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New Report: Recognizing Indigenous Peoples and Community Land Rights to Limit Deforestation Is Cost-Effective Approach to Fight Poverty, Climate Change

US\$1.64 Billion – Amount Committed to REDD+ – Would Secure Land Rights to Almost Half Billion Hectares of Tropical Forest, Necessary Precursor for REDD+; New Institution Addressing Land Tenure Will Answer the Call

NEW YORK (17 September, 2014)—US\$1.64 billion, the funds pledged to date by three major multi-lateral initiatives at the United Nations and World Bank in preparing for the evolving REDD+ carbon market, would expand the demarcation, registration, and titling of rights of the local communities and Indigenous Peoples living on 450 million hectares, an area almost half the size of Europe, according to new research released by the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) and Tebtebba (Indigenous Peoples' International Centre for Policy Research and Education). These cost estimates provide a benchmark for future climate-change work as international negotiations to address greenhouse gas emissions heat up.

“Past research shows that Indigenous Peoples and local communities are the best stewards of their land and forests,” said Bryson Ogden, private-sector analyst at RRI, “but it also shows that many national governments undermine their rights to these lands and forests. International solutions to climate change and endemic poverty undervalue community contributions to focus on market-based programs that may not be effective due to underlying tenure insecurity.”

“We appreciate the value that the international community places on the world’s tropical forests as vast biodiversity warehouses and carbon sinks,” said Raymond de Chavez, deputy director of Tebtebba. “But these forests are, first and foremost, the homes of millions of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. To save these places of wonder, international efforts should focus on restoring and protecting the rights of those people whose stewardship has been protecting the forests for centuries.”

The research brief, “Recognizing Indigenous and Community Lands: Priority Steps to Advance Development and Mitigate Climate Change,” calculated the cost of clarifying Indigenous Peoples’ and community rights to the tropical forests where they live, noting that secure land tenure is a prerequisite for the success of climate, poverty reduction and ecosystem conservation initiatives. The new data suggests that it would cost somewhere between US\$189 million and US\$500 to better document and clarify the rights of the communities living on the 40-50 million hectares of community forests in Indonesia that Indonesian indigenous group AMAN has committed to map over the next 7 years.¹ Likewise in India, the data suggests it would cost

between US\$67.5 and \$537 million to ignite the recognition process of the rights of some 88 million tribal peoples in 168,772 villages.ⁱⁱ

The report was released in advance of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, to be held on 22-23 September, as well as the United Nations Secretary-General's Climate Summit, to be held on 23 September, at which many nations and corporations will announce voluntary commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Government of Sweden, as part of the commitments it will announce at the UN, has made the first investment of SEK100.5 million (roughly US\$15 million) toward the establishment of the International Land and Forest Tenure Facility, which will work to increase the clarity and security of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to their rural lands, forests, and drylands worldwide. The Facility will provide funding and technical support for tenure reform projects in developing countries proposed by Indigenous Peoples, local communities, governments, and civil society.

“The lack of clear rights to own and use land affects the livelihoods of millions of forest-dwellers and has also encouraged widespread illegal logging and forest loss,” said Charlotte Petri Gornitzka, Director General of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. “Establishing clear and secure community land rights will enable sustainable economic development, lessen the impacts of climate change and is a prerequisite for much needed sustainable investments.”

The Facility will be an independent organization governed by representatives from major interest groups including Indigenous Peoples, community and civil society organizations, donors and private entities. Governing and advisory groups will enable links to and coordination with other related international initiatives. The Facility will initiate pilot projects in a select set of countries in early 2015, and aims to become fully operational by the end of 2015.

According to [previous RRI research](#), the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to own and control their lands are formally recognized in at least 513 million hectares of the world's forests, an area more than 1.5 times the size of India. However, most of this land is concentrated in only a handful of lower and middle income countries, and governments still claim 73 percent of the world's forests.

In Peru, for example, host to the next meeting of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, more than 60 percent of the country's Amazonian forest has been granted to oil and gas concessions. These concessions overlap with four territorial reserves, five communal reserves and at least 70 percent of all native communities in the country. In Peru and 11 other countries, [past research](#) has estimated that approximately one in every three hectares licensed for commercial exploitation overlaps indigenous community land.

“The national governments that attend all these international meetings need to embrace the fact that the forests are not empty,” said Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and member of the Advisory Group of the International Land and Forest Tenure Facility. “Yes, the forests and other non-industrialized land hold value. But we must also value the rights of those who inhabit these areas and are stewards of the natural resources they contain. Failure to do so has resulted in much of the local conflict plaguing economic development today.”

As the negotiations continue, the rights and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples and local communities also continue to be undermined. A [new report](#) commissioned by Tebtebba warns that an impending economic recovery in the extractive industry—particularly mining—will amplify the issues and conflicts surrounding the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

For example, the price of uranium is currently depressed and, correspondingly, uranium mines in the western US—75 percent of which are on federal or tribal lands—have been abandoned. These mines have had significant impacts on the health and environment of surrounding communities. If the price of uranium rebounds as projected, the mines may be reopened and the Tebtebba report concludes that Indigenous Peoples will shoulder the heaviest burdens from the operations.

“There is now strong evidence that the role of tropical forests in combating climate change will only be realized if there is justice for the people whose lives are intertwined with these forests,” concluded RRI’s Ogden. “Stronger rights help Indigenous Peoples and local communities achieve economic development goals. As international efforts to fight climate change and poverty come to a head, the international community needs to embrace these truths.”

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Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) is a global coalition of 14 Partners and over 140 international, regional and community organizations advancing forest tenure, policy and market reforms. RRI leverages the strategic collaboration and investment of its Partners and Collaborators around the world by working together on research, advocacy, and convening strategic actors to catalyze change on the ground. RRI is coordinated by the Rights and Resources Group, a non-profit organization based in Washington, DC.
www.rightsandresources.org

Tebtebba (Indigenous Peoples’ International Centre for Policy Research and Education) is an indigenous peoples’ organization born out of the need for heightened advocacy to have the rights of indigenous peoples respected, protected and fulfilled worldwide. It also advocates and works on the elaboration and operationalization of indigenous peoples’ sustainable, self-determined development. Tebtebba actively engaged in the processes which led to the adoption of international human rights law and other international instruments, policies and agreements. These include the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the establishment of spaces within the United Nations, such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, among others.
www.tebtebba.org.

ⁱ AMAN. 2014. Indonesia: Up Scaling Indigenous Mapping Efforts to Secure Collective Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Indonesia. Presentation given at World Bank. <http://www.rightsandresources.org/event/scaling-up-strategies-to-secure-community-land-and-resource-rights-2/>.

ⁱⁱ Forest Survey India (1999), with population data updated from the Census of India (2011).