

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

A Greengrants Feature on Indigenous Rights



ADVOCATING FOR JUSTICE

The indigenous peoples of the Peruvian Amazon knew that their rights were threatened by a set of laws making it easier for multinational companies to engage in deforestation, oil drilling, and natural resource degradation on indigenous lands, while excluding them from decision-making processes. A coalition of indigenous organizations, including the **Federation of Native Communities of Ucayali**, mobilized thousands to peacefully demonstrate against the decrees. In June 2009, after months of negotiation, this coordinated advocacy effort resulted in a historic moment: the repeal of the laws and the formal recognition of indigenous rights.



Indigenous rights are human rights. From the first days of colonialism, indigenous peoples have faced a barrage of threats to their very existence. Today, indigenous peoples' efforts to maintain their customs and reclaim control over their ancestral territories are frequently challenged by governments and industry looking to expand profits through logging, oil drilling, mining, and the exploitation of other natural resources. Too often, pressure to

develop these resources leads to a disregard of indigenous rights. In response, indigenous peoples around the world are organizing, combining traditional knowledge and customs with legal, scientific, and political expertise in order to protect their way of life. We support communities, representative indigenous organizations, and networks that are working to secure recognition of rights to sovereignty, territory, and the protection of natural and cultural resources. Supporting movements for indigenous rights leads not only to a more just world. Indigenous peoples hold incredibly valuable environmental knowledge, and by protecting their rights, we also protect the future of our planet.

Worldwide, indigenous peoples number between 300-500 million, embody and nurture 80% of the world's cultural and biological diversity, and occupy 20% of the world's land surface.

—Indigenous Peoples' Human Rights Initiative



SECURING LAND RIGHTS

Land is a fundamental element of indigenous identity and culture; without land, many indigenous peoples say their lives would have no meaning and their culture would disappear. However, gaining official recognition of ancestral territories requires overcoming strong resistance from economic and political interests, navigating complex legal and bureaucratic landscapes, and educating and mobilizing many isolated communities. In some countries, governments do not recognize collective rights to indigenous lands, or if they do, the recognition may not extend to the resources contained on or under those lands. Indigenous peoples around the world are advocating for recognition of their right of self-determination, so that they can govern their territories according to their own cultures and values.

Greengrants supports indigenous groups working to secure their land rights through a variety of activities, including: mapping of territories—a key step in collecting the necessary evidence to present to authorities; launching national and international legal campaigns; and educating communities and governments about the need to respect indigenous peoples' collective rights. With this support, indigenous peoples throughout the world are better able to defend the land they have lived on for generations.

Victory for Indigenous Land Rights in Brazil

The Raposa Serra do Sol indigenous territory in the Amazon state of Roraima, Brazil, represents 1.7 million hectares and is home to nearly 20,000 members of five indigenous peoples. Ongoing conflicts with agricultural interests led to serious threats to the reserve, jumpstarting an indigenous-led movement for its protection. In 2001, Greengrants supported the **Indigenous Council of Roraima** with a \$5,000 grant to take a case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights that resulted in a ruling to uphold the demarcation of the territory. In 2008, an additional grant through Greengrants' Brazilian partner, the **Center for Socio-Environmental Support**, to the **National Committee in Defense of Raposa Serra do Sol** enabled indigenous leaders to continue the domestic legal case necessary for nationally-recognized protection. In December 2008, Brazil's Supreme Court issued a final ruling protecting the territory and ordered outsiders off of the land. This ruling gives indigenous groups throughout Brazil new hope for asserting their own territorial rights.



Members of Raposa Serra do Sol stand up for their rights

SUSTAINING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In the Philippines, industrial logging has decimated indigenous territories. Oil and gas development in Ecuador contaminates water and threatens the health of remote villages. The challenge is clear: parallel to achieving territorial rights, indigenous communities must also be free to pursue viable and sustainable strategies to protect their lands and resources and re-establish strong communities.

Small grants support solutions designed by and for indigenous peoples. In Indonesia,

AMAN Kalimantan Barat is working towards ecolabel certification for forest products from the Sun community. The certification creates a sustainable source of income while providing incentive to protect the forests from illegal logging. Miskito communities in Honduras are developing markets for sustainable forestry products and ecotourism, and in the process, increasing the capacity of indigenous women to initiate and lead these projects. In Papua New Guinea, fisher associations are reviving traditional fishing practices and implementing them through successful community-run marine management areas.



*Cendela Lopez leads grantee, the **Association of Miskito Indigenous Women**, winner of the 2007 Honduras National Environmental Prize.*



By drawing on their own traditional resource management practices, indigenous peoples are finding sustainable solutions which create economic opportunities and strengthen leadership. The result: healthier communities that are more capable of withstanding pressure from outside interests, defending the rights of their people, and preserving their environments.

***The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**, approved in 2007, is a landmark agreement that sets an important precedent for indigenous peoples to fairly negotiate for control over their lands and resources.*



ENSURING FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT

Promoting Indigenous Rights in Russia

Located in Southern Siberia, the Teleut people of Kemerovo face severe contamination from the dominant coal mining industry, and some have been forced off their lands. A small grant from Greengrants is supporting the **Public Organization of Teleut People “Nabat”** to assess the impacts of mining activities, including violations of traditional land rights and degradation of natural resources. Armed with this information, the Teleut will better be able to negotiate with public officials to ensure that their rights are protected.



