

**SCALING-UP GLOBAL ACTION ON COLLECTIVE LAND RIGHTS FOR CLIMATE, CONSERVATION AND LIVELIHOODS: A high-level discussion co-hosted by the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) and the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)**



## **Event Summary**

On September 16, 2021, a high-level discussion convened online to address new opportunities and ongoing efforts to advance the collective land rights agenda at the upcoming UN Climate Change Conference, COP26, and related international events. RRI also launched the Path to Scale, its new initiative to scale up global action on collective land and resource rights. About 300 people from over 63 countries and five continents attended the event.

The discussion focused on three key areas: the current status of global efforts to secure Indigenous and community land rights; the potential for scaling up rights recognition; and plans and opportunities to scale-up commitment and action, particularly around COP26. Speakers stressed that there can be no pathway to net zero without securing tenure rights for Indigenous Peoples, local communities and Afro-descendant Peoples (IPs, LCs and ADPs). They emphasized the urgent need for better collaboration, alignment and knowledge sharing, and agreed that current public funding models are not working.

The speakers called for radical changes to the financial architecture for climate and conservation to advance collective land and resource rights, in order to recognize, protect and support the communities conserving the planet's most valuable lands and resources.

## **Background**

Conserving and restoring forests and rural lands is essential to achieving global climate, conservation, and sustainable development goals. Secure land rights for IPs, LCs, and ADPs—particularly the women among them—are a necessary foundation for scaling the implementation of all Nature-based Solutions. This includes protecting existing forests and critical ecosystems, restoring landscapes, and ensuring effective carbon markets.

However, although Indigenous Peoples, local communities and Afro-descendant Peoples have customary rights to over 50 percent of the Earth's terrestrial area, they have legal ownership to just 10 percent. This gap in ownership must be addressed if the world is to mitigate climate change and halt biodiversity loss. While there has been progress on this agenda in recent years, achieving climate and sustainable development goals will require much more ambition and coordination, as well as new initiatives to accelerate impacts.

The event aimed to increase awareness on the status of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant Land Rights and their critical importance to achieving climate, conservation and development goals. It celebrated the work already underway by showcasing related initiatives and commitments, and sought to foster new collaboration

between bilateral donors, governments, private philanthropies, and other stakeholders to accelerate efforts before the climate and biodiversity COPs.

## **Summary report**

### 1: Introduction

Moderator Fred Pearce opened the discussion at 8.30 EDT on September 16 by welcoming attendees and setting out the problem: that secure land and resource rights for IPs, LCs and ADPs remain scarce, despite the urgent need to recognize them in order to deliver solutions at scale to the biodiversity and climate crises. He described secure land tenure as “an inescapable foundation of conservation,” before inviting Deb Haaland, the first ever Indigenous cabinet secretary in the United States, to deliver her keynote speech.

### 2: Community Land Rights and the Climate and Conservation COPs: Plans and Opportunities to Scale-up Commitment and Action

- **Secretary Deb Haaland**, 54th U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Pueblo of Laguna

Joining from Washington, Keynote Speaker Sec. Deb Haaland outlined the tremendous challenges Americans face due to natural disasters, and noted that the climate crisis disproportionately affects people of colour. To illustrate this, she described Napakiak, a village in Alaska, where buildings are literally falling into the river.

She was clear that we will not achieve climate conservation goals without first bringing IPs and LCs to the decision-making table. She emphasized that IPs and LCs know their land better than anyone, having cared for it for generations.

"The US is ready to roll up its sleeves and get to work in how we collectively recognize and fund the contributions of Indigenous communities," she said. Haaland described this period as a turning point in history, as we pivot towards a new era of sustainable futures. "It is only with nature-based solutions, innovation and science, and Indigenous knowledge that we can rise to the challenge," she said.

