



SECURING THE AMAZON:

Indigenous Land Tenure and Forest Protection in Peru

A Report on Communal Land Tenure
Security and the SI-TIERRA Model in
Loreto, Peru

June 2026

IMAGE CREDIT: Sebastián Castañeda / Rainforest Foundation US

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	03
Letter from Jorge Pérez Rubio, AIDSESP	08
Letter from Suzanne Pelletier, Rainforest Foundation US	10

PART I

Closing the Tenure Gap:

Institutional and Policy Landscape for Peru's Indigenous Lands	12
1. Introduction	13
2. The Importance of Land Tenure Security for Indigenous Communities	15
3. Historical Challenges for Land Tenure Security in Peru	17
4. Major Investments, Limited Results	19
5. Challenges in Land Titling Initiatives	21
6. Conclusions and Recommendations	27

PART II

SI-TIERRA

A Promising Approach to Addressing Land Tenure Security for Amazonian Indigenous Territories in Peru	30
1. Introduction	31
2. How SI-TIERRA Overcomes Barriers to Land Tenure Security	32
3. Reconnecting Fragmented Landscapes	38
4. Lessons Learned & Recommendations	39
5. Project Expansion Projections	44
6. SI-TIERRA in Numbers	45
References	46
Acknowledgements	49

Executive Summary

The Importance of Securing Indigenous Peoples' Land Rights

Research consistently shows that securing Indigenous peoples' land rights is among the most cost-effective ways to protect forests, reduce illegal activities, and strengthen biodiversity. Where communities hold formal rights to their territories, deforestation rates are lower, governance is stronger, and cultural systems are more resilient.

Across Peru's Amazon rainforest, an estimated 20 million hectares (49.4 million acres) of Indigenous peoples' lands remain unrecognized—an area larger than the state of Washington. Loreto, the region highlighted in this report, is the largest region in the Peruvian Amazon and a major center of this land-tenure gap. Without secure tenure, communities remain exposed to land invasions, environmental degradation, violence, and organized crime.

Over the past decade, Peru has received significant public and international funding for land tenure initiatives. Between 2011 and 2020, approximately USD 158 million was allocated to titling programs. By 2022, fewer than half of 1,209 targeted communities had completed key stages of the titling process.

Land titling, or land tenure security, is a multi-step legal and administrative process requiring technical studies, field verification, community agreements, boundary demarcation, and formal registration. Each stage carries distinct procedural and financial requirements. Delays at any phase can halt progress and increase overall costs.

To secure land titles, Indigenous communities may face up to 22 administrative steps and must engage with multiple government agencies. In contrast, clearing forest for agricultural use may require only two or three steps.

Fragmented institutional responsibilities, limited field operations, weak coordination between public agencies, and shifting political priorities have all contributed to reducing the effectiveness of many land tenure programs.

Drawing on historical records, academic research, field documentation, and interviews with Indigenous leaders, public officials, and technical specialists, Part I of this report analyzes persistent implementation gaps and identifies practical lessons for strengthening land governance in the Peruvian Amazon.

Part II focuses on SI-TIERRA, an innovative Indigenous-led initiative in Loreto that demonstrates what coordinated land tenure implementation can achieve through collaboration between Indigenous organizations, civil society, and regional government institutions.

The program has contributed to conflict prevention, strengthened community governance, and improved the institutional capacity of Indigenous organizations. Indigenous-led logistics and coordinated documentation preparation have reduced reliance on external contractors and supported long-term territorial management.

This report was produced by the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest (AIDSESEP), in partnership with Rainforest Foundation US (RFUS), and in collaboration with regional authorities and technical partners. It aims to inform public policy, strengthen institutional coordination, and support efforts to accelerate secure land recognition for Indigenous peoples.

Key Findings

This report finds that, in Peru's Amazon region:

1. Overlapping concessions create long-term territorial risk.

More than 9 million hectares of forestry concessions and 15.4 million hectares of oil and gas blocks overlap with Indigenous lands.

These overlaps undermine tenure security and contribute to local and regional conflict.

2. Funding alone cannot deliver land tenure security.

Despite more than \$158 million in public and international investment, fewer than half of 1,209 targeted communities completed titling processes.

Fragmented institutions, shifting political will, and weak interagency coordination have limited the impact of past programs.

Lasting results require an integrated, end-to-end, field-based model with Indigenous leadership and coordinated government action.

3. SI-TIERRA shows that targeted resourcing and coordinated, field-based approaches, combined with political will, can dramatically reduce delays.

By strengthening Indigenous organizations' operational capacity and providing sustained field and administrative support, SI-TIERRA improved coordination among public agencies and technical partners, even in contexts with differing institutional priorities.

The political commitment of regional authorities, including the Regional Management of Agrarian Development and Irrigation (DIRDAGRI), formerly known as GERDAGRI, and the Regional Government of Loreto (GOREL), has been a critical factor in accelerating land recognition processes.

This approach reduced processing timelines from multiple years to 8–18 months, demonstrating that practical, Indigenous-led coordination can deliver faster, more reliable results.



IMAGE CREDIT: Sacha Cine / Rainforest Foundation US

4. Strong institutional capacity of Indigenous representative organizations is critical to sustaining results and accelerating processes.

Community-led logistics and governance systems have reduced reliance on external contractors and enabled inter-community boundary negotiations, and allowed administrative steps to be completed in advance, speeding up implementation.

By strengthening local coordination and decision-making capacity, these systems improve the efficiency of formal land recognition processes and reinforce long-term territorial management.

5. Long-term partnerships are essential for durable land tenure security.

SI-TIERRA has strengthened dispute resolution mechanisms, improved territorial governance processes, and enhanced coordination among Indigenous and public institutions.

Rainforest Foundation US supports this Indigenous-led process through long-term financial and technical partnership with AIDSEP and regional authorities.

Key data

Administrative Process Comparison

- Indigenous communities face up to 22 administrative steps across 12 government agencies to secure land titles, while clearing forest for agriculture can require only 2–3 steps.

Public Investment and Implementation Gaps

- USD 158 million was invested in land titling between 2011 and 2023.
- By 2022, fewer than 50% of the targeted communities had completed the titling process.
- There are cases where titling has taken decades.
- SI-TIERRA reduced timelines to 8–18 months.
- Since its inception in 2023, SI-TIERRA has titled or advanced land tenure security for more than 40 Indigenous communities, covering 77,265 hectares (approximately 191,000 acres)—an area slightly larger than the city of Chicago.

