

DEFINING THE PATH FORWARD

Overview of RRI's Strategic Program for 2023–2027

Human rights-based approaches offer the most sensible means of protecting and restoring the planet's ecosystems to achieve global climate and conservation goals. Within this context, the need to scale up the legal recognition of IP, LC, and ADP rights—especially those of women and youth in these groups—represents one of the most powerful actions to safeguard the planet while advancing justice, peace, and prosperity.

Achieving such ends within a rapidly diminishing window of opportunity requires unprecedented coordination, innovation, and action, and therein lies the ambition of the RRI Coalition for the 2023–2027 period. We gained the contextual knowledge and guidance to produce this framework through an extensive listening exercise with our coalition members over the past year (Box 1), as well as external public events, analyses, and discussions among Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community leaders across the world.

Box 1: From Darkness to Blue Skies: A Coalition Listening Exercise

Over the course of 2022, one hundred leaders of grassroots networks in 22 countries—men, women, and youth among Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant Peoples—were interviewed about their hopes, dreams, and fears for the future.

The interviews, commissioned by RRI, used the "Blue Skies" thinking approach, which is a freeform space for brainstorming and new ideas. We encouraged participants to be open-minded and to think beyond day-to-day concerns. We sought clarity on what they want the world to be like in 2030 and beyond, how such a world could be brought into being, and their worries about their paths to get there. The leaders we interviewed expressed diverse views but shared at least one universal vision. In a "blue skies" world, their communities would have secure rights to their communal lands, forests, and territories; including the rights to govern these areas and exercise control over who lives there and uses their resources. Four key themes emerged in these conversations:

- The need for new generation of foundational leaders
- The freedom to live with dignity and rights
- Embracing technology to create new narratives
- Creation of new Indigenous economic models.

For the full Blue Skies report and interviews, visit <https://rightsandresources.org/blueskies/>.

Five interlinked facts define the emerging context for this framework.

1. Communities customarily own at least half of the global land area but hold legal rights to less than 20 percent, and rights to other resource assets are often poorly defined.
2. At least 2 billion people are affected by these challenges and numbers are expected to grow over the coming decade. Additionally, despite their outsized role in the maintenance of community wellbeing and the management of collective lands and resources, women continue to face unequal rights. Similarly, youth have thus far been inadequately engaged as leaders within their communities and beyond.
3. A robust body of evidence now shows that community-held lands and territories tend to outperform public and private land holders relative to sustainability, equity, and resilience criteria.
4. Growing government support for community land rights is providing new opportunities for progress. As per RRI's Opportunity Framework, at least 24 tropical forest countries have adequate legal frameworks and operational capacities to support the legal recognition and/or protection of community-based tenure rights.
5. There is now widespread acknowledgement that IP and LC rights are central to achieving global environmental goals. This is illustrated by an increase in robust **standards** and **safeguards** to ensure rights-based approaches; a growing ecosystem of community organizations and their allies; and improved **coordination** and **advocacy** to foster **unprecedented donor pledges** and dedicated support for **gender-inclusive climate actions**.

In this context, we see four major challenges to address to address in the next five years:

1. **Mobilizing governments:** Despite improving political conditions in some jurisdictions, many countries are experiencing an increase in autocratic rule, shrinking political spaces, and the rollback of various rights, including formally recognized community land rights. The Covid-19 pandemic also exacerbated inequalities, leading to even greater restrictions on civil liberties and adoption of recovery plans that legitimize land grabs.
2. **Mobilizing funding and innovative modalities:** In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, government debt rose to unprecedented levels globally. Supply chain disruptions and labor shortages due to increasing geopolitical tensions are contributing to rising energy costs and food insecurity across the globe. At the same time, as public revenues diminish, private philanthropy has grown, presenting new potential for the advancement of community rights at the local level. That said, bilateral funding remains a critical component of donor support

for the IP, LC and ADP rights agenda, particularly to engage with government for transformative reforms. Moving forward, we see an urgent need for donor support to adopt fit-for-purpose funding approaches (as highlighted by two recent analyses: [Funding with Purpose](#) and [Building Bridges](#)). This is crucial to ensure greater direct community access to climate and conservation finance, and to achieve the RRI Path to Scale and Transformation to scale up global action on collective rights for climate and conservation.

- 3. Scaling-up implementation:** Despite significant progress in the number of countries with policies and legal frameworks recognizing community land and resource rights, implementation remains a challenge.
- 4. Going beyond “do no harm”:** Multilateral institutions and initiatives like the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), and the Coalition for Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest Finance (LEAF) have developed safeguards requiring the respect of local land rights, but none were designed to advance community forest tenure and governance.

