

# We know the forests, and the forests know us

**It's time to listen to Indigenous Peoples, local communities and family smallholders, who manage a third of the world's forests and, together, are the world's largest investors in forests**

We are Indigenous Peoples, local communities and family smallholders – women and men, young and old. Strong evidence backs our assertion that we maintain and restore forests and sustain livelihoods on a vast scale. Combined, we are, and have always been, the largest investors in forests, and our investment goes well beyond money. Given our commitment and scale, without us it will be impossible to achieve food security and nutrition, respond to climate change, conserve biodiversity, and reduce poverty.

We are ready to work with everyone, and insist on playing our part. Major obstacles continue to stand in our way, however, which could be removed with sufficient political will.

We have met<sup>1</sup> to consolidate and deliver our messages to the XIV World Forestry Congress, with the aim of creating such will. **We therefore urge governments and other major actors to recognize the following, and to take the necessary corresponding action:**

## *Secure tenure is the foundation*

- 1) **The rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and family smallholders, which government and non-government actors, and international organizations must respect and secure** in accordance with all human rights covenants and treaties, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security.
- 2) **The enormous forest management potential of community-based forestry by Indigenous Peoples, local communities and family smallholders**, which will only be unleashed if:
  - communities have formal land titles that fully respect traditional institutions and customary laws and are negotiated in fully participatory ways, as well as full and inalienable rights of access, use, management, exclusion and alienation in their forests, lands and waters in their territories;
  - the rules and regulations governing these rights are subject to principles of self-determination; and
  - communities have access to sufficient technical, financial, legal and material resources to fully realize their rights.
- 3) **The strength and importance of customary authorities**, with which governments, corporations and other outside actors must conduct legitimate processes to obtain the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and family smallholders when making decisions that affect the forests, ancestral lands or territories of such communities, and those communities have the right to withhold consent for any reason and to determine their own priorities.

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<sup>1</sup> This statement is an outcome of “Building momentum”, an event held before the XIV World Forestry Congress on 5–6 September 2015 in Durban, South Africa. The event built on six dialogues and initiatives convened regionally in the last year in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, in which Indigenous Peoples, local communities and family smallholders from widely diverse communities, forests and sociopolitical contexts participated or were represented. The meeting in Durban built on this process and further developed the messages, which therefore broadly represent the views of millions of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and family smallholders.

*Improved access to services and markets promotes sustainable development*

- 4) **The obstacles faced by forest and farm producers and their locally controlled enterprises in accessing markets**, such as legislative barriers, lack of technical support, poor market information, insufficient finance, weak bargaining power in relation to big corporations, unfair competition from state forests and large corporations, and bureaucratic hurdles such as those related to registration, harvesting, transport and marketing. Removing these obstacles and taking action to favour community-based forest enterprises is essential for levelling the playing field with corporate competitors.

*Forest and farm producer organizations are critical drivers*

- 5) **The unrecognized huge investment made by Indigenous Peoples, local communities and family smallholders in the sustainable management of their forests, lands and waters as cooperatives, community associations and producer groups**, which require support to increase their access to finance and investment and their power in the market so as to capture more value from value chains.
- 6) **The need for governments and corporations to engage with Indigenous Peoples, local communities and family smallholders, and their umbrella organizations, through equitable partnerships**, to:
- recognize and uphold sustainable traditional livelihood practices;
  - provide technical and financial support for production, adding value to products, improving transportation, and obtaining greater access to markets for their products; and
  - meet legal needs and effectively enforce laws.
- 7) **The need for governments and others to support Indigenous Peoples, local communities and family smallholders in developing capacity**:
- by supporting training in technical and entrepreneurial skills;
  - by providing access to research and appropriate technologies, specific policy affirmation for small forest enterprises in addition to general supportive policies, free, easily accessible market information services for producers, finance for forest producer businesses, and exemptions from taxes on sales by small-scale forest producers; and
  - by providing effective capacity development and support services for forest and farm producer organizations in, for example, extension, the provision of inputs, organizational governance, the fair distribution of benefits within communities, constructive policy engagement, negotiation, leadership training, resource mobilization, financial management, silviculture, nurseries, harvesting, and business management.
- 8) **The financial credibility of smallholders and forest and farm producer organizations**, which must be equal partners in the participatory design, implementation and monitoring of affordable financial policies and instruments. Investors and governments must engage effectively with smallholders and producer organizations, acknowledging and building on their realities (formal, informal and customary), such as the lack of security and collateral.

*Inclusive involvement in policymaking will ensure real impact*

- 9) **The absolute necessity of, and the value in, involving Indigenous Peoples, local communities and family smallholders, including women and youth, in national, regional and global policy development and implementation** in managing forest landscapes, thereby meeting local needs and generating global benefits.

**Engage with us as equal partners. Support us. Invest in us.**

**We have the numbers. We have the knowledge. We are a big part of the answer.**