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## Key messages

- Secure collective tenure rights for indigenous peoples and local communities are strongly correlated with reduced deforestation and forest degradation.
- Investing in collective tenure rights is cost effective and may increase countries' access to climate finance. Additional benefits relate to biodiversity and enhancement of ecosystem services, improved livelihoods and food security, with impacts potentially contributing to transformational change in the land-use sector.
- A range of models of collective tenure rights has shown success across different regions. These models include community forestry, indigenous peoples' territorial management, and village forest reserves linked to customary tenure.
- Strengthened political commitments, demonstrated through the adoption of enabling legal and policy frameworks; and enhanced cross-sectoral collaboration, are necessary to advance collective tenure rights and improve land and forest governance.
- Secure collective tenure rights must be embedded within broader land governance efforts in order to bring about substantial impact in reducing deforestation and forest degradation and in enhancing livelihoods.

# Collective tenure rights: Realizing the potential for REDD+ and sustainable development

## Information brief





## Key definitions

### **Tenure:**

Tenure refers to the systems that determine who can use what resources, for how long, and under what conditions. These systems can be based on written policies and laws, as well as unwritten customs and practices, especially as we refer to collective tenure rights (as per Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure, [FAO, 2012](#)).

An individual or a group can also hold multiple rights and these can be bundled together. For example, there can be numerous rights related to the same parcel of land, such as the right to sell the land, the right to use the land through a lease, or the right of way.

### **Collective tenure rights:**

Collective tenure rights refers to tenure rights that are held by a group rather than an individual, and are often linked to an area of commons collectively used and managed. Collectively managed commons are essential to cultural identity and well-being. They are crucial for indigenous peoples and local communities, including farmers, fishers, pastoralists, the landless and the most vulnerable, food insecure and marginalized people. ([FAO, 2016](#)).

### **Customary tenure:**

Customary tenure refers to locally derived systems with norms, rules, institutions, practices and procedures that have evolved over time and use. Customary tenure systems have gained social legitimacy and are negotiated, sustained and changed by local communities ([FAO, 2016](#)). Prior to legal recognition, many collectively managed areas are held under customary tenure. Customary tenure may not be recognized by national constitutions, legislations, or court rulings.

## Introduction

Secure tenure rights can make a substantial contribution to reducing deforestation and forest degradation and to enhancing sustainable development. This Information brief<sup>1</sup> focuses on the key contribution of collective tenure rights towards mitigating climate change, paying particular attention to the links with national strategies to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) and nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Over 2.5 billion rural people rely on this age-old form of property rights for their livelihoods. Furthermore, the customary claims of indigenous peoples and local communities cover more than half of the global land mass ([RRI, 2018](#)) – including some of the most important and biodiverse forest areas in the developing world. Recognition of these rights could facilitate scaled-up approaches to bring about needed transformational changes in the landscape.

This brief:

- **sets out** the case for prioritizing the securing of collective tenure rights in the context of REDD+ and sustainable development;
- **presents** three examples, from Nepal, Peru and the United Republic of Tanzania, to showcase the positive impact of secure collective tenure rights;
- **proposes** a range of measures that countries can take to accelerate progress towards collective tenure rights recognition.

## Why should collective tenure rights be prioritized?

1. **Secure collective tenure rights are strongly correlated with reduced deforestation and forest degradation.** There is a growing consensus and increasing scientific evidence that tenure security is an enabling factor in reducing deforestation and degradation ([CLUA, 2014](#); [FAO, 2016](#)). More effective forest stewardship by indigenous peoples

and local communities is usually attributed to their active participation in forest governance, their direct benefits from forest products, and their desire to maintain the resource for future generations. Their deep knowledge of the forest and spiritual and religious connections with nature also have positive impacts.

2. **Investing in recognition of collective tenure rights is cost effective.** Recent studies have analysed the cost-effectiveness of investing to secure collective tenure rights when compared with other strategies that promote sustainable forest management and maintenance of carbon stocks. Those studies found that such investments generally have comparatively lower costs and higher benefits ([Garnett, 2018](#)). Local communities and indigenous peoples spend less money per hectare than conventional conservation programmes (e.g. protected areas management), yet are likely to achieve at least equivalent conservation outcomes ([RRI, 2018a](#)). Their natural proximity to the forest, deep knowledge of its systems and dynamics, and strong intra-community relationships – enhanced through a sense of ownership based on tenure security – are some of the likely factors for efficient and cost-effective protection.
3. **Indigenous peoples and local communities manage vast amounts of land and carbon.** The land managed by indigenous peoples and local communities is very significant in terms of carbon stocks. Forests in the territories of indigenous peoples and local communities assessed in 64 countries (accounting for 69 percent of the world's forest cover) are estimated to contain at a minimum 17.1 percent of the above-ground carbon stored in tropical forests ([RRI, 2018c](#)). The area managed covers more than 38 million square kilometers and represents more than 250 times the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by global air travel in 2015 ([RRI, 2018c](#)). These vast land holdings of indigenous peoples and local communities – whether formally or informally recognized – underline the significance of addressing barriers to their sustainable management under REDD+.