Legal Framework

- Peru's legal framework classifies forested lands as state-controlled, meaning Indigenous communities receive title primarily to agricultural areas rather than across the full extent of their forested ancestral lands.
- Overlapping concessions on Indigenous lands include:
 - 9 million hectares of forestry concessions
 - 15.4 million hectares of oil and gas blocks

Scale of the Titling Gap

- Approximately 20 million hectares of Indigenous lands in the Peruvian Amazon remain untitled or without full legal security.
- Around 700 communities are stalled somewhere between recognition, titling, and registration.
- SI-TIERRA closes this gap through Indigenous-led, end-to-end coordination with public agencies and technical partners.

Recommendations

- Simplifying legal and administrative procedures
- Strengthening dispute resolution mechanisms
- Securing long-term funding for field operations
- Investing in Indigenous institutional capacity
- Improving coordination among public agencies and partners

Conclusion

Recent experience in Loreto shows that Indigenous-led coordination, backed by sustained political commitment and institutional support, can significantly accelerate land recognition. This shared responsibility model—linking Indigenous organizations, public institutions, and technical partners—is essential for closing Peru's land tenure gap. To succeed, the state must simplify procedures and ensure stable financing for field operations, providing a scalable roadmap for forest protection across the Peruvian Amazon.



Recognition of Indigenous Rights to Territory and Protection of the Amazon Rainforest in Peru

Letter from Jorge Pérez Rubio

President, AIDSESEP

From the Inter-Ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest (AIDSESEP), we welcome the presentation of this analysis on the progress of territorial legal security in the Loreto region. For Indigenous peoples, territory is not a tradeable resource or a commodity; it is our home, the foundation of our identity, our culture, the very essence of our lives.

Peru's Constitution and international treaties guarantee our ancestral right to own and manage our territories. However, the reality we face reveals historical gaps and bureaucratic obstacles that prevent the titling of Indigenous territories. Therefore, territorial legal security is the cornerstone for the protection of Indigenous peoples—who defend the forests with our lives—and for any climate action that seeks to be real and effective.

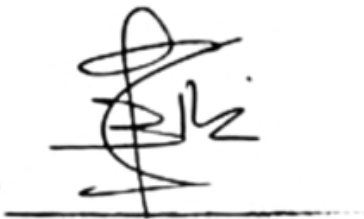
Through this message, we wish to emphasize four fundamental pillars that guide our proposal:

- **Protection of ancestral territory:** Ownership of our territories is a pre-existing right that the State has an obligation to recognize and protect in a comprehensive manner. We are not asking for concessions—we are demanding the fulfillment of a historical debt to guarantee the self-determination of our nations.
- **The urgency of simplifying procedures:** Currently, the path toward titling is riddled with excessive administrative steps and regulatory barriers that facilitate the dispossession of our territories rather than protecting us. It is imperative to reject laws that promote land trafficking and the invasion of Indigenous territories. Instead, it is urgent that regional governments follow the lead of the Government of Loreto and expedite the processes of legal recognition of native communities, as well as the demarcation and titling of the ancestral territories held by Indigenous peoples.

- **Efficiency in investment:** Many resources have been invested in titling programs that, regrettably, have delivered meager results relative to the scale of the need. We cannot continue allowing bureaucracy to consume funds intended for the security of our communities while invasions and illegal economies advance.
- **The SI-TIERRA model as a scalable solution:** In Loreto, we have demonstrated that coordination between Indigenous organizations and the Regional Government can generate concrete progress in territorial legal security—encompassing legal recognition, demarcation, and titling of Indigenous territories. The public-private collaboration model exemplified by SI-TIERRA (Comprehensive Regularization of Amazonian Indigenous Territories) is a proven path that can be replicated and scaled across the Peruvian Amazon, provided adequate funding and the necessary political will are in place.

This study charts a clear path for protecting Indigenous peoples and addressing the global climate crisis. We urge donors and responsible bodies to invest in efficient models that recognize our territorial governance as the best guarantee for conserving the Amazon.

United in defense of life and territory,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jorge P. Rubio', written over a horizontal line.

Jorge Perez Rubio
President, AIDSESEP



A Tipping Point for the Amazon: Why Land Tenure Security is a Climate Imperative

Letter from Suzanne Pelletier,
Executive Director of Rainforest Foundation US

Science tells us that protecting tropical forests and their ability to capture and store carbon dioxide is one of three principal tools we have today to combat the climate crisis—alongside rapidly phasing out fossil fuels and scaling up clean, renewable energy.

Since the Paris Accord was agreed to in 2015, some USD10 trillion¹ has been invested in decarbonization and the clean energy transition. In stark contrast, available data suggest that cumulative spending on tropical forest protection totals only in the low hundreds of billions of dollars² at most, with only a limited share reaching the governments, Indigenous peoples, and local communities in forested countries.

This disparity in funding priorities should be ringing alarm bells among decision makers in both the public and private sectors. We are running out of time before deforestation of complex, climate-regulating tropical forests like the Amazon reach a tipping point and become net carbon emitters rather than carbon sinks.

We must do better, and we must act now.

SI-TIERRA, the low-cost, high-impact, investment-ready initiative implemented in Peru's Loreto province and the subject of this report, shows that accelerating land-tenure security for Indigenous communities is both possible and transformative. This affordable solution directly affirms Indigenous peoples' rights while delivering measurable benefits: reduced deforestation, sustained biodiversity, and climate protection for communities, countries, and the planet.

While COP30 in Belem did not deliver everything we had hoped for, it did highlight the critical role that Indigenous peoples play in forest protection and committed significant new funding to strengthen land tenure security for Indigenous communities on the frontlines of tropical forest protection.

SI-TIERRA demonstrates that, when the resources and support reach those doing the hard work on the ground, public-private partnerships between Indigenous organizations and regional governments can deliver remarkable results and advance national climate commitments.

A core mission of Rainforest Foundation US is to support our Indigenous partners in Central and South America to secure and strengthen their rights to their ancestral territories. Over nearly four decades, we have worked alongside our Indigenous allies to advance land tenure security across more than 17 million hectares of Indigenous-managed tropical forest in Central and South America.

Climate change and the illegal destruction of Indigenous territories continue to be a grave risk to the rainforest. We hope you will join us, AIDSESEP, willing public authorities, and Indigenous partners in accelerating this critical priority over the coming years.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Suzanne Pelletier', with a stylized, cursive script.