### 3: Current Status of Global Efforts to Secure Indigenous and Community Land Rights: Gaps and Opportunities to Scale-up

- **Solange Bandiaky-Badji**, Coordinator, Rights and Resources Initiative

Dr Solange Bandiaky-Badji began by enumerating the issue: that IPs, LCs and ADPs—and particularly women within those communities—represent 1.8 billion people who protect, steward and lay claim to around half of the world’s forests. Their stewardship protects carbon sinks and minimizes deforestation, so they represent a climate solution—and yet, despite having rights to 50 percent of all forests, they formally own less than 15 percent of it. She shared RRI’s findings that securing tenure rights in 24 of the most forested countries could help avoid the equivalent of up to ¼ of global emissions in 2020.

“Securing tenure rights is a cost-effective climate, conservation, and development solution. Indigenous Peoples and local communities’ tenure security is fundamental to achieving global climate and biodiversity goals,” she said.

Bandiaky-Badji highlighted the current climate investment gap in tenure rights: less than 1 percent of global climate ODA went to IPs and LCs’ tenure and forest management in the past decade, and just one tenth of that went towards securing land rights. She warned that this must change if we’re to overcome the biodiversity and climate crises. Collective tenure rights, she explained, represent an extremely cost-effective solution: at a total cost of between US\$8.9 and US\$18.6 billion, it equates to between US\$0.19 and US\$2.77 per ton of avoided carbon emissions, according to RRI research.

Bandiaky-Badji argued that the sector has not flourished because it lacks an adequate financial mechanism; “we need to change the architecture,” she said. She set out a number of solutions, including more funding, more and improved coordination, greater efficiency, and a new instrument to provide direct support to local organizations for them to advance their rights. Without this new mechanism, she emphasized, we won’t meet our climate and biodiversity goals.

To highlight progress, she shared a number of RRI-coordinated initiatives—and, in doing so, launched [Path to Scale](#), an informal network of donors and financial mechanisms that seeks to raise US\$1 billion by COP26 and US\$10 billion by 2030, and to achieve recognition for an additional 400 million hectares by 2030. She described the Community Land Rights and Conservation Finance Initiative, a prospective international regranting mechanism for public and private funds to channel support directly to rights holder organizations.

She also she drew attention to the [Land Rights Standard](#), a recently-launched best-practice standard to guide all landscape-level investment by civil society organizations, companies and investors. In conclusion, Bandiaky-Badji urged the global community to think outside of the box in their support of a new, dedicated funding mechanism. She called COP26 a window of opportunity, and urged donors to start pledging and mobilising public funds ahead of it.

#### 4: Community Land Rights and the COPs: Plans and Opportunities to Scale-up Commitment and Action (continued)

- **Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park**, Minister for Pacific and the Environment, FCDO

Keynote Speaker Lord Goldsmith praised co-speaker Tuntiak Katan for his leadership and remarked how extraordinary it is that the forests looked after and lived in by Indigenous Peoples contain almost a quarter of the carbon in the world. He highlighted the absolute need to respect and recognize IPs and LCs’ unique knowledge and understanding, and to amplify and listen to their voices, emphasising that this is a matter of urgency given the record numbers of natural disasters, species loss, deforestation, and marine pollution we face today.

Unless we reverse the damage we are doing to our planet's natural systems, he said, every one of our shared global goals will be out of reach.

"As the world begins to wake up to the tragedy that we are causing ourselves, I cannot imagine how painful this must be for Indigenous Peoples, because you've been sounding the alarm for decades," Lord Goldsmith said. "While others have been part of the problem, you have been providing solutions. You've also been doing so against the odds and without any meaningful support or recognition," he said.

Lord Goldsmith stressed the need for nature-based solutions that protect and restore the abundance and connectivity of life on earth, and, in doing so, tackle poverty, pollution, pandemics and climate change at the same time. He said that there is no credible pathway to tackling climate change that does not involve protecting nature on an unprecedented level, and highlighted a pipeline of new initiatives designed to deliver on this, including the UK's new £100 million Biodiverse Landscapes Fund. He warned, however, that public money will not be enough; the problem requires "profound, systemic change," he said, which is why the UK is supporting an alliance of countries committed to identifying issues and shifting the "perverse incentives that are driving destruction" in favour of renewal.

