Alliance (WiGSA)



Launched in 2022, the Women in Global South Alliance (WiGSA) is an alliance of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's organizations, groups, and associations in the Global South working to scale up direct climate finance for community women and girls at the territorial level. Facilitated by RRI, its mission is to advocate for changes to the current global structure of donor funding to fight climate change, conserve biodiversity, and ensure women and girls are recognized for their leadership and contributions. As of April 2025, WiGSA has 23 member organizations representing 59 countries.

WiGSA is unique in its mission because it addresses a historical gap in international commitments to directly support women's roles in achieving global climate and conservation goals and securing their communities' rights. In 2024, WiGSA and RRI launched a new brief on global climate and conservation [funding reaching Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and Local community Women](#).

Since 2018, RRI's coalition in Latin America has emphasized the importance of [better understanding](#) the roles of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women and how they contribute to territorial governance, women's empowerment, and the strengthening of leadership. In [Colombia](#) and [Peru](#), women-led entrepreneurship are creating the long-term enabling conditions needed to overcome severe external shocks—such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic—to support their local economies, territorial governance, and sustainable natural resource management.

RRI's 2025 report, [Resilience and Resistance](#), brings renewed attention to the extent to which national laws recognize Indigenous, Afro-

descendant, and local community women's forest rights in 35 countries. It finds that even with some positive shifts in legal recognition, community women's rights to membership, inheritance, participation in community decision-making, and dispute resolution remain limited. Since its first edition in 2017, [Power and Potential](#), this data set has served as an important advocacy tool at the UNFCCC COPs, CSW66, Stockholm+50, and other global forums.

From securing legal recognition of community lands to shifting global finance systems, RRI's gender justice work reflects a clear strategy: women must not only be protected by law, but also positioned as leaders within their communities and on the world stage.

According to ancestral wisdom, the water apple tree pictured here is older than the Kasepuhan Pasir Eurih Indigenous community that protects it. Urban youth learned this and much more from Indigenous elders at a 2022 Green Camp in Indonesia. Photo by Eki and RMI, 2022.



INTERGENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND YOUTH: SUSTAINING MOVEMENTS THROUGH SHARED WISDOM

RRI's work is grounded in the conviction that lasting transformation requires the nurturing of leadership across generations. Through mentorship and solidarity, the coalition's veteran leaders are equipping young activists with the tools to take the tenure rights movement forward.

Around the world, long-time Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community advocates—many of whom have led collective titling processes for decades—have been mentoring younger organizers in negotiations, governance, and community mobilization. This transfer of knowledge is not just ancestral, it is strategic. When traditional wisdom is passed down, it strengthens collective land claims and ensures that governance structures evolve without severing ties to their roots.

In September 2023, 18 young leaders from 10 countries in Latin America met in Bogota to strengthen youth networks in the region and enhance their leadership skills. Together, they published a [Youth Manifesto](#) to express their mutual priorities regarding rights-based conservation and sustainable land management practices, drawing on their own experiences in their communities. The Manifesto will serve as a guide for RRI's global coalition, which is committed to incorporating youth leadership and engagement in its regional and global activities.



Participants of the Latin American Regional Youth Workshop, September 6–7, 2023.
Photo by Monica Orjuela for Rights and Resources Initiative.

“Empowerment of Indigenous and local community youth is a unified intergenerational effort. We are stronger when we are together.”

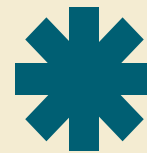
NED TUGUINAY OF THE ASIA
INDIGENOUS YOUTH PLATFORM

From Nepal to Liberia, the coalition's youth leaders are engaged in sustainable forest enterprise, conservation, and policy dialogues, drawing on the experiences and wisdom of seasoned organizers.

Recognizing the importance of this continuum, RRI supports intergenerational leadership through policy, programming, and platforms like WiGSA and the Youth and Land Governance Initiative in Africa. These efforts are about more

than capacity—they are about identity, continuity, and resilience. They ensure that Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community youth step forward not only as heirs to struggles but as co-authors of solutions.

Learning and Living Our Elders' Wisdom: Youth Power for Land, Forests, and Territories in Asia



Co-authored with 15 organizations across Asia—spanning youth groups, Indigenous networks, and ally organizations—this [youth-led report](#) published in 2023 brings to the fore the experiences and leadership of youth activists into a Call to Action.

