



## Brazil: Spurring a Progressive Forest Policy Framework

*The Rights and Resources Initiative has influenced policy changes and support tenure reform programs in Brazil that affect more than a million Brazilians and 200 million hectares of forest*

- + *In Acre state in July 2007, RRI brought leaders from 40 nations together to meet with forest activists, community leaders and officials in a well-publicized conference that represented a breakthrough in efforts to build political support for forest tenure reform in Brazil*
- + *Actions by the public and private sector, supported to a large extent by the intellectual framework provided by RRI, have had a remarkable impact, and Brazil is moving rapidly to embrace community forest management*
- + *In June 2009, with the administration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva announced the creation of a national community forestry policy that would promote sustainable management of forests used by farmers, settlers, indigenous peoples and forest communities*

For one week in July 2007, the Brazilian city of Rio Branco, in the heart of the Amazon, became the community forestry capital of the world. Participants from 40 countries gathered to explore the emerging phenomenon of community-based forest enterprises (CFEs), dynamic, small-scale businesses that tap the huge wealth of entrepreneurial talent that exists in forest-dwelling communities.

Instigated and led by the RRI, who began their relationship with the Brazilian Forest Service in 2006 through MegaFlorestais (a network of leaders of forest agencies of the world's top 10 forested countries, coordinated by RRI), the global conference was widely covered by wire reporters based in Brazil and by the major newspapers and magazines in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Brasília. Brazil's public and its policymakers watched as Brazil's forest communities, told their stories and shared experiences with colleagues from throughout the developing world and organized their advocacy. Addressing their political leaders, they called for an end to red tape and other obstacles to market access, materials and investment. The conference spurred unprecedented political support for tenure reform in Brazil, giving an opportunity for government officials and community groups to come together to move it forward.

The International Conference on Community Forest Management and Enterprise was unusual in many ways. It catalyzed the first high-level conversation between local forest community leaders from across Brazil with the Minister of Environment (Marina Silva at the time). The event brought to Acre 300 leaders and supporters of community-forest enterprises to meet with government policy-makers from Africa, Asia, and Central and South America.

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**Luiz Carlos Joels**  
Serviço Florestal Brasileiro

RRI's partners in organizing the conference included the Brazilian Forest Service, International Tropical Timber Organization and the Global Alliance of Community Forestry, in cooperation with the Brazilian government and IUCN. The governments of Acre state and Brazil hosted the conference.

Participants met in small groups with informal, simultaneous interpretation in four languages. At the end they delivered a strong declaration, calling for recognition of the importance of forest communities in promoting economic development and conservation, and an end to political, legal and financial obstacles that prevent communities from fully participating in the economic life of their nations.

In a parallel forum, local community forest leaders from across Brazil held their own meetings to report on Brazil's experience with the global themes addressed at the event. They reported on the nation's lack of a policy framework to encourage and support forest communities, and noted their lack of political power in battling widespread policy constraints. They also developed a plan and strategy to establish a national-level policy to support community forestry.

*RRI also helped to clarify the importance of involving the forest communities in the decision-making process. The conference in Acre gave policy makers a chance to hear what community leaders had to say.*

**Luiz Carlos Joels**  
Serviço Florestal Brasileiro

RRI continued its interaction with the forest sector leadership in Brazil on forest tenure and policy reform through the invitation to key international dialogues and in particular with the close contact during MegaFlorestais, of which Brazil has been a co-chair since 2007.

According to Luiz Carlos Joels, who retired recently as director of the *Serviço Florestal Brasileiro*, Brazil's National Program for Community Forestry was one of the many

outcomes of the 2007 conference and continued interaction with RRI. Launched in June 2009, the national program includes the agencies Incra (representing the settlements), Funai (indigenous people), and ICMBio (populations in conservation areas), which together represent some 1.3 million Amazonians.

"We had begun the process of change, but RRI helped to create the intellectual space we needed to understand the issues and make choices that would be right for Brazil," said Joels.

In a dramatic moment at the conference, community leaders presented a letter to Minister Marina da Silva, calling on Brazilian government officials to meet with community leaders and trade union groups to build a support system for community forest management. This encounter led to a commitment by the government to develop a process and a national community forestry policy, a process that was spearheaded by the Brazilian Forest Service, with the other related government agencies.

Two years after the conference in Acre, on June 5, 2009, President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva signed a decree establishing the Federal Program of Family and Community Forestry to promote sustainable management of the forests used by farmers, agrarian reform settlers, and traditional communities. Federal officials also agreed to implement a national program to provide financial, technical and legal support to community foresters.

"The pressure from society has been so great that other institutions working in the forests have begun to address community forestry," says Joels. "The path is still long, but the first significant steps have been taken, and RRI has played a critical role. It has been vital that they provided logistical support and an intellectual framework for taking this movement forward. And they brought ideas that we could use as a point of departure, rather than telling us what to do."