1. This brief is the summary of a more extensive technical paper of the same title which may be referred to for further details, including a full reference list.





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4. **Secure collective tenure rights contribute to enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem services.** The collectively managed lands of indigenous peoples and local communities contain the vast majority of the world's genetic resources ([IASG, 2014](#)). Indigenous peoples' territories also overlap with about 40 percent of all terrestrial protected areas ([Garnett, 2018](#)). Their traditional management systems are highly compatible with biodiversity conservation. Other ecosystems services are also enhanced through management by communities and indigenous peoples, such as hydrological services, nutrient retention, regulation of local climate dynamics, and pollination ([Ding, H, Veit, P. et al., 2016](#)). Better protection of biodiversity aligns with the goals of REDD+ through commitments to provide benefits for forest biodiversity and alignment with goals and targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

5. **Secure collective tenure rights enhance access to climate finance.** An increasing number of donors and funding mechanisms (including the Green Climate Fund), recognize responsible governance of tenure, including collective tenure rights, as key factors for REDD+ success. Responsible governance of tenure is closely examined in investment decision making. By taking concrete action to address collective tenure rights and setting up clear mechanisms for benefit distribution across different scales and groups of relevant stakeholders, governments are able to demonstrate their alignment with these priorities and pave the way for smoother access to climate finance.
6. **Securing collective tenure rights is associated with improved livelihoods and food security.** Up to 2.5 billion people worldwide rely on collective lands for their well-being ([RRI et al., 2016](#)) – as a source of food, fuel and income – as well as the ecosystem services provided by well-managed forests. Enhancing tenure security has a positive effect on rural livelihoods ([FAO, 2016](#)). For example, a global study covering 108 countries found that strong property rights are linked to higher per capita incomes and greater socio-economic stability ([RRI et al., 2016](#)). Increased incentives to invest in land and its productive capacity as well as increased job creation, underlie this finding. Collective forest enterprises often reinvest a portion of their profits in public goods, such as health and education, promoting longer-term prosperity ([Ding, H, Veit, P. et al., 2016](#)). Tenure security can alleviate the disproportionate burden of poverty that women face and, in turn, benefit families as a whole since women tend to make decisions that prioritize household welfare ([Landesa, 2012](#)).



## Country cases

### Case 1: Community forestry in Nepal - Chitwan Kayar Khola

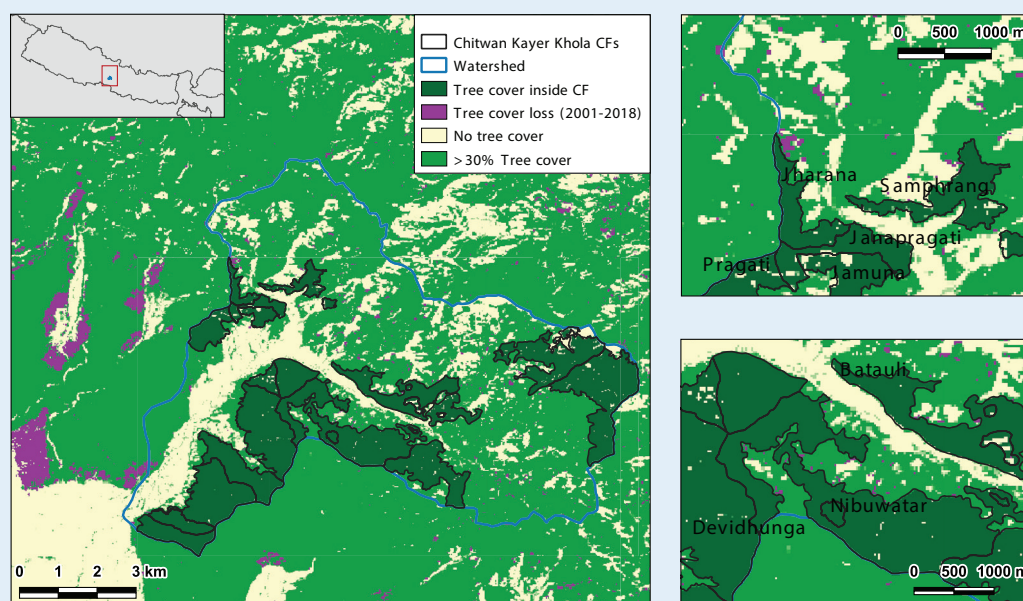
In the 1990s, the government of Nepal prioritized its national community forestry programme, establishing a supportive legal framework and demonstrating strong political will to expand and scale up the programme.