Indigenous and local community youth in Asia, and around the world more broadly, often straddle what seem like impossible compromises. They navigate the delicate balance between forces of modernization and their intergenerational connection to home and community. By building a strong intergenerational bond with their communities and ecological context, youth can become self-motivated defenders of their collective rights. Here are five key principles they recommend for building youth leadership in the years ahead:

- Youth organizing is always intergenerational.
- Leaders create more leaders.
- Youth learn by leading and allies lead by trusting them.
- Youth safety is a shared duty.
- Solidarity is sacred.

Young people often understand what is at stake because they have experienced it. They understand that their issues are interconnected and entrenched because they have struggled to untangle and overcome them. But most importantly, they are ready to consolidate the commitment and wisdom needed to win together.



Ayu (age 24) and Dita (age 24) Indigenous Talang Mamak youth, Riau province, Sumatra, Indonesia. Rubber plantations have surrounded the Talang Mamak for generations beginning with Dutch colonial rule. Many of these rubber plantations were converted to palm oil plantations in 1980's. Moreover, more than 5000 hectares of local forest has been cleared since 1986 and converted to palm oil plantations by these large companies. The Talang Mamak rely on the forest for their livelihoods, food and for cultural practices and rituals. Today, the community has no other option than to work for the private companies or plant their own palm oil trees. "If the forests disappear then the Talang Mamak disappear" states Dita, a 24-year-old Talang Mamak who advocates for her community's land rights.

Photo by Jacob Maentz for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2022.

An Indigenous Pygmy woman uses the GPS on her phone in the DRC. 2024.
Photo by EnviroNews RDC for RRI



BUILDING COMMUNITY POWER THROUGH INNOVATION

Technology has become a crucial force multiplier for communities defending their lands and resources from encroachment and extraction. Since 2005, RRI has helped scale up the use of digital tools that enhance monitoring, evidence gathering, and policy influence while anchoring community data in national and global decision-making.

In the Amazon Basin, RRI supported the titling of eight Indigenous communities in Peru and helped establish nine community-led monitoring centers across Ucayali, Loreto, and Madre de Dios. Staffed by trained youth and local leaders, these centers are equipped with satellite internet, GPS, and drones, and are embedded within AIDSEP's Early Warning System. They allow communities to monitor illegal logging, track deforestation, and issue real-time alerts—linking local knowledge with national and international advocacy. In 2023 alone, these efforts prevented the incursion of multiple extractive operations while protecting land defenders through a dedicated monitoring and alert module used by 18 regional federations.

RRI's collaboration with 20 grassroots organizations and researchers of Afro-descendant Peoples, including PCN and OTEC, led to the [first multi-country analysis](#) and development of an [open-access cartographic viewer](#) of Afro-descendant territories in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is the first tool to visualize the territorial presence and ecological data for Afro-descendant, Black, Maroon, Garífuna, and Creole peoples in 16 countries. Released in 2022, the study reveals that Afro-descendant Peoples legally own just 5 percent of nearly 205 million hectares of their lands. This data has since been used by Afro-descendant leaders to advocate for land recognition at the UNFCCC COPs, CBD COPs, and other international venues.

In Indonesia, RRI's support for the Coalition for Tenure Justice and the Participatory Mapping Network (JKPP) led to the mapping of over 17.2 million hectares of customary lands. Youth and women trained in spatial journalism, digital mapping, and data advocacy have



Top: Kwango province, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Photo by Ley Uwera for the Tenure Facility.

Middle: Drone footage of a river in the Amazon Rainforest, Latin America.

Bottom: Women in Liberia convene outside of a community hall.

Photo by Rights and Resources Initiative, 2012.

uploaded hundreds of cases to Tanahkita.id, an open-source platform optimized in 2022. These community maps informed legal challenges to Indonesia's Job Creation Law and fed directly into the 2023 National Tenure Conference's recommendations.

Meanwhile, in Liberia, community-run monitoring stations are now linked to the Forestry Development Authority, allowing swift detection and reporting of illegal logging. These efforts by Social Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development (SESDev), with involvement from the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) and the CSO working group on oil palm, have elevated communities as critical actors in national enforcement systems, creating a feedback loop between territory and policy.

Digital empowerment goes beyond enforcement. It builds community governance sys-

tems, protects cultural landscapes, and allows communities to shape national databases and disclosure standards. RRI is advocating for the integration of this community-generated data into corporate due diligence frameworks—ensuring that companies are held accountable for operating on contested land. The Interlaken Group's guidance on responsible supply chains is now being paired with real-time Indigenous monitoring to push for greater transparency and equity in global investment systems.

