



Tenure Facility Learning Exchange highlights innovations underpinning progress on community land rights, business case for implementing tenure reforms, and possibility to address armed conflict and catalyze gender equity

49 participants from nine countries highlight secure land rights as key to achieving global development goals at Learning Exchange hosted by Indian School of Business

12 October 2018, Hyderabad, India—Leaders from Africa, Asia, and Latin America convened to share lessons culled from projects supported by the Tenure Facility, the first and only funding institution devoted solely to supporting Indigenous Peoples’ and local communities’ efforts to secure their rights over their lands and forests. The lessons learned from these initiatives and strategies for upscaling initial successes were the subject of a three-day learning exchange hosted by the Indian School of Business (ISB), the Tenure Facility, and the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI). Three key themes emerged: the business case for supporting community land rights; the importance of catalyzing recognition of women’s land rights on the ground; and the key role of secure community land rights in preventing conflict and preserving peace.

“We’ve seen enormous progress over the past three years where the Tenure Facility has invested in the ongoing work of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to secure their land rights,” said Nonette Royo, Executive Director of the Tenure Facility. “The results to date show enormous potential, proving that by investing in communities we can catalyze recognition of rights—which is key to achieving global goals on climate change, gender equity, and the Sustainable Development Goals—in a short period of time.”

In Indonesia, where a Tenure Facility-supported project has already titled almost 1.5 million hectares of community land, a new project will scale these gains in the context of the country’s land reform. A proposed new project would see their collaboration expand to include the Agrarian Renewal Consortium (KPA) and the Indigenous Territory Registration Body (BRWA).

“The amplification power of the Tenure Facility lies in its trust in and support for indigenous leaders and organizations who have been leading the fight for recognition all their lives,” said Rukka Sombolinggi, Secretary-General of the Indigenous’ Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN). “But equally important is its ability to convene key players and unlikely allies, be it in Indonesia or across the world.”

ISB leads on making the business case for community land rights

In India alone, the potential benefits of recognizing community land rights are enormous. Under India’s Forest Rights Act, a landmark 2006 law that recognizes community rights to their forestlands, more than 32 million hectares of community forestland could be recognized. If implemented, it could constitute the largest land reform in the world. The Tenure Facility-supported initiative in India—led by civil society organizations Vasundhara and Society for Rural, Urban, and Tribal Initiative (SRUTI) as well as the Indian

School of Business—will catalyze that implementation by supporting community-level titling of forestlands. The project has already conducted trainings, established a data portal, tested a monitoring system, and filed 600 claims for titling forest rights at the community level.

While one of India's foremost business schools may seem like an unlikely ally in this process, ISB's hosting of the Learning Exchange and work on the Tenure Facility-supported project in India shows their commitment to implementing the FRA—and being a leader on a global discussion around the business case for community land rights. Previous research from RRI and ISB on the impact of land-related conflict on stalled investments laid the groundwork for this case in India: out of 80 high-value stalled projects studied, more than a quarter were stalled due to land disputes, putting nearly US\$26 million in investments at risk.

“ISB's involvement with community forest rights shows how important it is for unconventional allies like ISB to make the business community aware of the importance of supporting community land rights as a business imperative,” said Arvind Khare, Senior Director for Tenure Facility Support Programs. “We've quantified the business impact of ignoring communities' rights in India, but talking to leaders from all over the world, it's clear that there's room for growth globally on this issue. The question now is whether the rest of the business community in India—and the world—will follow their lead in respecting rights.”

Supporting women's rights to land

Indigenous and rural women often play a key role in managing community resources. But their rights to inherit, own, and manage land are rarely respected: of 81 low- and middle-income countries examined in a [report](#) issued last year by RRI, not a single one met its obligations under CEDAW on women's land rights.

But even where the laws are more progressive regarding women's land rights, implementation remains a hurdle as well. A proposed project in Burkina Faso would support the efforts of women's cooperatives to receive land titles that would allow them to cultivate these lands and support women-owned community forest enterprises.

Andy White, Coordinator of the Rights and Resources Initiative, said the Tenure Facility's innovations in implementation is already bringing about a tipping point on community land rights recognition. “If just the laws that are already on the books in a few key countries are implemented, we could see 40 percent of forests in the developing world being recognized as community forests – which would be a huge step towards saving the world's forests, but also for ensuring peace and prosperity. Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and women have shown tremendous courage, dignity, and strength in their long struggle for their land rights over generations—it's time for governments to realize that respecting rights is the right thing to do for their own countries and for the world.”

Resolving conflicts over land and building sustainable peace

Tenure Facility support for projects in post-conflict environments such as Colombia and Liberia—and places at risk of conflict such as Mali—get to the heart of the need to resolve longstanding conflict over land in order to build lasting peace.

In Liberia, the enactment of the country's landmark Land Rights Act (LRA)—signed last month by President George Weah after years of education and campaigning by local civil society—sets the stage for recognizing customary land rights across the country. But while the achievement is a sign of communities' strength, the next stage also contains risk for communities that the implementation of the LRA could subvert communities' interests—and risk backsliding.

“The passage of the Land Rights Act is a tremendously important moment for the consolidation of Liberia's peace,” said Ali Kaba, Program Director at the Sustainable Development Institute, a civil society organization in Liberia. “But before we can celebrate this achievement, we have to ensure that the Act is implemented in a way that recognizes the best interests of communities. Otherwise, we risk the same pattern of destabilizing conflict over land that has persisted for years—and that helped fuel Liberia's terrible civil wars.”

In Mali, a previous Tenure Facility-supported project supported HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation and the National Coordinating Body of Peasant Organizations in Mali (CNOP) in their efforts to create land commissions, or COFOs. The COFOs were designed to provide a forum to resolve low-level land conflicts—which are common and often intractable in Mali, and which had fueled much of the discontent and insecurity that has destabilized the country over the last several years. And they worked: the 17 COFOs created by the pilot project led to a 25 percent reduction in land conflicts at the commune level, and a 35 percent reduction at the village level.

A proposed new project would scale the creation of these COFOs—and, now that the idea has been tested and proven successful, expand them into areas at greater risk of conflict from the insecurity in the country's northern and central regions, and where preventing land conflicts is integral to maintaining a fragile peace.

The Tenure Facility is the first and only international, multi-stakeholder financial mechanism exclusively focused on securing land and forest rights for Indigenous Peoples and local communities. It provides grants to implement tenure rights under existing law and policy and shares the knowledge, innovations and tools that emerge. Launched in 2014 by the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), the Tenure Facility is dedicated to scaling up recognition of collective land and forest rights globally. This helps reduce conflict and further the achievement of global human rights, environment, and development goals. The Tenure Facility is an international foundation registered in Sweden.