The Path Forward

To realize its full potential, RRI needs to consider four operational lessons for the way forward. Combined with our value proposition and theory of change (see Annex II), they are the building blocks of our new five-year strategic program for 2023 to 2027.

1. Strong local organizations and progressive social and market systems are required to seize opportunities, diminish the risks of rollbacks, and ensure progress towards rights-based climate and conservation actions.
2. Local advocacy is essential to the advancement of tenure reforms and the pursuit of rights-based climate, biodiversity, and sustainable development action.
3. Multilateral institutions and intergovernmental organizations can advance or stall developing country support for the land rights agenda.
4. Fit-for-purpose funding modalities are essential for the realization of global ambitions on rights-based climate and conservation priorities.

Strategic Directions 2023–2027

RRI’s Fourth Strategic Program (SP4) reflects the long-term [institutional goals](#) of the RRI Coalition, as defined in its 2020 [Memorandum of Understanding](#), and more recent Partner demands for an inclusive consideration of the different lands and ecosystems held by communities. For the 2023-2027 period, RRI’s work program aims to contribute to the following goals:

1. Advance the legal recognition of community land and forest tenure rights, raising the total area owned by or designated for IPs, LCs, and ADPs by at least 400 million hectares by 2030.
2. Secure the rights of IPs, LCs, ADPs, and particularly the women and youth within these groups, to manage, conserve, use, and trade all ecosystem products and services in areas under their control, and ensure they are protected from rollbacks, land grabbing, and criminalization.
3. Contribute to mobilizing at least US\$10 billion of new funding—prioritizing local initiatives and organizations—to advance the above targets over the 2023–2030 period in tropical forest countries.

Linked to the above goals are three following strategic objectives that will guide RRI's overall work program for 2023-2027. RRI will utilize [the Path to Scale and Transformation framework](#) and the [Opportunity Framework](#) to foster coordinated actions towards these objectives:

1. Scale up in-country engagement to support local organizations and advocacy in Latin America, Asia, and Africa through regional programs, the Strategic Response Mechanism (SRM), and the Community Land Rights and Conservation Finance Initiative (CLARIFI). RRI will substantially increase country and regional program support to IP, LC, ADP and women's and youth's movements, organizations, and CSOs to secure and effectively govern their lands and territories and mitigate the risks of rollbacks and criminalization. Renewed strategic engagement of the coalition in countries will increase the number of states with adequate enabling environments of gender-sensitive, legal, regulatory, and procedural frameworks, and enhance institutional capacities for the recognition of community tenure and livelihood rights. This renewed engagement will yield a robust pipeline of mid- to large-scale investment opportunities for CLARIFI and other financial mechanisms to invest in scaling-up community land rights and mitigate climate change.
2. Catalyze global ambitions, coordination, and innovation to scale up the agency of rightsholders to the level and pace required to achieve 2030 global climate and conservation goals. The rapidly changing global political-economic context, associated food and energy crises, and declining aid budgets in developed countries, coupled with growing support from private philanthropies, imply that we need new modalities and network connections to raise capital to the levels required to secure community rights at scale. RRI will leverage and expand its [Path to Scale](#) working group of bilateral donors, private philanthropies, multilaterals, and financial mechanisms to coordinate strategies and investments that support the most strategic geographic and political opportunities for advancing community land and livelihood rights. RRI will mobilize this group to scope, define, and catalyze the next generation of fit-for-purpose funding vehicles to manage and channel large-scale funds directly to community-led

organizations to rapidly advance recognition of rights and support self-determined conservation and development initiatives.

3. Mobilize key constituencies and leverage networks, data, and tools to drive support for community land tenure, governance, and self-determination. RRI will mobilize and expand its existing programs, networks, data, and tools, to advance the following priorities:
 - a. *Advance IP, LC and ADP women's tenure and roles in governance and leadership.*
 - b. *Mobilize the climate and conservation sectors to adopt rights-based approaches and support the land rights agenda.*
 - c. *Leverage the private sector to advance community-led development, conservation, and management of rural lands and forests.*
 - d. *Monitor and report on global progress towards the recognition of community land, resource, and livelihood rights and global goals.*

Budget Request

RRI is requesting US\$75 million over five years—at least 15 million per year—an increase of approximately 54 percent over the annual average budget (\$9.8 million) of the preceding five years 2018–2022. The increased funding would strengthen RRI's country and regional programs, gender justice approach, and strategic initiatives. This would enable RRI to dramatically scale-up investments towards establishing paths to scale and transformation at local and national levels and supporting the legal recognition and implementation of the land and resource rights of IPs, LCs, ADPs, and particularly the women among them, including their ability to realize their self-determined priorities.

Read RRI's complete Strategic Program 4 in Annex III of our Program Book at

bit.ly/RRIProgram