Looking ahead, RRI plans to expand [community monitoring](#) across East Africa, the Congo Basin, and Mesoamerica, tailoring tools to local realities while upholding the principle of data sovereignty. The goal is not just to digitize landscapes, but to ensure that the people who protect them have the power to define what development looks like—and the tools to make it enforceable.

The History of RRI's Tenure Tracking Data



In the 2002 report, [Who Owns the World's Forests?](#) produced by Forest Trends, RRI co-founder Andy White and Alejandra Martin wrote that long-standing government claims of state ownership of forests had begun to dissolve in the 1980s and 1990s as governments increasingly recognized areas under community control and/or ownership. The transition away from wholesale government statutory ownership and control of the world's forests continued over subsequent years, prompting further analysis.

Since then, RRI has continued tracking changes in statutory forest tenure over 92 percent of the world's forests and has regularly updated and expanded our databases to track communities' rights to land and freshwater, as well as women's specific rights to community resources.

[RRI's Tenure Tool](#), updated in 2022 and expanded in 2024, is the largest online database on Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' tenure rights. The platform gives rightsholders, researchers, activists, policymakers, and the public free and easy access to peer-reviewed quantitative and qualitative data on community rights recognition across more than 75 countries.



Rah Island, Vanuatu. Two young islander women sit on wooden boat fishing.
Photo by Jantira Namwong.



VOICES FROM THE MOVEMENT



From top left: Participants pose for a photo after a panel discussion at the First Forum of Indigenous and Local Community Women in Central Africa and the Congo Basin in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo.

Photo by Victoire Douniama for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2023.

Indigenous Afro-descendant woman works in a field, Colombia.

Photo by Darwin Torres for Proceso de Comunicadas Negras (PCN), 2023.

Forest in the Congo Basin, Republic of Congo.

Photo by EnviroNews RDC for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.

Women collect forest products in Sumatra, Indonesia.

Photo by Jacob Maentz for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2022.

Indigenous Pygmy women collect water, DRC.

Photo by EnviroNews RDC for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.

IN AFRICA, COMMUNITY LEADERS SHAPE THE FUTURE OF TENURE RIGHTS



A woman watches elephants in the distance in Kenya.
Photo by Anthony Ochieng.

The work of securing community tenure rights does not begin or end with policy reform. It is grounded in decades of organizing, negotiation, and advocacy. Across Africa, communities have long been on the frontline in the battle for justice, sustainability, and equitable development. RRI has played an instrumental role in amplifying their voices. Liberia, Kenya, and the DRC offer compelling examples of how RRI's support strengthens local struggles and helps translate community aspirations into reality. In each of these countries, land is not just a source of livelihood—it is the basis of identity, survival, and self-determination.

RRI's approach in Africa has focused on enabling communities' long-term leadership and amplifying their strategies through alliances, technical support, and shared learning.

Liberia: Turning a landmark law into lasting change

Liberia's 2018 Land Rights Act (LRA) marked a critical moment in West African land governance, becoming the first legislation in the region to [formally recognize](#) customary land rights without requiring a formal deed. Passed after years of national consultation, the LRA defines four categories of land ownership, including customary land, and guarantees equal rights for rural communities and women in land governance.

A key driver behind the LRA was the CSO Working Group on Land Rights—a coalition of national NGOs and grassroots organizations committed to land justice. This group coordinated countrywide consultations, lobbied for inclusive legal protections, and partnered with international allies like RRI to ensure the final law reflected community voices.

Yet implementation remains a major hurdle. RRI has played a key role in bridging this gap—partnering with organizations such as SDI and SESDev to strengthen local capacity, document customary practices, and equip communities to engage with the Liberia Land Authority. As of 2022, SDI supported the finalization of regulations for implementing the LRA's customary land component and contributed to

the launch of a centralized land governance information hub.

Mina Beyan of SESDev explains, “*The law was progressive, but implementing it on the ground has been the real challenge. Many communities still lack awareness about their rights.*”

RRI-backed workshops and local dialogues helped fill this gap, enabling communities to map their territories, resolve internal disputes, and build governance protocols. These activities are part of a broader push to translate the LRA into meaningful gains for all community members. Gender justice was also central to this strategy. Through targeted initiatives, women were trained to understand and claim their land rights, influence decision-making, and hold community leaders accountable.

