

Net Zero and Land Rights

There are a number of ways that land rights can be impacted by the roll out and implementation of net zero commitments. Changed ownership rights, availability of land, and the possibility of land grabbing for carbon plantation development or offset projects can jeopardise food security and livelihoods.

Indigenous Peoples have struggled mightily to establish the principle of ‘free prior and informed consent’ [FPIC] for local communities and indigenous peoples [LCIPs], a hard-won victory at the international level, but its application to ‘net zero’ commitments has barely been explored. The gap between the total amount of LCIP lands and territories recognized under tenure and collective rights—estimated at about 10%—indicates the great potential for a scale-up of community-centered solutions, with benefits for biodiversity, climate, and livelihoods.

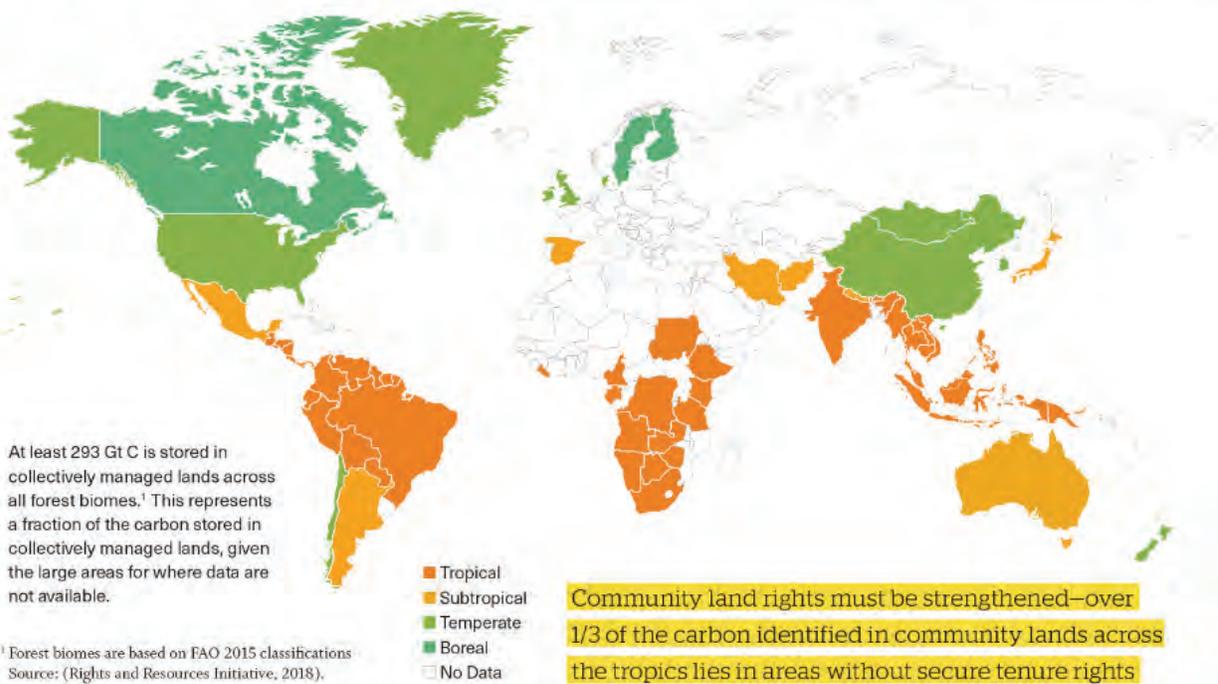
In this context, ‘net zero’ commitments that move resource rights further from community control may pose a threat. That threat may be disproportionate to the livelihoods of women, youth and small farmers.