He outlined how the UK is making agricultural subsidies contingent on good stewardship, and trying to break the link between commodity supply chains and deforestation. He also called on multinational development banks such as the World Bank to mainstream nature across their portfolio, and said the UK is working hard to align its private sector with environmentally-sustainable growth.

Lord Goldsmith put IPs and LCs at the centre of all of nature-based solutions, saying that we'll only help the natural world to recover if those who depend on nature the most directly—and who understand it the most deeply—are at the heart of protecting and restoring it. He criticized the tiny amount we've spent on land tenure rights so far—"a gigantic missed opportunity"—and said governments have a unique ability and responsibility to change things. Lord Goldsmith assured the audience that the UK was using its full leverage to call for greater recognition of rights and committed himself to doing everything he can. In conclusion, he asserted that shining a light on global efforts and coordinating across sectors will help to create the political will needed to meet the challenge.

- **Tuntiak Katan**, Indigenous Shuar of Ecuador; General Coordinator of the Global Alliance for Territorial Communities (GATC); and Vice General Coordinator of Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica (COICA)

Keynote Speaker Tuntiak Katan joined the meeting from his community in Ecuador, where he said that the nearby river has been reduced to just "a trickle," a tenth of what it once was. With this in mind, he shared his concern and shock at how we are "killing the world."

Katan described how, through the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities, IPs and LCs around the world are now working together—despite cultural and linguistic differences—to define the issues and identify solutions.

“What we’ve seen and what we’re proposing, is that the solution is here, in our communities, in nature,” he said. Sharing his frustration with the phrase “climate change” instead of “climate crisis,” he used his presentation to emphasize that the planet is at breaking point. While he welcomed political commitments, he expressed concern that words and declarations on paper are not translating into action. IPs and LCs think holistically about their ecosystems and want to preserve them, he explained, but they need help—and not funding to duplicate existing mechanisms on the ground but material help to preserve the 840 million hectares of natural forests that they’re already caring for, land titles to recognize their legal rights to that land, and support that strengthens Indigenous economies. He spoke of the need to undo the damage extractivist countries have done, and warned that post-pandemic economic reactivation could spell yet more exploitation and extractivism of IP and LC resources.

Katan again commended the fact that world leaders are launching new mechanisms, systems, and strategies, but posed a question: Why is this funding not reaching communities? He proposed that we invest at least 80 percent of funding in the territories themselves and 20 percent on operational systems, instead of the other way around, and encouraged donors to tap into existing Indigenous systems in order to profit from their knowledge, structures and mechanisms. In conclusion, he emphasized that IPs and LCs are ready to begin the dialogue in order to increase recognition of their efforts, and called for “specific and effective actions” to take advantage of this.

## 5: Demonstrating the Potential of Scaling-up Rights Recognition: Experience of Kenya and Peru

- **Fabiola Muñoz Dodero**, former Minister of the Environment and Agriculture, Peru

Fabiola Muñoz Dodero agreed with the moderator’s assessment, that Peru has grown rapidly but inequitably, and said that she considered the rights of IPs and LCs to be a crucial issue. However, she acknowledged that the discussion on rights has not been at the center of conversations in Peru. She recalled that, as head of Peru’s Ministry of Agriculture and Climate, she tried to close the gap between rights and tenure, and, in doing so, learned that it’s possible to have a broad and open dialogue, and that stakeholders are willing to engage, but that the necessary resources are not in place. As well as political will and financial backing, she said there needs to be a better understanding of the issues surrounding land tenure, for example how land rights spark conflict.

She explained that communities need legal rights with corresponding predictability and sustainability in order to protect their land. “The largest amount of deforestation is happening in places where there are no assigned land and forest tenure rights. At the community level, we need the formalization of rights to prevent a biodiversity collapse,” she said.