“Whenever safe spaces are provided to us, we are free to learn, collaborate, and strategize together on how we can improve issues that affect women’s human rights. We are learning how we can document our issues and how we can build teams together, supporting women at the grassroots level,”

— **Loretta Alethea Pope**, Executive Director at the Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI) in Liberia and member of WiGSA



Drone footage of the customary territory of the Indigenous Ogiek of Mt. Elgon who have stewarded the lands for generations.

Photo by TonyWild Photography for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2022.

Kenya: Reclaiming ancestral lands, defending cultural survival

Kenya's 2010 Constitution laid a foundation for a new era in land governance by recognizing community land and mandating legislation to secure it. This led to the enactment of the 2016 Community Land Act (CLA), which provides a legal process for communities to register and manage communal land. The CLA was designed to protect the rights of

“From the very beginning, RRI’s support was instrumental—not just in providing technical and financial resources, but in helping us mobilize communities and bring their voices into decision-making spaces. That early partnership helped us shift from reactive advocacy to strategic engagement—ensuring community concerns were not only heard but acted upon, both in Liberia and on global platforms.”

SILAS SIAKOR,
LIBERIAN ACTIVIST AND 2006 GOLDMAN
ENVIRONMENTAL PRIZE WINNER

historically marginalized pastoralist, Indigenous, and agro-pastoralist communities.

However, implementation of the law has been uneven and slow, hindered by bureaucratic procedures, lack of awareness, and resource constraints. Despite this, communities like the Maasai in Kenya’s pastoralist heartlands have made critical gains.

Kimaren Ole Riamit, a Maasai leader and director of the Indigenous Livelihoods Enhance-

ment Partners (ILEPA), describes RRI’s support as crucial: “Our struggle is intergenerational. Having well-documented evidence and community-led advocacy is key. RRI’s support made that possible.”

In a landmark case supported by ILEPA and RRI, Maasai communities [successfully reclaimed land](#) that had been improperly appropriated by external actors in Maji Moto. RRI’s funding enabled legal counsel, documentation, and grassroots mobilization to secure a court ruling after decades of resistance that returned land to its rightful custodians. The victory represented a deeply symbolic reclaiming of ancestral territory and dignity for the community. It has since become an inspiration for other Indigenous groups in the region to assert their land claims with renewed confidence.

DRC: Advancing legal reform through locally-led advocacy

The DRC is home to the world’s second largest tropical forest and is a critical site in the global fight against climate change. Its vast forests are also home to the country’s vulnerable Indigenous Peoples and local communities who depend on the land for their survival. Since 2012, RRI has supported a vibrant coalition in the DRC, influencing its evolving land rights laws and leading major policy reform.

In 2013, DRC created a National Land Reform Commission (CONAREF) to manage its land reforms based on principles of participation, decentralization, and respect for environmental and human rights, as well as the rights of women and minorities. In 2014, it adopted a decree that made it possible for communities to obtain legally recognized community forest concessions for their conservation and livelihood purposes.

RRI members such as the Congolese Resources Institute (CRI), Dynamique des Groupes des

Peuples Autochtones (DGPA), l'Environnement et le développement durable (CFLEDD), the Centre for Innovation in Indigenous and Sustainable Development (CTIDD), Ligue nationale des associations autochtones Pygmées du Congo (LINAPYCO), and Conseil pour la défense environnementale par la Légalité et la Traçabilité (CODELT) played a crucial role in developing, piloting, and scaling this approach in collaboration with the Tenure Facility. **As of April 2025, the DRC has granted 202 community forest concessions over nearly 4 million hectares.**

Notably, RRI was the only international coalition asked by the DRC government to present its recommendations to improve the draft National Land Policy. All of its recommendations to strengthen and clarify collective tenure were [adopted](#) in the final version, and with advocacy led by CLFEDD, the government also committed to mainstream gender in the policy, ultimately centering women's land rights in land registration that had not been updated since 1973.

Two additional wins for RRI's DRC coalition came with a [historic 2022 bill](#) to protect and promote the rights of the DRC's Indigenous Pygmy Peoples, and a [2023 landmark Land-Use Planning Law](#), passed by the National Assembly following sustained advocacy by RRI's local partners and collaborators.



Indigenous Pygmy women stand together in solidarity, DRC.
Photo by EnviroNews RDC for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.

“While we know not everything will change immediately and the law’s implementation will take time, it will at least make sure that we have more tools available to implement our rights going forward.”