Suzanne Pelletier
Executive Director,
Rainforest Foundation US

PART I

Closing the Tenure Gap: Institutional and Policy Solutions for Peru's Indigenous Lands



IMAGE CREDIT: Mauricio Velez / Rainforest Foundation US

1

Introduction

Peru holds the second-largest expanse of Amazon rainforest after Brazil. Fifty-one distinct Indigenous peoples inhabit the Peruvian Amazon³ and have protected and stewarded these forests for generations, managing them as a source of food, shelter, medicine, and their cultural identity continuity. Studies show that Indigenous territories with secure land tenure experience significantly lower deforestation rates, store more carbon, and sustain greater biodiversity than other types of protected forests.^{4 5 6} From 2001-2021, forests managed by Indigenous peoples stored a net 340 million tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere each year, equivalent to the U.K.'s annual fossil fuel emissions.⁷

Despite regulatory reforms and substantial investments, many Indigenous peoples in Peru lack land tenure security over the forested portions of their territories due to legal frameworks that separate agricultural lands from forests, allowing the government to retain control over forested areas and subsoil resources.⁸ Economic development policies often portray large Indigenous territories as empty or lacking productivity, undermining efforts to secure collective land tenure. Bureaucratic complexities and shifting governmental responsibilities further impede progress.

Even with these obstacles, Indigenous organizations continue to advocate for policies that recognize their territorial rights and grant them greater autonomy over their lands and resources.

Over the past half-century, more than 1,300 Indigenous communities in the Peruvian Amazon have secured land titles covering over 12 million hectares—approximately 17% of the country’s forested areas.⁹ However, as of 2025, more than 700 Indigenous communities are still awaiting titling or registration.¹⁰ Of these, 312 are located in Loreto, the country’s largest and most forested region, which also holds the greatest diversity of Indigenous peoples.¹¹

Although precise figures are unavailable, the best estimates indicate that over USD 158 million has been invested in Indigenous land tenure security in Peru through various mechanisms since 2011.¹² Data available as of late 2022 show an additional vulnerability: fewer than 80% of the more than 1,300 Indigenous communities that have obtained land titles have completed formal registration with SUNARP—the final step in the process required to ensure full legal protection.¹³

Based on interviews and literature review conducted for this report, three main factors explain the limited success:

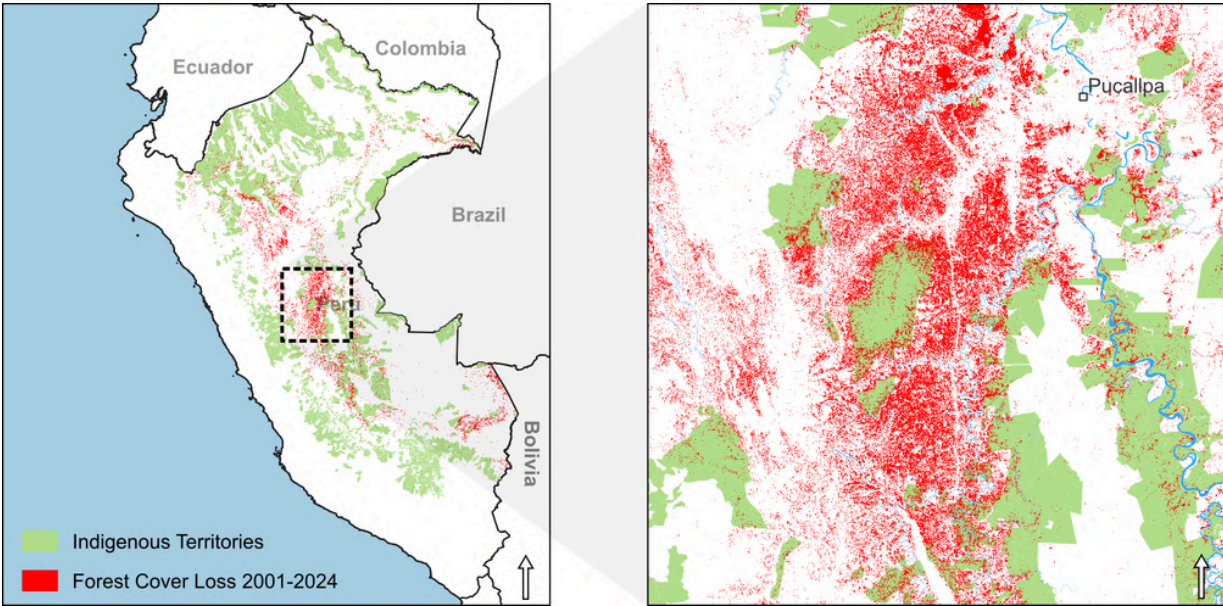
- 1

Haphazard funding that ignores process complexity
- 2

Insufficient on-the-ground socio-technical work and community engagement
- 3

Lack of an enabling political environment

This last point may be the most critical factor determining the outcome of land tenure initiatives.



An example of how land managed by Indigenous peoples (in green, showing forest cover) manifests lower rates of deforestation. CREDIT: Rainforest Foundation US



2

IMAGE CREDIT: Pamela Huerta / Rainforest Foundation US

The Importance of Land Tenure Security for Indigenous Communities

Benefits of Land Tenure Security

Substantial research demonstrates that legal recognition and Indigenous management of Indigenous territories lead to lower deforestation, greater biodiversity, stronger culture, and reduced illegal activities. These positive outcomes are made possible because:

- Secure tenure rights increase the ability and motivation of Indigenous communities to invest in long-term forest management.^{14 15}
- Land titles enable communities to legally exclude outsiders and better defend against encroachment.¹⁶
- Formal recognition allows Indigenous peoples to partner with government agencies to monitor and enforce against illegal activities.¹⁷

Impact on Communities Lacking Secure Land Tenure

As of late 2024, according to AIDSESEP, 717 Indigenous communities remain in the queue to complete the land titling process. A further 150 communities are awaiting official government recognition of their status—an essential precursor to titling. The pathway to secure tenure generally follows three sequential stages: recognition of the community, issuance of the land title, and formal registration of that title in the national property registries.¹⁸

The lack of land titles for roughly one-third of Indigenous communities in the Peruvian Amazon¹⁹ creates openings for illegal activity and for organized crime networks to exploit through land invasions. This exposes Indigenous communities to serious risks, including violence, attacks, and the murders of human rights and land defenders.²⁰

AIDSESEP's data show that of the 35 Indigenous leaders murdered over the past decade across the Peruvian Amazon, most cases stemmed from territorial disputes between communities and outsiders.²¹

However, multiple studies note that securing land tenure alone is not enough to safeguard the forest. Effective community-led forest management structures, together with strong government enforcement, are also essential for sustained protection.²²



IMAGE CREDIT: Sebastián Castañeda / Rainforest Foundation US



3

IMAGE CREDIT: Sacha Cine / Rainforest Foundation US

Historical Challenges for Land Tenure Security in Peru

Land tenure security progress in Peru has been uneven and repeatedly slowed by institutional and political barriers. The land titling process is hindered by administrative barriers—including overlapping claims, unclear and outdated regulations, limited budgets, and inconsistent political will at national and regional levels—which create long, costly, and complex procedures that delay or even prevent the recognition of Indigenous peoples' ancestral territories.²³

Economic Pressures and Legislative Setbacks

The push for economic development, especially following the 2006 U.S.–Peru Free Trade Agreement, triggered a wave of legislative decrees that weakened communal land rights and facilitated extractive industries' access to Amazonian lands.²⁴ These decrees expanded the definition of “idle and unproductive lands,” enabling the state to claim Indigenous territories, and removed requirements for companies to obtain community consent before operating. In doing so, they directly undermined Indigenous peoples' right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for projects and activities affecting their ancestral lands.