The most complicated and probably the most serious immediate danger to land rights comes from ‘project’ or ‘jurisdictional’ carbon projects. These might proceed under the banner

of REDD+ [Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation], or simply as a ‘net zero’ offsetting project. In either case, this is a clear misuse of the term ‘Nature-based Solution’ to promote a ‘carbon-market based solution’. This takes the form as carbon counting based on: forested acres, avoided deforestation, deviation from ‘business as usual’ scenarios, and ‘sustainable forest management’. All of these are the basis for issuing carbon credits. But this measurement is frequently disconnected from underlying livelihoods and local decision-making processes. Other challenges:

- **Recentralization of forest governance** by forest bureaucracy over LCIP lands through the advent of forest carbon projects and offsets. Terms like ‘forest’, ‘degraded’, and ‘abandoned land’ have been defined in order to create land-management categories that exclude people.
- **Dedicated energy crops—direct land grabs.** Land that has either been forest or used for food crops is now being dedicated to fast-growing, usually exotic species, as energy crops. Very often these plantings are monocultures as well. Adverse impacts on local food

Indigenous and community lands across 64 countries store >293 gigatonnes of carbon.



security are likely, and dangerous. Land grabbing can also occur through impact on land prices, leading to a greater re-concentration of landholdings as a result of bioenergy demand.

- **BECCS—indirect landgrabs.** BECCS is the proposal to harvest huge amounts of biomaterials, burn it in dirty energy facilities, and try to ‘capture’ the carbon dioxide from that burning. What’s captured is then concentrated and shipped by pipeline to a purported long-term underground storage facility. It’s a geoengineering approach in which no single part of the process chain has been shown to work. As with direct land grabs, the prospect of an expansion of BECCS creates very serious adverse impacts on pastoralists, and the most vulnerable. IPCC pathways showing high dependence on removals from BECCS suggest the mobilization of ‘residuals’, ‘post-harvest waste’, and materials from ‘drylands’ and ‘wastelands’, etc. in their models. But these are often the most important lands for grazing small livestock, for women and children’s nutritional needs, and for household food security. BECCS is presented as a mitigation solution, but for local communities the most urgent need is assistance in adapting to climate change.
- **Other geoengineering approaches.** Direct air capture, enhanced weathering, and solar radiation management all have profound impacts on land and heighten demand for land and water. For a more in-depth analysis, please see ‘Net Zero and Geoengineering’.

Secure land tenure should be the STARTING POINT for discussions of any use of LCIP lands or resource base for ‘net’ purposes. Participation by vulnerable groups, particularly women lacking land rights, and application of FPIC should be observed as well. Otherwise existing structures will simply reproduce and exacerbate inequities—or cause new forms of marginalization. A new marginalization threatens in the form of the over-emphasis on mitigation at the expense of adaptation. Net zero commitments that use land-based approaches must be explicit about contributions to ecosystem-based adaptation.



‘Net Zero’ creates a real risk that carbon will be prioritized over livelihoods for planning purposes. New and additional climate finance must be directed toward building resilience and adaptive capacity at community and landscape levels, while also focusing on biodiversity outcomes. LCIPs should be able to build assets based on their stewardship of land, water, and carbon resources—but this should happen outside of the proposed market mechanisms, which are mostly designed to serve traders, speculators, and project developers.

Where carbon rights are poorly articulated—which is almost everywhere—there are dangers related to the imposition of new forms of control on the land-use decisions taken by communities. For example—‘contract farming’ for energy crops and offtake of biomass; reduced resource access associated with an externally-imposed ‘avoided deforestation’ or ‘sustainable forest management’ goal; as well as the likelihood that mitigation benefits arising from activities under REDD+ translate into revenues for national or provincial governments, but simply do not reach the local level for improving livelihoods.

It is important for civil society to understand what national governments propose in their NDCs related to land use, and what types of climate finance in relation to agriculture and forestry is being sought. Civil society groups need to pose questions about the impact of these ‘climate actions’ on local land rights. The separation of the carbon value from other social, spiritual, and economic processes of communities creates its own form of ‘carbon commodification’ that must be resisted.

The CLARA network includes climate justice advocates, faith groups, conservation groups, land-rights campaigners, agroecologists, and representative of peoples movements around the globe. Our commitment to social justice brought us into the climate debate and informs our approaches to climate solutions. For more information about CLARA, visit www.CLARA.earth

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