PATRICK SAIDI,
COORDINATOR, DGPA ON THE DRC'S
INDIGENOUS PYGMY PEOPLES LAW

Toward a continental shift in power and land justice

What unites these diverse victories is a shared model: communities at the center, supported—not supplanted—by RRI. The result is not only stronger rights on paper, but more resilient, informed, and connected grassroots movements.

Looking ahead, local leaders emphasize the need for sustained, multi-year investment. In Liberia, Beyan calls for increased engagement with regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional political and economic union of 15 West African countries, and more resources to support the implementation of land governance reforms. In Kenya, Ole Riamit underscores the urgency of protecting land defenders and scaling legal support for public interest litigation. In the DRC, civil society groups continue to call for full recognition and resourcing of customary land governance systems.

IN ASIA, COMMUNITIES SECURE LAND AND CLIMATE FUTURES



Local woman cuts green overgrowth off a bush at the Shree Bindeshwari Community Forest, Nepal.
Photo by Asha Stuart for Rights and Resources Initiative. March 2025.

Across Asia, Indigenous Peoples and local communities have long protected their lands, cultures, and forests in the face of state neglect and extractive pressures. In countries like Indonesia and Nepal, these communities are securing critical victories—not alone, but in collaboration with allies like RRI, whose two decades of support have helped them shift the balance toward justice.

Indonesia: Grounding customary rights in law and practice

In Indonesia, home to one of the world's largest Indigenous populations, securing tenure rights remains a challenge due to conflicts involving powerful palm oil, mining, and logging industries. The government has historically claimed control over roughly 70 percent of the country's land, designating much of it as state forest.

“RRI’s consistent support helped establish clear frameworks that empowered our communities to effectively engage government and international stakeholders. RRI set the standard—not only for research and advocacy, but for how to partner with Indigenous Peoples. They gave us space to lead, trusted our expertise, and stood beside us when few others did.”

RUKKA SOMBOLINGGI,
AMAN’S SECRETARY GENERAL,
INDONESIA

A landmark 2013 Constitutional Court ruling (MK35) rejected this claim, recognizing that customary forests are not state forests—a major legal precedent that opened the door for Indigenous land claims.

In 2016, Perkumpulan HuMa was working to accelerate national recognition of Adat Forests in Indonesia following MK35. Through legal research, advocacy, and public engagement, HuMa developed a national guideline on Adat Forest recognition and supported the drafting of Ministerial Decree No. 6747. Its efforts led to the formal recognition of nine Adat Forests totaling 13,122 hectares by President Jokowi in 2016—another landmark moment for Indigenous land rights.

With RRI’s strategic and financial backing, AMAN achieved a major milestone: the legal recognition of over 300,000 hectares of ancestral lands previously under state control and the connection of grassroots efforts with regional and global policy processes. One such community was the Masyarakat Adat Dalem Tamblingan (MADT) in Bali, which has [fought for years](#) to reclaim their ancestral forest and protect



A woman stands in the Amazon Rainforest in Colombia collecting bananas in a basket strapped to her back.
Photo by Amazon Conservation Team.

it from encroachment and exploitation.

Nestled in between 300-year-old trees and thousands of plant species—many of which are found nowhere else on Earth—are 17 temples built along the border of the MADT’s territory in north-central Bali. These temples represent the way the MADT understand their reciprocal relationship with the natural world: their belief system, Piagem Gama Tirta, translates to “reverence for water and living in harmony with nature.”

“We do not call what we do conservation. It’s our daily habit and it is who we are,” said Putu Willy Suputra, a MADT youth trekking guide.

Backed by AMAN and supported through RRI’s strategic engagement, the community legally secured its customary rights and now manages its territory under a traditional governance system rooted in spiritual stewardship. It has become a model for Indigenous-led conservation—preserving biodiversity and water sources, and halting illegal development in the sacred Tamblingan forest area. By [asserting land rights and customary laws](#), MADT’s leaders demonstrate how community tenure can be a pillar of both ecological resilience and cultural renewal.

In 2024, the ICCAs Working Group in Indonesia played a leading role in promoting Indigenous and community-led conservation in the country’s national policy. Their advocacy bolstered the inclusion of communities’ territorial governance in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and helped influence a landmark shift in Indonesia’s stance at CBD COP16, where the country endorsed the permanent Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) to strengthen Indigenous participation in biodiversity governance. These steps advanced the status of 142 communities



Members of the Women in Global South Alliance (WiGSA) pose for a photo with local community members and Community Forest User Group leaders during its second strategic meeting in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Photo by Sandesh Chaudhary for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.

managing 274 Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs), affirming them as key custodians of biodiversity.