Dodero noted that not all stakeholders share the same vision when it comes to community rights; for example, ministries, non-profits, and other organizations define the land tenure gap in different ways. She thus warned that cooperation isn’t enough, highlighting the need to align information and protocols.

In closing, she called for an intercultural vision that is more respectful of IPs and LCs and their fundamental role in the climate economy. “What I’m talking about isn’t just a matter of romanticism. We must understand that Indigenous Peoples have an extremely important role to play in these discussions,” she said.

- **Kimaren Ole Riamit**, Maasai Community Leader Kenya, Founder-Director of Indigenous Livelihoods Enhancement Partners (ILEPA)

Kimaren illustrated how important the land rights agenda is to Kenyans, explaining how the Maasai have been subjected to generations of land rights violations, initially by colonial settlers and more recently by conservation groups. He underlined how vulnerable Kenyans are to climate shocks, and said that, in theory, the government has responded to these issues in an exemplary manner, embedding respect for Indigenous Peoples and recognition of their land rights in its progressive new constitution and signing almost all relevant environmental accords. Kimaren contended, however, that despite all of this progress on paper, Kenyans have seen few gains on the ground.

He expressed concern that the multilateral actors channeling financing towards IPs and LCs in Kenya have very little connection with local communities; they focus their interventions on the state, forgetting that the state is part of the problem when it comes to marginalization of IPs and LCs.

“There has been far more focus on procedural rights and less on actually securing land and forest tenure rights for Indigenous Peoples and local communities,” he said. Ole Riamit described how Kenya has had its progressive new Community Land Act for five years, but has only recognized the rights of six communities in that time. He cautioned that the windows of opportunity created by law for IPs and LCs to address historical injustices in Kenya are closing, expressing his frustration that Kenyans’ rights are recognized, but they have nothing to show for this. The missing link, he concluded, is not a policy or an institution but the actual delivery of resources into the hands of communities who have been safeguarding their land for generations.

## 6. Panel Discussion: Indigenous, Community and Donor-led Initiatives to Scale-up Action on Land Rights

**Pasang Dolma Sherpa**, Executive Director, Center for Indigenous Peoples Research & Development, Nepal, agreed that the role of IPs and LCs is vital for nature-based solutions and contended that the present financial architecture violates their rights by focusing on either biodiversity or carbon, while sidelining their values and knowledge systems. She highlighted the fact that 6.2 million IPs and LCs around the world are working to safeguard biodiversity, and echoed speakers’ calls for a new financial architecture that would allow them to respond to the crisis. Sherpa called for a single new mechanism that would operate globally as well as nationally to protect IP and LC rights and transfer their knowledge to future generations as well as raise funding and distribute it to local organizations. She stressed the need to understand the communities and their concerns before designing this mechanism.

**Cristián Samper**, President and CEO of the Wildlife Conservation Society, spoke of his Colombian origins and noted that Colombia has a long tradition of recognizing IP and LC rights. He recounted his realization that these are “key approaches” that are “completely compatible with conservation” and that complement the work of conservationists worldwide. He said that WCS considers recognizing the tenures and rights of IPs and LCs to be a core element of their strategy to secure livelihoods and protect biodiversity; in evidence of this, they already work with more than 200 Indigenous groups around the world, and more than 1,200 Indigenous communities.

*Moderator Fred Pearce asked what commitments the panelists would like to see emerging from COP26 in order to scale up their efforts and truly make a difference?*

Samper addressed the question first, remarking that this is an incredibly important period for the world, with COP26 and the convention on biodiversity meetings coming up. He observed that much of the focus seemed to be on measuring territories in terms of carbon, and warned that we shouldn’t ignore the biodiversity component. He drew attention to the 30x30 initiative that seeks to protect and conserve 30 percent of the land and the ocean by 2030, which he deemed a “key goal”, as long as it’s done in the right way. In his capacity as advisor to the Bezos Earth Fund, Samper forecasted a series of investments specifically designed to support the work of IPs and LCs on the ground, but said that there is still an urgent need to grow financing for the issue.