The Bagua Conflict and Its Consequences

These changes sparked widespread protests across Peru. The most dramatic escalation came in 2009 with the Bagua conflict, a violent confrontation between Indigenous protestors and police in northern Peru that left dozens dead and hundreds injured, and marked a turning point in national awareness of Indigenous land issues. From 2009 to the present, the Bagua conflict has produced measurable gains and, in some cases, setbacks in land tenure security for Indigenous peoples in Peru.

In the immediate aftermath, sustained Indigenous mobilization and international scrutiny pushed the state to adopt the prior consultation framework required by the International Labor Organization's Convention No. 169. This culminated in a national consultation law celebrated as a human rights milestone but often implemented as a formalistic procedure that does not truly respect communities' decisions or autonomy.

At the same time, the 2009 decentralization of titling responsibilities to regional governments triggered a sharp slowdown in the recognition of Amazonian communal lands. Without clear procedures or sufficient capacity at the regional level, virtually no new native community titles were issued for years, leaving roughly a third of Indigenous territories still without titles well into the 2020s.

Through the 2010s, overlapping concessions, protected areas, and agribusiness or extractive projects created growing pressure on Indigenous territories. Investor-oriented reforms such as Law 30230 weakened environmental safeguards and curtailed protections for untitled communities, undercutting the promise of Bagua-era reforms and reinforcing structural insecurity over land and forests.

Yet Indigenous organizations continued to litigate and organize. By 2025, they secured a landmark ruling in which the judiciary declared the state's failure to adopt and implement a coherent and adequately financed national titling policy an "unconstitutional state of affairs," ordering authorities not to grant forest or wildlife concessions in territories of peoples in voluntary isolation or in proposed reserves.²⁵ The order also explicitly recognized the long-standing debt owed to Indigenous territorial rights—signaling that, even as legal tools and jurisprudence have advanced since 2009, these advances have occurred against a backdrop of chronic state inaction and politically driven rollbacks.



4

IMAGE CREDIT: Rainforest Foundation US

Major Investments, Limited Results

Despite Peru's political commitments and substantial international financial pledges over the past 15 years, a clear national roadmap is still lacking to ensure that Indigenous land tenure objectives reach their intended beneficiaries.

Drawing on project documentation compiled by experts (Table 1), between 2011 and 2020, roughly 14 donor-funded projects were implemented to support Indigenous land titling and related processes in Peru, with an aggregate budget of approximately USD 158 million and targets covering about 1,209 communities.

This pattern is consistent with broader analyses that identify at least nine major current titling projects with a goal of titling 719 communities in the last decade, most of them launched after 2011 and clustered in nationally and internationally funded initiatives focused on collective titling in the Peruvian Amazon.

By 2022, less than half of these 719 pending communities had been recognized, titled, registered, or geo-referenced. Political conditions—especially at the regional level—have significantly affected the speed and scope of these efforts, and systemic challenges identified by regional governments and Indigenous organizations continue to limit their effectiveness.

Stronger central government guidelines and targets could help ensure continuity across titling initiatives, but ultimately, progress will require sustained collaboration between national and regional governments, international funders, and continued advocacy from Indigenous and other civil society organizations.

Table 1

Key donor-funded projects supporting titling in the Peruvian Amazon

Project	Budget (USD)	Scope	Goals	Results
Forest Investment Program (3 projects, 2 IDB and 1 WB) (2018–2023)	\$2,400,000	Madre de Dios, San Martín, Ucayali	17 communities (titled and extended)	None completed to date
Dedicated Grant Mechanism (MDE “Saweto”) funded by World Bank (2015–2020)	\$5,500,000 (\$2,600,000 budgeted for titling)	Amazonas, Cusco, Junín, Loreto, MDD, Pasco, San Martín, Ucayali	310 communities recognized; 130 titled	250 recognized; 58 titled
Rural Land Titling & Registration Project in Peru Third Phase (PTRT3) – IDB (2016–2023)	\$56,000,000	Amazonas, Loreto, San Martín, Ucayali	304 communities titled in Amazon departments	5 titled
GIZ-ProTierras (2015–2021)	N/A	San Martín, Ucayali	N/A	43 communities titled (21 completed)
UNDP-DCI (Peru–Norway–Germany Joint Declaration of Intent) (2016–2023)	\$6,100,000 (only part of which was for titling)	Loreto, San Martín, Ucayali	98 communities titled	None completed to date
WWF-DCI (NORAD) (2016–2017)	\$5,000,000 (only part of which was for titling)	Loreto	35 communities titled	35 communities titled
Proyecto Cuatro Cuencas (2015–2017)	\$955,000	Loreto	100 communities demarcated; 60 titled	114 demarcated; 47 titled
Alternative Development Project in Satipo-Devida (EU) (2011–2017)	\$82,000,000 (only part of which was for titling)	Junín	135 communities recognized or titled	11 communities titled

Data analysis courtesy of Suyana Huamani Mujica (2021), with complementary research by Ben Hodgdon, Forestry Consultant.

5

Challenges in Land Titling Initiatives

The titling process for Indigenous communities in Peru is severely hindered by systemic and political issues. Key procedural challenges include a fragmented, complex approach involving numerous agencies, reliance on outdated and incomplete data, and a lack of field resources for dispute resolution and verification.

This results in high rates of titled lands that cannot be officially registered in Public Registries (Superintendencia Nacional de los Registros Públicos, SUNARP) due to extensive overlaps with state-protected areas and resource concessions, such as oil and gas. Institutionally, progress is undermined by fluctuating political will, high staff turnover, and the government's refusal to grant full territorial rights, limiting titles to settled areas while the state retains control over traditional forested lands.