Nepal: Community forests at the heart of equity and climate action

In Nepal, many organizations work tirelessly to strengthen inclusive forest governance. Nepal’s community forestry program is considered one of the most successful globally, with over 22,000 community forest user groups managing more than 2.2 million hectares of forestland—approximately 30 percent of the country’s total forest area.

“RRI has been a vital ally—supporting our campaigns, building our leadership, and bringing our voices to national and global platforms. With their support, women have not only gained leadership roles in community forestry—they’ve changed the way conservation is understood,” said Bharati Pathak, member of Nepal’s General Assembly, Bagmati Province and former Chair of FECOFUN.

Yet challenges remain, nearly 3.3 million hectares of high-altitude grazing lands still

lack recognition, and proposed expansions of protected areas continue to pose risks to community tenure.

“We need stronger institutions, direct support for women-led organizations, and long-term investment in our capacity to negotiate with governments and the private sector. Communities know how to protect the forest. What we need now is for the world to listen—and invest,” Bharati added.

In 2023, the Center for Indigenous Peoples’ Research and Development (CIPRED) in Nepal supported the [legal recognition of Indigenous governance and healing practices](#) in Tsum Nubri. The municipality formally adopted the Shyagya Act and Amchi Act, recognizing the Tumba people’s customary institutions within a national conservation area—a landmark legal breakthrough officially launched by Prime Minister Dahal. This achievement, supported by CIPRED’s advocacy and legal expertise, sets a precedent for rights-based conservation and Indigenous self-governance.

Meanwhile, the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) has halted the government’s attempt to create Mera Peak National Park spanning three municipalities in Solukhumbu district, an area customarily claimed by some of the country’s Indigenous Peoples, without FPIC. With RRI’s support, NEFIN mobilized leaders to visit every neighborhood and village in the district to raise awareness and encourage consultations.

Green Foundation Nepal (GFN) is working on community enterprises and livelihoods. Since

2012, it has been facilitating multistakeholder dialogues, sustainable resource management, participatory research, policy and media advocacy, and green enterprise development to strengthen the organizations of farmers and forest-dependent peoples throughout the country. Through its project “Community Forest Enterprises”, GFN found that community-based forest management has a higher effectiveness rate than other methods and enhances local livelihoods.

In Nepal, the Women Rights and Resources Network (WRRN) aims to empower women and ensure their active participation in the management, conservation, and utilization of natural resources while advocating for gender equality and rights-based policies. Since 2021, WRRN have organized learning and sharing workshops, led dialogues on the importance of supporting women-led entrepreneurship, and organized community trainings on agroforestry and silviculture.

Building momentum from the ground up

Community leaders in Asia underscore that securing tenure rights requires more than legal change. It demands sustained organizing, accessible data, inclusive leadership, and long-term partnerships. These experiences from Indonesia and Nepal show what is possible when local leadership is matched with strategic solidarity.

IN LATIN AMERICA, TENURE RIGHTS, LEADERSHIP, AND TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE TAKE CENTER STAGE



Indigenous Ashaninka women from the Waypancuni community, Peru.
Photo by Juan Llasca for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2024.

RRI's work in Latin America reflects a consistent commitment to advancing tenure rights, self-determination, and community-led governance. From Guatemala to Brazil, and the Andean foothills to Mesoamerican forests, RRI has played a central role in transforming its coalition members' legal victories into grounded systems of territorial governance, climate action, and conservation.

Guatemala

In Guatemala, the foundation was laid in 2007–2008, when RRI helped facilitate a historic alliance between highland Indigenous organizations and lowland mestizo community forestry concessionaires. This coalition emerged as a powerful force in national policy dialogues, defending community forestry rights and reinforcing the globally acclaimed Petén community forest concession model. That model was further strengthened in 2021–2023, when RRI’s SRM supported the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP) in securing a 25-year extension of three concessions and adding two new ones—bringing 70,000 additional hectares under community stewardship and benefiting over 50,000 people.