Despite numerous challenges, community forestry in Nepal has contributed significantly to poverty alleviation, community development, and forest cover restoration. Kayar Khola watershed (see Figure 1), situated in Chitwan district, covers an area of approximately 8 000 ha, of which approximately 2 382 ha are managed by 16 community forest user groups. A forest cover change study from 2002 to 2012 revealed that over the 10-year period, forest area increased in all 16 community forests (Figure 1).

The overall case of Nepal indicates that under a purposeful national approach, the devolution of forest management rights to local communities, with an emphasis on women's engagement, can reverse the trend of deforestation, while also contributing to poverty alleviation.

**Figure 1:** Chitwan Kayar Khola watershed in Nepal.

The image shows the effectiveness of CF groups in resisting deforestation pressures.



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Tree cover data: Hansen, M. C., P. V. Potapov, R. Moore, M. Hancher, S. A. Turubanova, A. Tyukavina, D. Thau, S. V. Stehman, S. J. Goetz, T. R. Loveland, A. Kommareddy, A. Egorov, L. Chini, C. O. Justice, and J. R. G. Townshend. 2013. "High-Resolution Global Maps of 21st-Century Forest Cover Change." *Science* 342 (15 November): 850–53. Data available on-line from: <http://earthenginepartners.appspot.com/science-2013-global-forest>

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by UN Environment or contributory organizations

## Country cases

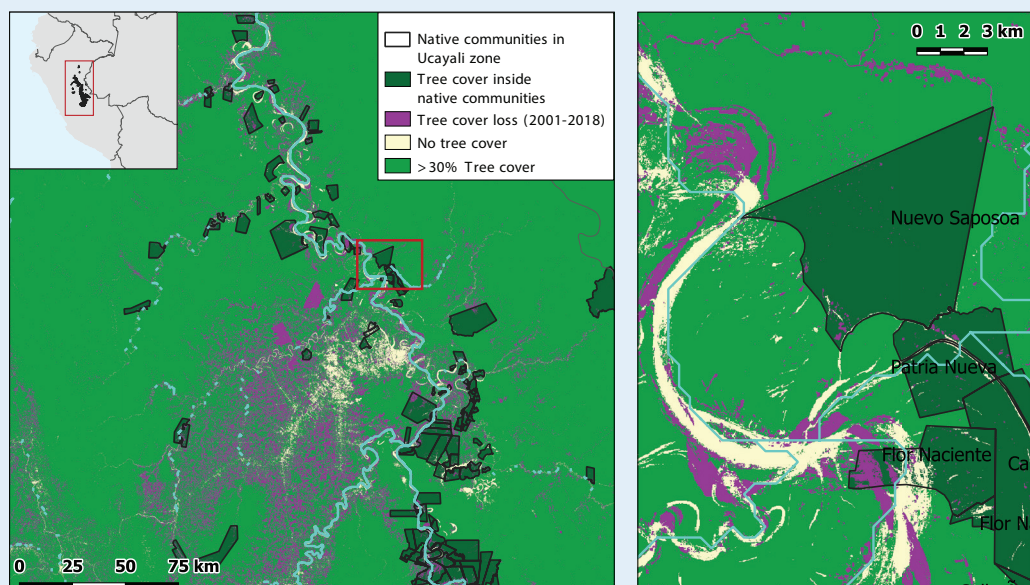
### Case 2: Indigenous titling in Peru – Native communities in the Ucayali Zone

Titling of indigenous peoples' lands has advanced significantly in Peru, supported by the Amazon rainforest's importance in global efforts to reduce climate change. Where lands have been titled, there is evidence that forest clearing and disturbance have been sharply reduced.

Two native communities – Patria Nueva and Nueva Saposoa – in the Ucayali zone (see Figure 2), have been officially accredited as forest monitors by the State. These two villages, thanks to their monitoring work supported by Rainforest Foundation<sup>2</sup>, have completely eliminated deforestation caused by cocoa growers, logging and other illegal activities. Peru's national REDD+ strategy recognizes the importance of tenure issues and can therefore help to align cross-sectoral collaboration to advance collective tenure rights.