Furthermore, conventional titling methods are criticized for procedural inequality and for excluding Indigenous communities from meaningful participation, which stalls the resolution of long-standing territorial disputes.²⁶

5.1 Procedural and Technical Challenges

5.1.1 Fragmented Approach to Land Titling

Peru's land titling process involves multiple steps that require careful sequencing and coordination to succeed.²⁷ Yet many initiatives address only isolated components rather than adopting a holistic approach. This fragmentation causes inefficiencies and errors, often resulting in overlapping territorial claims that are difficult to resolve after titles are issued.

Government decentralization has complicated the titling process because procedures vary from region to region.

While legal interpretations identify 14 steps in 9 stages for recognizing and titling native communities, in practice studies identify closer to 22 steps, which can involve up to 12 different government agencies.²⁸

5.1.2 Outdated or Incomplete Data

Significant challenges stem from outdated databases lacking reliable geographic information and coordinates. Many pre-date GPS technology and provide an incomplete picture of overlapping land claims. Problems worsen when titling work is conducted primarily from regional capital offices using faulty or incomplete information without adequate field verification.

5.1.3 Insufficient Field Operation Resources

Professional teams producing technical documentation for titling often lack the resources to visit communities to resolve border disputes, delineate boundaries, establish markers, and verify GPS coordinates. Inadequate field operations significantly compromise the quality and accuracy of the titling work.

5.1.4 Registration Obstacles

Many titled lands face barriers to official registration in SUNARP due to overlapping claims with state forests, protected areas, and concessions. Land tenure security experts estimate that approximately 190 - 250 communities have titles but cannot be registered by SUNARP because of such state overlaps.²⁹

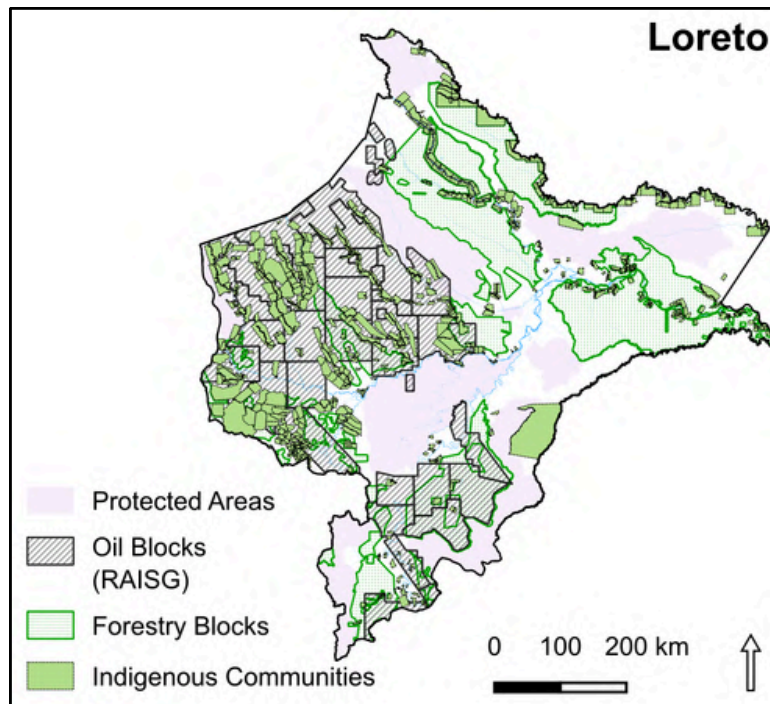
Available regional evidence suggests that a substantial share of titled native communities remain unregistered in SUNARP. For example, in Loreto, only 547 of 715 titled communities were registered.³⁰

5.1.5 Overlapping Rights

Peru lacks a single map of titles and concessions, causing ongoing conflicts and hindering community titling progress.³¹ Communities often have unresolved border disputes with neighbors dating back decades.

Additionally, Indigenous territories frequently overlap with areas designated for other purposes by state agencies, including state-designated protected areas (Áreas Naturales Protegidas, ANP).

- Between 40% and 75% of the Peruvian Amazon (16–45 million hectares) lies within oil or gas concessions.^{32 33} These concessions overlap with 33% (15.4 million hectares) of Indigenous territories.³⁴
- More than 9 million hectares of commercial forestry concessions also overlap with Indigenous communities' rights.³⁵



5.1.6 Procedural Inequality Compared to Other Land Use Designations

Indigenous community titling and registration require navigating numerous complex steps, whereas non-Indigenous landholders follow a simple two-step process. This disparity creates additional barriers for Indigenous communities.³⁶

5.2 Political and Institutional Challenges

5.2.1 Political Will and Continuity

Frequent changes in regional administrations and high staff turnover undermine continuity and the development of institutional knowledge.

Support for Indigenous land tenure security also varies, as not all regional governments prioritize Indigenous land tenure (see Part II of the study).

As a result, titling initiatives often gain or lose momentum depending on shifting political priorities.

5.2.2 Limited Territorial Rights

The government does not recognize the full extent of Indigenous peoples' territories, granting titles only to settled areas while retaining control over traditional lands used for hunting, gathering, and other culturally important activities. Current law recognizes and titles lands for a specific community, rather than contiguous landscapes spanning multiple communities and customary lands.

Forested areas are classified as state-controlled “inalienable forest reserves,” and Indigenous peoples are granted temporary usage rights rather than permanent titles over these areas.

Communities must still obtain separate usufruct contracts and implement costly forest management plans in order to legally use the resources within their traditional forest lands.³⁷

5.2.3 Insufficient Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Traditional titling approaches lack effective mechanisms for resolving long-standing territorial disputes between neighboring communities, often indefinitely stalling the titling process.

5.2.4 Limited Community Participation

Conventional titling approaches frequently exclude Indigenous communities from meaningful participation. Without early community involvement, initiatives lose access to critical local knowledge and fail to build necessary community buy-in for sustainable outcomes.