Meanwhile, after more than 40 years of struggle and with funding and support from RRI’s SRM, the Indian Law Resource Center brought the case of the Maya Q’eqchi’ Agua Caliente Indigenous Peoples v. Guatemala to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in February 2022. In December 2023, the Maya Q’eqchi’ Agua Caliente achieved [a landmark victory](#). Not only did the court order a halt to mining on community lands, but it also recommended new legislation recognizing Indigenous property rights. Its ruling gave the government six months to award the community its land title.

Bolivia

In Bolivia, RRI’s engagement dates back to 2013–2014, when it supported Indigenous and campesino organizations to operationalize the country’s 2009 constitutional recognition of Indigenous autonomies. A key focus was placed on gender justice, highlighting the leadership of women in forest-based enterprises such as Brazil nut cooperatives and timber collectives. From 2017 to 2019, RRI contributed to strengthening governance in Charagua Iyambae, the first formally autonomous Indigenous territory



Participants of a training workshop on Early Warning and Action System in Bajo Quimiriki, Peru.
Photo by AIDESEP-Peru.

in the country. By 2023, in partnership with the Centro de Estudios Jurídicos e Investigación Social (CEJIS) and the National Confederation of Indigenous Women of Bolivia, RRI helped secure the titling of 181,130 hectares in the Multiethnic Indigenous Territory of Beni, benefiting the Mojeño Trinitario, Mojeño Ignaciano, Movi-ma, Yuracaré, and Tsimane Peoples.

Peru

In Peru, RRI’s collaboration with AIDESEP has evolved over many years. In 2014, it supported cross-border mapping with the Instituto del Bien Común to expose overlapping oil and gas concessions in Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia and reinforce Indigenous FPIC claims. During UNFCCC COP20 in Lima, RRI amplified Indigenous organizations’ voices in positioning tenure rights as a climate solution. In 2017–2019, RRI worked with the Andean Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations and women’s networks to support agroecological enterprises rooted in food sovereignty and ancestral knowledge.

Together, RRI and AIDESEP strengthened the leadership and political participation of 263 Indigenous women from 27 ethnic groups in the Peruvian Amazon, empowering them to take more active roles in their communities’ decision-making. They also bolstered women’s technical capacities, training them in

Supporting the Afro-descendant Movement in Latin America and the Caribbean



In dense rainforests along ancestral rivers, Afro-descendant communities have long safeguarded nature—not by decree, but through centuries of care and resistance. Their identity is inseparable from the land, yet for decades their rights to that land have remained precarious.

“Territory is not just soil. It is culture, memory, and future,” said PCN’s José Luis Rengifo.

For 13 years, RRI has supported the Afro-descendant movement in Latin America and the Caribbean by helping to craft advocacy strategies, mapping Afro-descendant Peoples’ territorial presence, and collecting crucial data to inform policymakers and the international community of their important role in conservation and climate action.

The identification of 205 million hectares of Afro-descendant Peoples’ territories in the region enabled the governments of Colombia and Brazil to make the case for the international recognition of Afro-descendant Peoples as a rightsholder and actor in global biodiversity conservation efforts. This support culminated at the 16th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in 2024, where Afro-descendant Peoples were [recognized as actors in Article 8\(j\)](#), formally granting them political influence in negotiations and access to international financing.

“We need to keep pushing,” Rengifo says. “Recognition is the beginning. Now we must ensure implementation—territory by territory, community by community.”

using digital tools to support the creation of integrated farms in Koribeni, Mairidicai, Rio Bertha, and Airija communities. Recently, RRI and AIDSEP co-developed an [assessment](#) on women’s participation and conservation contributions in national and regional Indigenous organization.

Ecuador

In Ecuador, RRI supported mass Indigenous mobilizations in 2022, providing legal protection to more than 8,000 demonstrators. These mobilizations, led by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuador-

ian Amazon (CONFENIAE), and the Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin (COICA), pressured the government to strengthen FPIC protections and suspend extractive activity in ancestral territories.

Separately, in the Andean region, ALDEA launched the Land Restoration Lab, which exposed carbon offset fraud in REDD+ markets and trained youth land promoters in mapping, legal defense, and conservation planning.

Brazil

In Brazil, from 2023 to 2024, CLARIFI partnered with CONAQ to develop territorial and environmental management tools for 17 Quilombola communities across 11 states. These efforts support biodiversity protection, traditional agriculture, and long-term climate resilience in the Atlantic Forest and Cerrado biomes.

Mesoamerica

In Mesoamerica, CLARIFI collaborated with the Alianza Mesoamericana de Pueblos y Bosques



A community woman cooks food over a firepit outside her home in Honduras.
Credit: Joel Redman for If Not Us Then Who?

