

First global pact backing indigenous land rights launched

October 3 2017, by Marlowe Hood



Protesters in Brazil in 2015 demand protection for indigenous people's rights

Indigenous peoples could soon regain some control of their native forests with the creation of a new global institution dedicated to securing their land rights.

The International Land and Forest Tenure Facility, formally launched in Stockholm on Tuesday, aims to help communities protect their land

resources as well as combat [climate change](#).

Funded by Sweden, Norway and the Ford Foundation, a US charity, the Tenure Facility has already provided grants and guidance for pilot projects in Peru, Mali, Indonesia and three other nations.

Disputes over resources can prove deadly. According to non-governmental organisation Global Witness, more than 200 environmental campaigners were murdered in 2016 alone—nearly half from indigenous tribes.

A 2014 survey by US-based think tank World Resources Institute found restoring control of forests to original inhabitants can tackle global warming.

In Brazil, deforestation in indigenous community forests from 2000 to 2012 was less than one percent, compared to seven percent outside those areas.

'Unrelenting conflicts'

Depleted tropical forests and emissions from agriculture and livestock have accounted for more than a fifth of global [greenhouse gas emissions](#) in recent decades.

Ford Foundation president Darren Walker told AFP that climate change and inequality are "existential threats" on a global scale.

"Creating mechanisms that allow indigenous peoples and local communities to gain tenure over their land or forests is a way to tackle both these problems."

The Ford Foundation has pledged \$5 million (4.2 million euros), and

Norway announced Tuesday a grant of \$20 million over the coming years. Sweden pitched in \$10 million during the pilot phase and will fund future projects. Walker said he expects donations rise to \$100 million overall within a year.

The project aims to boost forestland properly titled to indigenous peoples by 40 million hectares, an area twice the size of Spain, within a decade.

Such efforts, they calculate, would prevent deforestation of one million hectares and the release of 500 million tonnes of CO₂, more than the annual emissions of Britain or Brazil.

Corruption and abuses

More than two billion [people](#) live on and manage half the world's land in customary or traditional systems, yet indigenous communities have formal legal ownership of just 10 percent.

And even where they do have title, corruption and abuses have led to protracted conflicts with local and national governments, companies and migrant workers.

Native populations can even run afoul of major green initiatives to fight climate change or stem biodiversity loss.

A controversial UN-backed programme known as REDD+—Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation—creates incentives to keep forests intact, paid for by rich nations or companies seeking to offset pollution under carbon trading schemes.

But critics say the projects REDD+ finances can push aside the needs and rights of [indigenous peoples](#) who are often most directly affected by

the changes.

A peer-reviewed 2013 study concluded that less than half of some 50 projects in Africa, Latin America and Asia did anything to alleviate the poverty of [forest](#)-dependent peoples, though many did enhance their land rights.

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Citation: First global pact backing indigenous land rights launched (2017, October 3) retrieved 4 October 2025 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-10-global-pact-indigenous-rights.html>

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