

Fact sheet 1 – Securing rights, combating climate change¹

- Indigenous Peoples and local communities have legal or official rights to at least 513 million hectares of forests, which is about one-eighth of the world's total forest area. Most of these – 478 million hectares – are in low- or middle-income countries where pressures to exploit forests are strong.
- Collectively, these government-recognized community forests contain 37.7 billion tonnes of carbon, about equal to the carbon in all North American forests. If this carbon were released into the atmosphere as CO₂, it would equal about 29 times the annual CO₂ emissions produced by all passenger vehicles worldwide.
- There is a clear correlation, however, between forests owned by Indigenous Peoples and local communities and low rates of deforestation and therefore low rates of greenhouse-gas emissions.
- In Bolivia, Indigenous Peoples hold 22 million hectares of forest, an area slightly larger than Greece. Between 2000 and 2010, only about 0.5% of these legally recognized Indigenous community forests were deforested, compared with 3.2% in the Bolivian Amazon as a whole – the deforestation rate, therefore, was more than six times lower in forests where Indigenous Peoples have legal rights protected by government.
- Community-managed forests on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula have lower deforestation rates than government-protected areas designated for strict conservation. For example, the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve experienced a deforestation rate of 0.7% (between 2000 and 2005), compared with a rate of 0.002% (between 2000 and 2004) in a nearby community-managed forest.
- Only 0.6% of forest was lost inside Indigenous lands in the Brazilian Amazon between 2000 and 2012, compared with 7.0% of forest outside such lands.
- Community forests in the Brazilian Amazon tend to be relatively carbon-rich, containing 36% more carbon per hectare, on average, than areas of the Brazilian Amazon outside Indigenous lands.
- When governments increase and enforce forest rights, communities can successfully stop loggers, extractive companies, and settlers from illegally destroying their forests.
- For example, government protection of the forest rights of communities in Niger led to the establishment of 200 million new trees, which have absorbed 30 million tonnes of carbon in the last 30 years. Support for community forestry in Nepal has improved forest health and generated carbon stock of more than 180 million tonnes on 1.6 million hectares of land.
- In many countries, governments do not legally recognize community forest rights, or do so only weakly. For example, governments retain legal administrative control over 99% of forests in the Congo Basin, 99% of forests in peninsular Southeast Asia, and all the forests in the Russian Federation.
- A lack of government protection of Indigenous rights could cause massive amounts of greenhouse-gas emissions. Communities own almost all forests in Papua New Guinea, but the government has issued 4 million hectares in leases to private companies. If converted to oil palm or other non-forest uses, these leases could emit almost 3 billion tonnes of CO₂.

¹ This factsheet was derived from: Stevens *et al.* (2014) *Securing rights, combating climate change: how strengthening community forest rights mitigates climate change*. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. Accessible at www.wri.org/securing-rights.