(AMPB) and Re:wild to support post-COVID-19 recovery across communities' territories. This partnership helped communities respond to pressures from extractive industries and climate shocks by strengthening their ecosystem restoration, forest management, and food sovereignty in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama.

Each of these achievements is rooted in RRI's long-standing commitment to co-creating strategies with those on the front lines. Through legal advocacy, governance innovation, gender justice, territorial monitoring, and strategic finance, RRI has strengthened the scaffolding for durable tenure systems across Latin America.

ROOTED AND RISING: THE PATH FORWARD

As RRI marks its 20th anniversary in 2025, we are called not only to reflect on past achievements but to confront the urgent realities that shape our future. In a global moment defined by accelerating climate breakdown, resurgent authoritarianism, and deepening inequality, the foundational vision of RRI—centering the land and territorial rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant Peoples—has never been more relevant.

Yet while recognition of community tenure rights has grown significantly, progress is fragile. Rights defenders are criminalized, legal reforms are undermined, and climate finance continues to sideline those who have most successfully protected lands and territories. For many, recognition has not translated into real and tangible rights. Rollbacks are an ever-growing concern, as demand for land resources continues to grow and more powerful actors continue to rewrite rules or seize lands with impunity. Women and youth—who lead frontline resistance—are still excluded from decision-making and available funding streams.



Iranyishuye Mariam from REPALEAC Burundi-ASSEJEBA and Jenifer Lasimbang from Malaysia-Borneo at the Forum for Indigenous and Local Community Women in Central Africa and the Congo Basin in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo.

Photo by Victoire Douniama for Rights and Resources Initiative, 2023.

This is not a policy gap. It is a crisis of justice and survival. RRI's role must continue to be one of connection and innovation—facilitating national and regional coalitions, amplifying country-level advocacy, and investing in intergenerational leadership. From tools like Land-Mark and community monitoring to incubating the Tenure Facility and WiGSA, and securing Afro-descendant Peoples' recognition under the Convention on Biological Diversity, RRI's impact lies in identifying gaps, devising solutions, and shifting power.

"Innovation has always been RRI's lifeblood," said co-founder Arvind Khare. "But to stay relevant, it needs to constantly pay attention to emerging issues in tenure—whether it's water, pastoralism, or the aspirations of youth."

As surfaced in RRI's [Blue Skies 2022](#) listening exercise—a series of dialogues with 100 grass-roots leaders across 22 countries—one message came through clearly: the future depends on preparing the next generation. Indigenous youth are not only inheritors of ancestral knowledge, but they are also demanding new spaces, tools, and alliances to protect their communities and territories.

Looking forward, the next phase of RRI's work must scale collective tenure rights recognition to an unprecedented degree and radically shift who holds power in policy, finance, and conservation. It must transform how institutions engage with land, resources, and rights, and it must center the leadership of those who have always protected these territories.

Across its coalition, strategies are evolving to meet the scale of today's challenges—from climate finance architecture to territorial defense technologies. RRI must expand its platforms for women's leadership, deepen youth partnerships, and continue to challenge donor and government frameworks that remain overly bureaucratic and inflexible. Scaling innovation means transforming not only what we fund, but how.

It also means acknowledging that many communities remain at the margins of global attention and investment—Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America, pastoralist groups in East Africa, or customary fisherfolk across coastal Asia. These communities must be equally prioritized in global efforts to scale rights-based solutions.

"There are not many organizations where young professionals are truly engaged in systemic change—where you're pushing the envelope and also building relationships with Indigenous federations and local

**"The only way for
RRI to stay relevant
is to constantly
keep innovating,
like it always has."**

ARVIND KHARE

communities,” said co-founder Augusta Molnar. “That creative, committed space is what makes RRI worth investing in.”

And as RRI enters its third decade, its leadership remains clear-eyed.

“We are not here to replicate old models,” said Solange Bandiaky-Badji, RRI’s President and Coordinator. “We are here to redefine how rights, resources, and power are distributed. Our future depends on trusting the leadership of those who have always protected these lands—and making sure they have the resources, space, and political power to continue doing so.”

This is not just a call for inclusion in broken systems. It is a call to change them. To governments, we say: honor your commitments. To donors, we say: trust and fund those on the frontlines. To companies, we say: step aside if you will not stand up. And to communities everywhere defending land, life, and our collective future—we say: we are with you.



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