IMAGE CREDIT: Sebastian Castañeda / Rainforest Foundation US

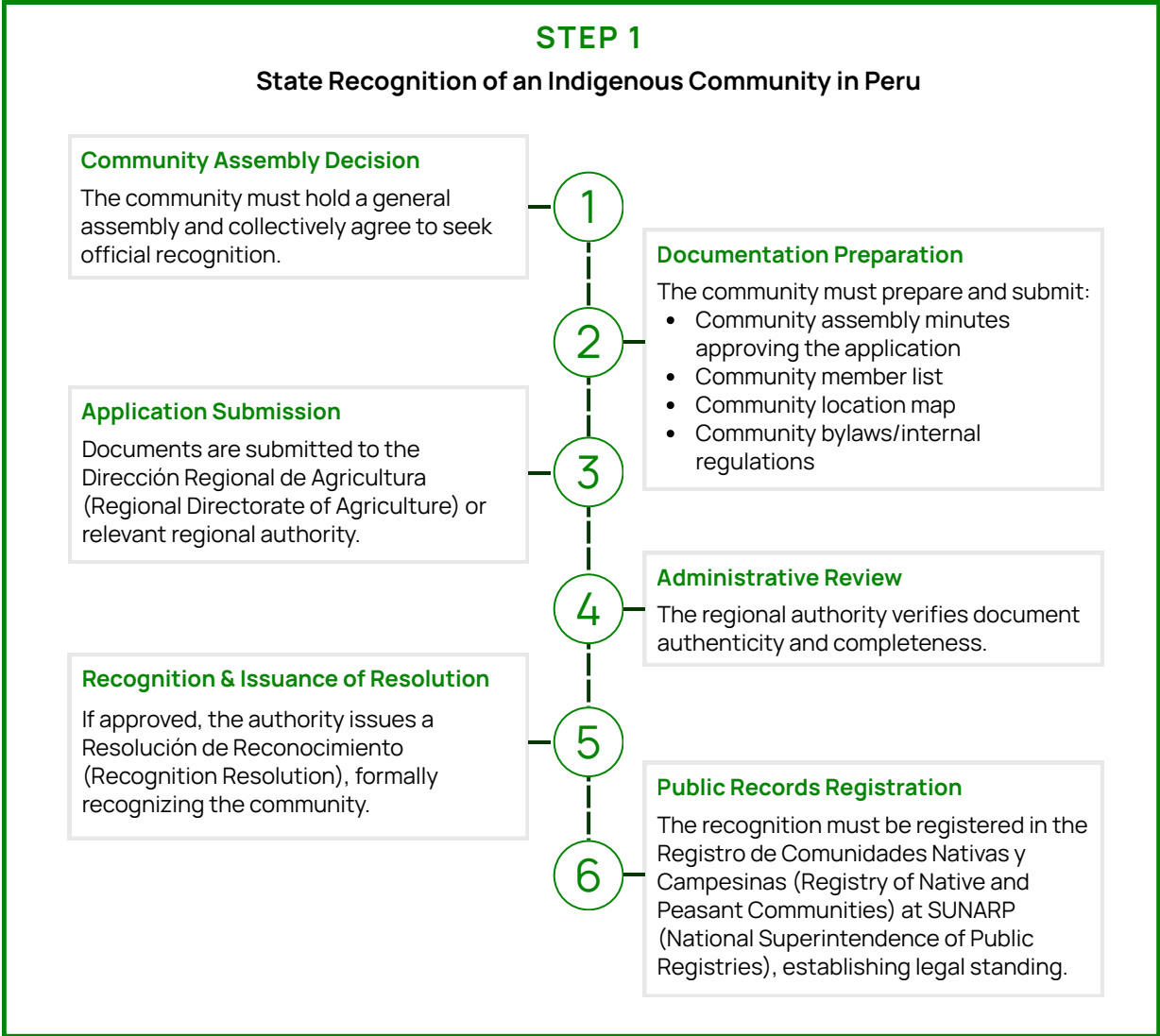
The following tables illustrate the complex, multi-stage nature of Peru's Indigenous land titling process, which is hindered by bureaucratic fragmentation.

While the legal framework outlines 14 steps in 9 stages, the actual process often involves up to 22 steps managed by as many as 12 different government agencies, with procedures varying significantly by region.

This fragmented and complex approach, compounded by issues like outdated data and insufficient field resources, is identified as a major factor limiting the success of titling initiatives.

Diagram 1

The long journey to land tenure security



STEP 2

Obtaining a Land Title

Only legally recognized communities are eligible for land titling.

Land Survey and Demarcation

The community works with regional/national authorities to conduct land surveys and demarcation.

1

2

3

Land Claims Adjudication

Authorities review claims, resolve disputes with neighbors or private landholders, and define precise community land boundaries.

Formal Titling

Once territory is demarcated and claims adjudicated, the state issues a collective land title.

STEP 3

Communal Land is Registered

Land Registration

The title is registered in the National Public Registry (SUNARP), officially recognizing the land as community property.

1

2

Land Becomes Protected

By law, titled land cannot be sold, seized, or lost over time, ensuring long-term communal ownership. Communities are exempt from property taxes and may access infrastructure funds and rural development programs.



IMAGE CREDIT: Sebastián Castañeda / Rainforest Foundation US

6

Conclusion and Recommendations

Achieving land tenure security for Peru's Indigenous communities represents one of the most effective strategies for protecting forests, safeguarding biodiversity, and ensuring cultural survival. However, securing Indigenous community land titles faces substantial challenges.

To move past these challenges and advance toward stronger land tenure security, the authors offer the following recommendations:

Short term

1. **Adopt a Comprehensive Approach:** Address the entire process from community recognition to title registration rather than focusing on isolated components. This requires coordinated stakeholder efforts and a complete understanding of the titling procedure. In this sense, land tenure security efforts would also benefit from better coordination among funders and civil society organizations subcontracted for project execution.
2. **Strengthen Field Operations:** Direct more resources toward on-the-ground work, including boundary delineation, dispute resolution, and community participation and expertise. Field verification is essential for accurate titling and preventing future conflicts.
3. **Ensure Consistent Funding:** Create dedicated funding streams prioritizing critical field operations and technical support for Regional Agricultural Directorates responsible for issuing Indigenous community land titles.
4. **Ensure Collaboration with Indigenous Communities and Representative Organizations:** Involve Indigenous communities as active partners throughout the titling process, incorporating their knowledge, concerns, and priorities from the beginning.

Medium term

1. **Strengthen Dispute Resolution Mechanisms:** Develop effective processes for resolving territorial disputes between neighboring communities and state entities before issuing titles. One possibility could be to establish land tenure conflict resolution working groups in each regional province. These could be composed of representatives of Indigenous organizations as well as relevant regional government agencies.
2. **Improve Data Systems:** Develop comprehensive, up-to-date geographic information systems accurately reflecting existing land claims, titles, and usage rights to prevent overlapping claims.
3. **Build Political Support:** Develop strategies to maintain momentum and political will across administration changes, ensuring continuity of land tenure security initiatives.

By implementing these recommendations, Peru can address both historical and ongoing land tenure security challenges while honoring its commitments to Indigenous peoples' rights and advancing forest protection goals.

Securing Indigenous community land tenure represents a critical opportunity to protect one of the world's most valuable forest ecosystems while upholding the rights and cultural heritage of its original stewards.