“Private philanthropy has a catalytic role in this, and we need the private sector to scale up investments for those actually doing the work—Indigenous Peoples and local communities,” he said.

Pasang expressed her hope that donor representatives at COP26 will not lead with the same old modalities but make new pledges to recognize rights and tackle the climate crisis. She acknowledged structural problems with climate finance, in particular that there is not enough funding dedicated to IPs and LCs for their work, and also contended that rules and procedures have been too complicated. “Climate solutions are not possible without respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples,” she reiterated.

**Gustavo Sánchez Valle**, President of Red Mochaf in Mexico and a member of the Executive Committee of the Meso-american Alliance of People and Forests, introduced RED Mochaf as part of a regional platform in Mesoamerica that brings together different national organizations. He then described the Mesoamerican Territorial Fund, a pilot finance mechanism designed to improve communication with territories and make investments in Indigenous areas.

“Traditional finance mechanisms tend to look at local communities only as beneficiaries and not as actors with their own right to decide. Therefore, this financial mechanism is far less costly and much more effective for directing funding to those doing the work,” he said. He explained that the goal is to position these Indigenous finance mechanisms as the interface between IPs and LCs and large climate funds, in order to avoid the inefficient intermediation of funds that has characterized efforts in the past.

## Conclusions: Next Steps and Opportunities at COP26

- **Chris Penrose-Buckley**, Senior Land Policy Lead, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

Chris Penrose-Buckley recounted the points that emerged during the event, including: that there is no pathway to net zero without recognizing tenure rights; the importance of knowledge and expertise; that public funding is not currently working; and the importance of alignment and collaboration.

He reflected on the priorities in the approach to COP26 and beyond, speaking of the need to shift this from a side issue and part of the inclusion agenda to being a central pillar of the fight against climate change, and to see local communities not as beneficiaries but as key actors.

“This is not about what we can do for you,” he said, addressing IPs and LCs in the audience and worldwide. “It’s about the service that you provide for the whole planet, and the need to recognize that, to reward it properly, and to sustain it.”

Penrose-Buckley highlighted the speakers’ calls to increase funding, and pledged the UK government’s support for this at COP26. He reiterated the need to change the approach to delivery, by developing finance mechanisms that work, dialogue that supports action on the ground, and national policy change. “There’s a big opportunity to link local action with global progress on these issues,” he said, adding that we’ll need to sustain this action well beyond COP26. Penrose Buckley praised collaboration between the many stakeholders to date and shared his hopes that this will continue as stakeholders go beyond dialogue to meaningful progress on the ground.

- **Tuntiak Katan**, Indigenous Shuar of Ecuador, General Coordinator of the Global Alliance for Territorial Communities (GATC), Vice General Coordinator of Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica (COICA)

Katan welcomed the positive changes underway but reemphasized that change must mean recognition of the Indigenous and local structures that already exist, and not starting from scratch.

“Indigenous Peoples do not want to be seen as beneficiaries; we want to be seen as co-authors, as agents, as leaders, as changemakers, and this shift in mindset needs to happen now,” he said. He listed a number of Indigenous organizations already working on the global Climate Change agenda, including the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests, and reminded the audience that solutions to the climate crisis lie in community-led initiatives that take place in the natural environment. He criticized organizations for paying lip service to the fact that they work with IPs and LCs without actually doing so, and reminded the audience that economic revival poses a threat to Indigenous Peoples and nature.



In his closing remarks, he called on donors to support IPs and LCs' land titling and to put local knowledge and initiatives at the center of all conservation and restoration mechanisms. "We're ready. Join us in our fight! We want to sit down together and talk," he said.

Moderator Fred Pearce closed the discussion at 3pm.

**For more information, see the following links:**

- [Event Video](#)
- [Blog Post](#)
- [Path to Scale website](#)
- [Land Rights Standard Principles](#)
- [Global Territorial Alliance](#)