



## The Rights and Resources Initiative: Advocacy for Community Forestry in the ITTO

*Through its research and advocacy over the past five years, the Rights and Resources Initiative has influenced the policies of the International Tropical Timber Organization, an international body that promotes the conservation, sustainable management and trade of tropical forest resources worldwide.*

- + *RRI's research has helped shape understanding of the precedence of forest tenure goals in national, regional and global forestry goals*
- + *RRI has assisted the ITTO in providing data and analysis that has helped move its leadership and member states to expand community forestry programs, with attention to tenure and forest governance*
- + *RRI has enlisted forestry officials in key forest nations to support initiatives for forest tenure and to bolster enterprises and livelihoods for forest peoples*

By strengthening the contribution of civic activists and the community rights agenda, RRI has played an increasing role in the International Tropical Timber Organization, which promotes the conservation, sustainable management and trade of tropical forest resources worldwide.

Largely due to RRI's work and the enlistment of allies supporting legal reforms and government support for community tenure and communal forest enterprises, the ITTO and its leaders are now committed to and supportive of these reforms. Over the course of six years of RRI activity, key multilateral banks and U.N. organizations have altered their positions and now more actively support forest tenure reforms.

"RRI has been a great partner to ITTO in our efforts to help member countries address the issues affecting forest communities and Indigenous peoples," says ITTO Executive Director Emanuel Ze Meka. "RRI's participation in the International Tropical Timber Council, for example, has helped ensure that the voices of all stakeholders, especially those of marginalized communities, are heard and that their concerns are addressed in the development of policies. I have no doubt that our member countries appreciate the constructive role that RRI plays in the ITTO as an honest broker between government and civil society."

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Executive Director, ITTO

Through the ITTO's Civil Society Advisory Group, created in 2002, RRI helped to broaden ITTO's objectives in its 2006 governing agreement to include support for community forestry, enterprises and

livelihoods, as well as recognize the importance of tenure reform, indigenous peoples rights and forest governance.

The Civil Society group has grown in influence, as has its contribution to ITTO's long-term planning. RRI and other civil society groups have presented their work at well-attended ITTO meetings in Japan, Papua New Guinea, Ghana and Cameroon. These steps have contributed to policy reforms in Africa and Indonesia, and steered ITTO donors toward local communities, including land tenure issues.

For example, the ITTO accepted global forest tenure estimates produced by RRI in its 2009 report *Tropical Forest Tenure Assessment*. The report led to a flurry of news articles noting that only two percent of African forest lands are locally controlled. Attention to this issue sharpened recognition by African leaders of the need to reform their forest tenure systems.

Since African timber-exporting countries look to ITTO for guidance on forestry policies, the timber Organization is an important forum for influencing policymakers. In 2007, a Community Forestry Enterprises Conference that RRI and ITTO organized in Brazil led African participants to request an analysis of tenure trends in their countries. That in turn led to the creation of the RRI report presented at the 2009 Cameroon meeting.

The success of that conference, where the participants from 27 countries issued a strong statement of support for strengthening local tenure structures, led to inclusion of tenure reform on the official agendas of regional government meetings, including a discussion of forest tenure issues in the Congo Basin at a September 2010 meeting in Cameroon.

The fundamental significance of tenure was addressed in opening remarks by Cameroon's minister of forestry, Elvis Ngolle Ngolle, who said, "This issue goes above and beyond the forestry sector. It's a basic issue of development. All our policies are defined by a strategy to develop our territories, which is to say, to establish the rights and responsibilities of each actor in the management of our basic asset -- our land."

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After the success of the African and Latin American studies and conferences, RRI and ITTO decided to cooperate to organize a similar exercise in Asia. The Government of Indonesia offered to host the conference in July, 2011.

RRI's efforts in collaboration with ITTO have led to unprecedented support for forest tenure reforms within and by ITTO, according to Emanuel Ze Meka. ITTO has spent over \$770,000 of its allocated resources on activities recommended by RRI. The group has also created a thematic program on community forestry, for which the Civil Society group contributed key direction and text.

"The involvement of RRI has enabled us to hear the voices of people as disparate as community sawmill operators in Cameroon, water-bottlers in Mexico and fruit-juice producers in Nepal," says Meka. "The global conference on community forest management and enterprises in Rio Branco, Brazil, elevated the issue of forest tenure and rights towards the top of ITTO's agenda. This was followed last year by a successful conference on forest tenure, governance and enterprise in Yaoundé. We are delighted that RRI is working with us to convene the third conference in the series in Indonesia."

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