Achieving this will require sustained commitment, improved coordination, and recognition that Indigenous land rights are integral to achieving both social justice and environmental sustainability in Peru's Amazon.

With proper implementation and support, land tenure security initiatives can deliver positive outcomes for Indigenous communities, forests, and the global climate.



IMAGE CREDIT: Rainforest Foundation US

PART II

SI-TIERRA

A Promising Approach to
Addressing Land Tenure
Security for Amazonian
Indigenous Territories in Peru





1

IMAGE CREDIT: Sebastián Castañeda / Rainforest Foundation US

Introduction

SI-TIERRA: An innovative, cost-effective, and timely model for Indigenous land tenure security

SI-TIERRA is a collaborative land tenure security initiative in Peru's Loreto province, led by the Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana (AIDSEP) in collaboration with the Regional Government of Loreto (GOREL).

Building on the experience of previous land tenure security efforts, SI-TIERRA was launched in 2023 with direct financial and technical support from Rainforest Foundation US (RFUS).

This innovative and comprehensive program has demonstrated that it can deliver rapid, low-cost recognition of land tenure along with permanent geo-referencing and demarcation of Indigenous territories in the Peruvian Amazon. Both are recognized as critical elements for the long-term protection of Indigenous peoples' lands and forests.

The SI-TIERRA initiative builds on the World Bank's Dedicated Grant Mechanism (DGM) implemented between 2015 and 2021 at a cost of USD 4.5 million. The DGM used a participatory, relatively low-cost approach, prioritizing community engagement throughout the process.

The project aimed to support the legal recognition of 310 native communities and land titles for 130 communities. According to the DGM website, more than 231,000 hectares of Indigenous land were titled through DGM-supported processes.



IMAGE CREDIT: Sacha Cine / Rainforest Foundation US

2

How SI-TIERRA Overcomes Barriers to Land Tenure Security

The SI-TIERRA model accelerates the collective land tenure security process and supports communities to defend their territories, contributing to broader goals of forest protection and Indigenous self-determination.

Specifically, SI-TIERRA resolves known bottlenecks identified through the analysis of previous land tenure efforts. It addresses several—but not all—of the issues addressed in Part I of this paper.

How SI-TIERRA Works

SI-TIERRA is a collaborative, multi-faceted approach, focused on securing formal legal recognition of Indigenous lands.

Core Functioning:

1. **Government Partnership and Methodology:** The project is executed by AIDSESEP and is based on a four-year agreement with the regional government of Loreto. The government supports the effort by contracting soil analysts, lawyers, and geographic information systems (GIS) specialists to work alongside RFUS-financed and equipped, community-based, Indigenous titling teams.
2. **Land Titling:** The primary objective is to advance community-held land titles and public registration for Indigenous communities in Loreto. SI-TIERRA has already supported the successful titling of more than 40 communities.
3. **Theory of Change:** The entire approach is based on the theory that securing land rights for Indigenous peoples is the most effective way to achieve lasting forest protection and biodiversity conservation. This is achieved through three levers of change:
 - Asserting, securing, and defending Indigenous rights to their forests.
 - Protecting forests by bolstering territorial monitoring and governance.
 - Strengthening local institutions and facilitating direct funding.

The SI-TIERRA Process

The SI-TIERRA model operates through a strategic public-private partnership between the national Indigenous organization AIDSESEP and the Regional Government of Loreto (GOREL). Unlike traditional top-down approaches, this model is Indigenous-led, with AIDSESEP serving as the primary coordinator for community engagement while government agencies like the Dirección Regional de Desarrollo Agrario y Riego de Loreto (DIRDAGRI), formally GERDAGRI, provide the necessary technical and legal expertise for demarcation. The process begins with a comprehensive "pre-diagnostic" assessment to identify the specific legal status of a community and anticipate potential bottlenecks before field teams are even deployed. By utilizing multi-disciplinary "titling brigades"—which include lawyers, GIS specialists, and Indigenous experts—the initiative ensures that technical documentation is accurate and culturally sensitive from the start.

Once in the field, the process prioritizes on-the-ground resolution of historical boundary disputes between neighbors through direct community participation and permanent GPS verification. A holistic methodology addresses the entire land tenure journey in a single integrated workflow: from initial state recognition and physical demarcation to the final, often-neglected step of official registration in the National Public Registry (SUNARP). By aggregating contiguous communities at a watershed scale, SI-TIERRA reduces logistical costs and also reconnects fragmented landscapes into large, legally protected blocks of forest that are more resilient against deforestation.

Concept Spotlight: “Land Titling” vs. “Advancing Land Tenure Security”

While these terms are often used interchangeably, they represent two different concepts in a community’s journey toward legal protection.

Advancing land tenure security with SI-TIERRA

Securing land is not a single “on/off” switch but a multi-step ladder. The SI-TIERRA process focuses on advancing land tenure security because it addresses the multiple steps of this ladder (not just the “titling” step), supporting communities to advance, ideally, to the final step of registration with SUNARP.

