Land Rights Matter — For People and Planet

Policy Recommendations for Climate Action Through Land Tenure Security

In 2019 the world lost 46,000 square miles of forest, the equivalent of a soccer field every six seconds.[1] The destruction of these forests – which shelter a kaleidoscope of plant and animal species, offer livelihoods for indigenous and local communities, and store vast amounts of carbon necessary to mitigate climate change – is preventable. With strong land rights, women and men in vulnerable geographies can slow down deforestation and contribute to restoring forests.

The world is currently witnessing raging fires in forests worldwide, shrinking and disappearing glaciers, droughts in some places and floods in others. All of these environmental impacts, propelled by climate change, take a toll on the planet's biodiversity, the global economy, and the well-being of billions of people. With so much at stake, secure land rights are an essential tool to combat climate change and mitigate these harmful consequences. When women and men have secure land rights, whether individual or collective, they have the security and the confidence to make decisions about how to use their land in a manner that contributes to their well-being and the well-being of the planet.

Women and men with secure land rights can make use of their land in ways that help to mitigate climate change.[2]

When men and women feel that their rights will be respected by the community and national authorities, they have greater incentives to make investments in their land that build climate resilience. In some countries, secure land rights encourage men and women to invest in planting trees.[3] Land titles can also encourage the adoption of soil conservation practices such as terracing and irrigation.[4]

Forest demarcation, combined with stronger indigenous and community rights that include protective status, contribute to slow deforestation.[5] A study in the Cuyabeno Reserve in Ecuador found that parcels without land title around the reserve had a higher rate of deforestation than those with titles with forest-friendly restrictions. These restrictions required landholders to submit an integral management plan that zoned parcels into specific allowable land uses in agreement with the Forest Law. By law, such plans allow for up to 30 percent of each parcel to be zoned for non-conservation uses, with at least 70 percent of the parcel conserved as natural forest. New titles also required to secure permission from the Ministry of Environment before sale of property as well as the prohibition to sub-divide the properties.[6]

Land tenure security is a key factor for the success of Community Forest Groups, a promising tool to improve reforestation

Community forestry has shown promise to improve reforestation and potentially offset carbon emissions.[7] A study in the Amazon region that used data about changes in aboveground carbon density and forest cover tracked gains and losses in carbon density from forest conversion and degradation/disturbance, found that indigenous territories (ITs) and Protected Areas were more effective than others in maintaining a balance between carbon losses and gains. However, the potential of weakening legal frameworks that protect the land rights of indigenous territories may compromise this success. This suggests that tenure security needs to be strengthened and protected through country-level programs, regulatory frameworks, or international processes.[8]

A study of Mexico, Nepal and the Philippines identified five success factors for community forestry programs: that they 1) allow people to access land, 2) withdraw resources from it, 3) exclude others, 4) make decisions about its management and, 5) about its sale or lease. In

ABOUT LANDESA

Landesa is an international non-governmental organization that fights poverty and provides opportunity and security for poor rural women and men through the power of land rights. Insecure land rights are a leading factor in extreme poverty, food insecurity, gender inequality, conflict, environmental destruction, and sluggish economic growth. Additionally, more than one billion poor rural people around the world lack legal rights to the land on which they depend to survive.

Landesa has partnered with governments and civil society to develop pro-poor and gender-sensitive laws, policies and programs to help secure land rights for more than 180 million families in over 50 countries.

addition to that bundle of rights, improved gender-based and socio-economic equality, democratic leadership and systems, and government support all motivate people to engage in community forestry.[9]

Successful and sustainable community forest management requires external financial and institutional assistance that respects established local rule-making autonomy.[10] This autonomy can only be guaranteed with secure land rights.

As the global population grows to around 9 billion by 2050, and climate change creates more food insecurity, pressure on the global food system increases.[11] Secure land rights improve the adoption of Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA), a promising system that can boost agricultural productivity, encourage the economic development of rural communities, and ensure food security in a changing climate.

Studies in India suggest that ownership rights — more than rights to use plots through renting — increase the probability of adopting one or more CSA practices. In Nigeria and the Czech Republic, researchers found that farmers who own, and have a title deed to prove ownership, have higher adoption rates of practices that combat land degradation and restore soil health, improving their productivity and income while being better equipped to manage the effects of climate change.[12] Although the literature suggests positive links between secure tenure and adoption of CSA that can lead to reducing food insecurity, there is no clear evidence linking titling reforms focused on individual tenure and increases in productivity.[13] More importantly, some studies suggested that such reforms that did not purposefully include gender lenses undermined women's rights by giving land titles to men almost exclusively.

Women have fewer opportunities than men to access land, capital, and services to adapt to the effects of climate change.

Titling programs that regularize tenure security can improve investments in terraces, irrigation and tree planting, as studies in Indonesia, Ethiopia and Rwanda suggest.[14] In Rwanda, a study found that when given the opportunity, women with regularized land rights increase their investments in soil conservation measures at the same or higher rate than men.

Women and men often have different adaptive strategies because of gender unequal social norms that limit women's participation in decision-making and control of natural and financial resources.[15]

A study on adaptation to respond to climate change in nine East and West African countries found that women have less access than men to common property resources and to cash to obtain goods or services. Public and private organizations that foster agriculture and livestock production tend to provide support primarily to men.[16] Similarly, a literature review of gender-responsive climate services found that in many countries where Climate Smart Agriculture projects are conducted, women have less access to weather and climate information, such as early warnings about floods and droughts, that could be key in their adoption of prevention activities.[17]

Governments, donors and civil society working on climate change can increase the effectiveness of their investments when they include actions to increase tenure security.

International donors and governments should include stakeholders with expertise in land rights to ensure that their investments effectively combat climate change and improve the adaptive capacity of women and men in vulnerable populations.

Investing in strengthening the land rights of indigenous peoples can increase the ability of these communities to protect vulnerable landscapes and improve carbon sequestration and capture.

Governments can help by building bridging capital, easing procedures that allow community forest groups to navigate complex administrative mechanisms and planning requirements, approving legislation to legitimize community forestry, and by providing technical advice, assistance and funding.

Governments can also conduct land reforms that formalize rental markets and end harmful practices that exclude women from benefiting from tenure security.

Non-governmental organizations can help mediate demands by less powerful individuals and communities to support the ability of residents and local institutions to resist the push from powerful and sometimes corrupt actors and agencies that participate in forest exploitation.

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2. We used search engines to identify papers for this review. In the mitigation section,we review 37 peer reviewed papers with empirical data and 7 systematic/metareviews. We reviewed 17 peer reviewed papers with empirical data and 2 systematic/meta reviews for the adaptation section. More details in the full report. Goldstein, M., Houngbedji, K., Kondylis, F., O'Sullivan, M., & Selod, H.: 2018; Adimassu, Z., Langan, S., & Johnston, R.: 2016.

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14. Ali, D. A., Deininger, K., & Goldstein, M.; 2014; Di Falco, Salvatore & Marcella Veronesi, 2013; Grimm, Michael; Klasen, Stephan; 2011

15.Djoudi, H., & Brockhaus, M. , 2011.

16. Perez, C.; Jones, E.M.; Kristjanson, P.;Cramer, L.; Thornton, P.K.; Förch, W.; Barahona, C. , 2015.

17.Gumucio, T; J. Hansen, S. Huyer & T. van Huysen., 2019.