2. <https://social.shorthand.com/RainforestUS/3y1A8vLsOu/peruvian-indigenous-communities-are-officially-recognized-as-forest-guardians>

**Figure 2:** Indigenous communities in the Ucayali Zone, Peru. Empowered indigenous communities have resisted deforestation pressures.



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## Country cases

### Case 3: Participatory forest management in the United Republic of Tanzania - Bagamoyo district village forest reserves

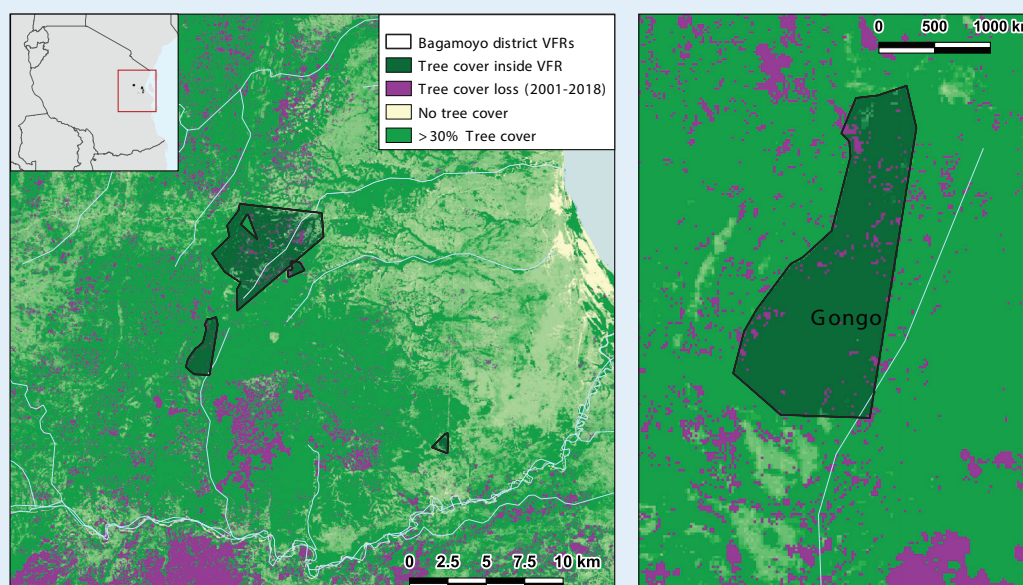
The United Republic of Tanzania has made strides in legally recognizing customary land and in promoting participatory forest management as part of its development vision as well as its NDC. Implementation of participatory forest management has been shown to improve ecosystem services, from forest conditions to wildlife abundance.

In the coastal village forest reserves in Bagamoyo district, villagers collectively managing the forest have been able to resist a range of threats including extraction activities, in particular charcoal; unsustainable logging for timber and poles; overharvesting for wood carving; and unsustainable hunting and mining (see Figure 3).

The main lesson learned from the case of the United Republic of Tanzania, is that even if a country's development vision and its legal and policy framework supports devolution of rights to communities, the continued, smooth and consistent support for implementation is critical to bring about transformation and impact at scale.

**Figure 3:** Bagamoyo district village forest reserves, Tanzania.

Limited deforestation is observed within the village forest reserves indicated in dark green.



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Tree cover data: Hansen, M. C., P. V. Potapov, R. Moore, M. Hancher, S. A. Turubanova, A. Tyukavina, D. Thau, S. V. Stehman, S. J. Goetz, T. R. Loveland, A. Kommareddy, A. Egorov, L. Chini, C. O. Justice, and J. R. G. Townshend. 2013. "High-Resolution Global Maps of 21st-Century Forest Cover Change." *Science* 342 (15 November): 850–53. Data available on-line from: <http://earthenginepartners.appspot.com/science-2013-global-forest>

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## Success factors and potential challenges

Country progress towards increased tenure security for collective lands has revealed some important success factors. One of the most important is political will. In order to succeed, governments need to collaborate effectively with traditional institutions and uphold supportive laws and policies to devolve rights. Efforts to secure collective tenure rights must be an integral part of a larger initiative to improve land and forest governance, which should include a supportive legal and policy framework. One of the critical governance factors is the autonomy and technical capacities of the community to make its own rules. Clear titles that support the governance of tenure rights of communities enhance legitimacy and lead to better compliance with rules; more effective local enforcement; and ultimately, more sustainable management of forests. Clear, participatory land-use plans and economic incentives to invest in forest management (e.g. an adequate share of benefits, access to finance and markets, introduction of innovative technology) are also pivotal success factors.