Weak laws and government development policies have meant that indigenous peoples' lands are frequently targeted by oil companies, loggers, miners—even conservationists. Unfortunately, indigenous peoples are often not included in development decisions, nor are they informed about the full environmental, social, and economic consequences. While international law recognizes indigenous peoples' right to **free, prior and informed consent** to activities on their lands, enforcement requires sustained pressure and resources. Small grants help

people participate in these decisions by supporting the collection of evidence of rights abuses, legal representation, and deepening networks among groups facing similar problems.

“Indigenous peoples know best how to solve their problems. With the right kind of financial support, communities can design their own strategies to manage resources, build leadership capacity and create lasting solutions. I’ve witnessed how small grants mobilize communities, create hope, and increase visibility with other donors. A strategy might not work the first time around—but it should be up to the groups themselves to re-think better solutions.”

—John Ericho, Greengrants Pacific Islands Advisor,
Conservation Forum of Papua New Guinea



ADVOCATING FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

Around the world, indigenous peoples are on the front lines of climate change. In the Arctic, rapid ecosystem changes are impacting traditional subsistence activities. Communities in the Pacific Islands are losing their ancestral villages to rising sea levels. Greengrants funds indigenous groups that are bringing public attention to the impacts of climate change and participating in key policy debates about how to address them. We also support villages in relocating to higher grounds, planting mangroves to protect coastlines, drawing on traditional knowledge to promote more drought-resistant agricultural techniques, and promoting sustainable energy alternatives.

From International Policy to Local Forests

The proposal for **'Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation'** (REDD), under discussion for inclusion in international climate policies, has significant implications for indigenous peoples. Payments to maintain standing forests could bring great benefit, but it is still unclear who will control funding and how it might affect forest access. **Dignité Pygmée**, an indigenous organization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, received support from Greengrants to share the progress of international climate change negotiations with potentially impacted communities, and to ensure that their perspective is heard at the next round of international talks.

“For thousands of years, the forest has been home to indigenous peoples, whose traditions have nurtured these important carbon sinks. Both as protectors of these forests and as those who will be most affected by changes in climate patterns, indigenous peoples have much to offer to climate change policies. One of the key challenges facing indigenous peoples in Africa is ensuring that they have legitimate representation in processes that determine national and international policy outcomes. They must be able to access information and participate in the decisions that will impact their lives.”



—Samuel Nnah Ndobe, Greengrants International Financial Institutions Advisor,
Center for Environment and Development—Cameroon

THE GREENGRANTS APPROACH – MOBILIZING RESOURCES



“We must address a complex system of historic power dynamics in order to secure the basic rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples. To overcome this, indigenous peoples need to enhance their traditional institutions and increase their capacities as leaders. This will be a long process, and strategic assistance is needed. Small grants are a perfect match. They allow indigenous peoples to truly own their endeavors—this is real empowerment.”

—Edtami Mansayagan, *Greengrants Alliance of Funds*,
The Samdhana Institute—Philippines

Developing Indigenous Philanthropy for the Future

Philanthropy for and by indigenous peoples is a necessary step into a world where priorities are locally-defined, projects are locally-owned, and resources are not classified by dollar signs. Indigenous peoples have much to contribute to this philanthropy—knowledge, land, and leadership. For successful indigenous rights movements to emerge, we must mobilize these assets in creative and often complex ways.

Indigenous philanthropy can take many forms. In Brazil, Greengrants Alliance of Funds member the **Center for Socio-Environmental Support** is prioritizing support for indigenous rights. Mexican Alliance partner the **Solidarity in Action Fund** is increasing the capacity of indigenous organizations to fund their own initiatives. Greengrants has welcomed new indigenous members to our Advisory Boards in Russia and the Pacific Islands. Collectively, we are helping build a powerful indigenous rights movement that is working locally and internationally to protect cultures and the environment.

Indigenous Peoples Support Fund

Over the last ten years, Greengrants and our Alliance partner, **The Samdhana Institute**, have helped to convene and increase participation in indigenous dialogues throughout Southeast Asia. At a 2007 gathering, elders from indigenous movements discussed the need for a sustainable small grants mechanism to ensure that indigenous ideas and initiatives were not lost in legal and bureaucratic development structures. From this dialogue, the Indigenous Peoples Support Fund was formed to increase the resources and skills available to, and directed by, indigenous groups throughout the region. www.samdhana.org

THE GREENGRANTS ADVANTAGE

At the heart of Global Greengrants Fund is our network of expert advisors—biologists, nonprofit managers, lawyers, economists, foresters, journalists, engineers, and activist leaders—strategically positioned and intimately knowledgeable about the urgent issues in their regions. These advisors enable us to reach the most remote corners of the globe to support exciting initiatives leveraged by local knowledge and commitment.

Small grants are helping to build and strengthen the grassroots environmental movement by, among other things, shifting agendas, redistributing power, and promoting sustainable economies. The power of these groups is further strengthened by networking with regional and global allies, resulting in an integration of approaches and a more influential voice. Networks are the currency of movement-building and have proven invaluable in furthering social and environmental change.



JOIN THE MOVEMENT

We are all part of a global community, and while the challenges we face may seem immense, the Greengrants model allows any donor—large or small—to gain access to a vast network of volunteer advisors, connecting you to the most inspiring groups that are working collectively towards a brighter future. Our approach, low overhead costs, and on-the-ground knowledge offer a unique opportunity to make a difference for these committed and passionate grassroots leaders and the communities they represent.

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