REDD+ and national or jurisdictional programmes may represent an opportunity and a platform to advance in some of these processes.

Likewise, a number of potential challenges exist in the quest for secure collective tenure rights. For example, many communities struggle with the lengthy and burdensome process often required to obtain collective tenure rights. Moreover, communities that do obtain land titles may experience high external pressure to sell their lands or user rights to commercial or state interests. Such pressures may lead to division and internal conflicts within a community as members try to reach a consensus. Another potential and significant risk is exclusion of women from tenure processes. Since most heads of households, village leaders and title holders are male, special efforts are needed to engage women and ensure that they are fully included in decisions related to tenure.



Painting *Amazonas Jasici* by Tunisian artist Rim Bouhafa depicts the deep connection of indigenous peoples with the forest and the challenges they often face to protect it.



## Priority measures suggested for policymakers

Securing collective tenure rights requires a stepwise approach that meets the specific country context. The following considerations are offered to policymakers:

1. **Ensure that supportive legal and policy frameworks are in place and enforced.**  
Legal and policy frameworks to reinforce collective tenure rights are called for (if not already in place) with endorsement from the highest level (i.e. constitutional or supreme court). Legal and tenure assessment studies may be required to determine gaps and needs, and examine incentives to protect collectively managed forests. Once laws are in place, they must be enforced, including those laws protecting land rights defenders.
2. **Continuously enhance stakeholders' capacity to strengthen responsible governance of tenure and secure collective tenure rights.**  
The processes involved in community tenure recognition will require capacity development for actors (both women and men) and institutions operating at various levels. This aspect can include education, technical trainings and outreach activities. Technical capacity gaps in institutions involved in land administration may be analysed and plans for institutional and capacity strengthening put in place.
3. **Invest in land demarcation and titling of indigenous peoples' and local community lands.** Significant investment in the demarcation and titling of the lands of indigenous peoples and local communities is at the core of progress in securing collective tenure rights. Governments, including forestry agencies, need to allocate their own resources to this priority. In addition, bilateral and multilateral climate financing mechanisms should add to and expand dedicated funding streams for this purpose.
4. **Provide financing for long-term, consistent support by government.** It is necessary to increase domestic and international financing to support the efforts of indigenous peoples and local communities to record and secure



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their legitimate tenure rights. The support from existing mechanisms and initiatives (e.g. UN-REDD, the Carbon Fund, Forest Investment Program, and the Green Climate Fund) is currently insufficient given the scale of the work required. Government support should be consistent and long-term in order to demonstrate commitment to the process.

5. **Review and revise nationally determined contributions to ensure adequate attention is given to clear and secure systems of tenure and to collective tenure rights.**  
For the many countries whose NDCs do not yet recognize the importance of community-based actions and securing tenure rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, there is an opportunity during the periodic global stocktakes to review and revise these documents through a 'tenure lens' and to emphasize the important role of indigenous peoples and local communities in emerging climate solutions.

## Conclusion

The rationale for prioritizing secure collective tenure rights to realize the potential for REDD+ and sustainable development is well supported by the research and by on-the-ground experience.

Securing access to collective tenure rights alone will not automatically lead to reduced deforestation and forest degradation, nor to shifts in discourse or attitudes; efforts need to be sustained by complementary actions. These include reform of legal and policy frameworks, integrated land-use planning, income generation and capacity development, gender inclusion, and identification and facilitation of access to markets for local enterprises, among others. The [Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure](#) provide a useful framework to guide such legal and policy reform efforts.

REDD+ and the global climate agenda present an important opportunity for countries to engage more actively in securing land and resource rights for indigenous peoples and local communities. At the same time, collective tenure rights represent a key element to achieve long lasting and successful results of REDD+, contributing to addressing global climate change. Many challenges lie ahead in securing collective tenure rights. The situation across regions and within each country differs greatly, and solutions must be tailored accordingly. Expansion of collective tenure rights is a key trigger to achieve transformational change in countries towards alleviating the climate crisis and enhancing livelihoods.



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Background artwork: © Rim Bouhafa

## UN-REDD Programme

The United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD) was launched in 2008 and builds on the convening role and technical expertise of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment). The UN-REDD Programme supports nationally led REDD+ processes and promotes the informed and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders, including indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities, in national and international REDD+ implementation.

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