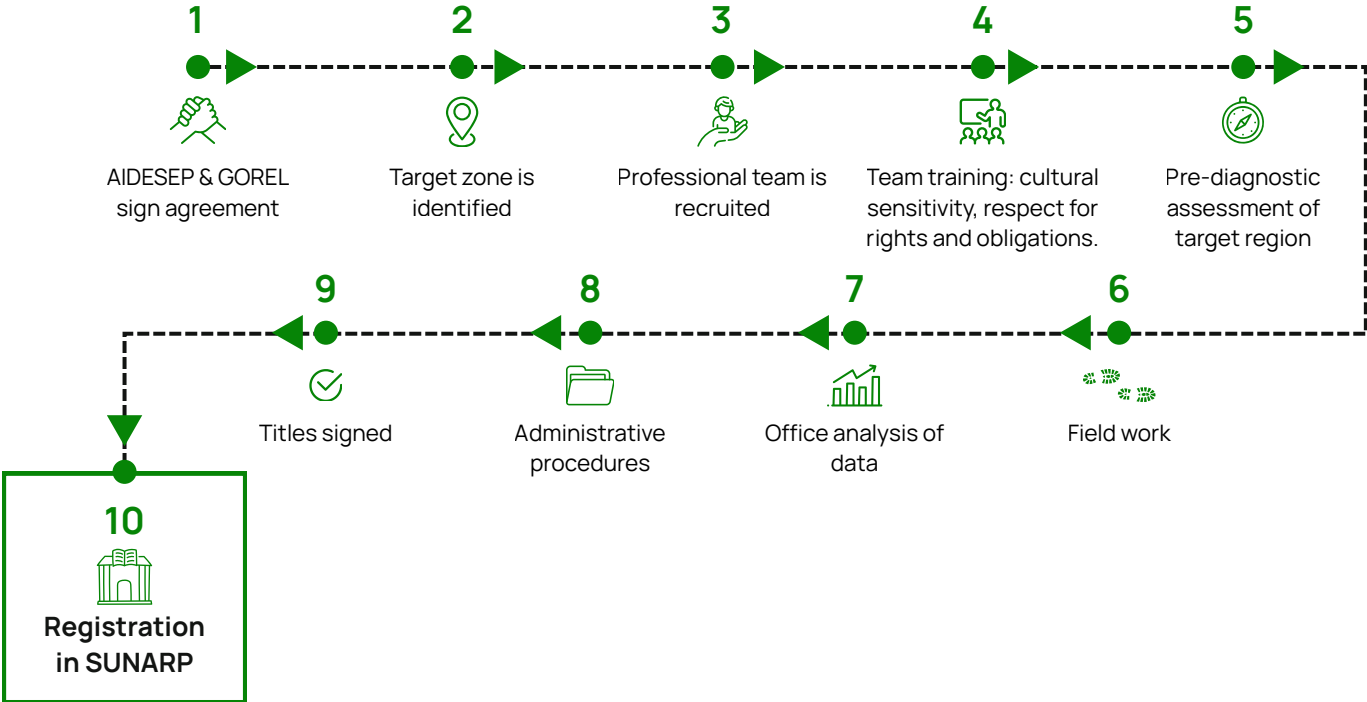
Key Steps in the Security Ladder:

1. **Recognition:** Official state acknowledgment of the community’s existence.
2. **Demarcation & Georeferencing:** Moving from “hand-drawn” maps to precise GPS coordinates validated by government authorities and agreed upon by neighboring communities, ensuring community boundaries do not overlap with each other
3. **Titling:** The formal legal recognition of land rights.
4. **Registration (SUNARP):** The final “shield.” This enters the community into the national database, making their rights visible to third parties, investors, and the state.
5. **Extensions:** Once communities have a land title, they can request “extensions” to expand the area under their control. This typically occurs as communities grow in population size. It is also an important way in which multiple communities have ensured that their lands are connected mosaics rather than patchworks with gaps that can be exploited by outside actors.


Why the distinction matters: A community can be "Titled" but still vulnerable if their boundaries aren't clearly demarcated and georeferenced, as well as registered in the Public Registry. SI-TIERRA focuses on clearing all of the administrative hurdles that exist to ensure final land rights security.

Diagram 2

The SI-TIERRA process



“ For more than 30 or 40 years, we haven't been able to title our land, but with the agreements we made with RFUS, AIDSESEP, ORPIO, and DIRDAGRI, **we've achieved it in less than six months.** ”

 **Francisco Hernandez Cayetano**
 President of the Federation of Ticuna and Yahuas Communities of Bajo Amazonas (FECOTYBA)

Known Challenges to Land Tenure Security	The SI-TIERRA Approach
<p>Overlapping rights Communities often have unresolved border disputes with neighbors dating back decades. Additionally, Indigenous territories frequently overlap with areas designated for other purposes by state agencies, including state-designated protected areas (ANPs) and Permanent Production Forests (Bosques de Producción Permanente, BPPs), which are areas where legal timber extraction is permitted.</p>	<p>Conflict resolution process Conduct preliminary assessments before field visits to anticipate potential challenges from competing institutional legal claims to the land. SI-TIERRA has prioritized Indigenous lands that do not overlap with state-designated protected areas or concessions. Although resolving overlapping institutional land claims is beyond the scope of this program, SI-TIERRA does significantly reduce the possibility of future potential overlap.</p>
<p>Incomplete registration of titles Over 80% of titled communities have not completed registration with SUNARP for a variety of reasons, leaving them without full legal protection.</p>	<p>Integrated approach The technical and political opportunity opened by this collaboration allowed communities missing registration in SUNARP to complete that step. The program further prioritized communities with no overlaps with state concessions—and therefore eligible for titling and registration—so they could complete the process in full and quickly.</p>
<p>Community boundary disputes Peru lacks a single map of titles and concessions, causing ongoing conflicts and hindering community titling progress. Some communities possess land titles with "referential" boundary descriptions rather than exact GPS coordinates, requiring modern surveying for full recognition.</p>	<p>Supporting dispute resolution Directly involve community members and leadership to resolve boundary disputes using verifiable, permanent GPS coordinates. Multi-disciplinary field brigades stay in the field to work with communities in resolving territorial disputes between neighboring communities.</p>
<p>Funding Issues Insufficient funding and inadequate staffing for Regional Agricultural Directorates responsible for issuing land titles hampers efficient processing.</p>	<p>Meeting funding challenges Support funding needs that ensure continuity of staff at the different government agencies, including technical field staff carrying out vital work in the communities.</p>
<p>Fragmented approach to land tenure security Peru's land titling process involves multiple complex steps requiring proper sequencing and integration to succeed.</p>	<p>Collaborative pre-diagnostic Through a pre-diagnostic approach, quickly identify the status of a community's quest for land tenure security and identify all the steps required to ensure it successfully completes the journey to full territorial security.</p>
<p>Outdated, incomplete data Significant challenges stem from outdated databases lacking reliable geographic information and coordinates. Many pre-date GPS technology and provide an incomplete picture of overlapping land claims.</p>	<p>Verification and correction of data in the field and registration files Integrate geo-referencing and cross-checking data as standard operating procedures for the field survey. Cross-reference with data in files in various administrations.</p>
<p>Limited community participation Conventional titling approaches frequently exclude Indigenous communities from meaningful process participation.</p>	<p>Indigenous-led initiative Directly fund the national Indigenous organization so it can be a direct interlocutor with the regional authorities.</p>

How SI-TIERRA Delivers Results

CHALLENGES



PARTNERSHIP SOLUTIONS



RESULTS

<p>Structural capacity constraints for titling implementation DIRDAGRI, the regional authority responsible for legally processing Indigenous land titling in the Loreto Department, faced significant resource shortages that limited its ability to conduct fieldwork and advance titling processes. With insufficient funding for transportation, technical staff, and equipment, the agency struggled to respond to the growing backlog of requests from Indigenous communities seeking legal recognition.</p>	<p>Strategic leveraging of funds RFUS supported the partnership with targeted investments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USD 190,000 to strengthen AIDSESEP's technical and coordination capacity. • USD 340,000 for logistical infrastructure to support field activities. (Funding for SI-TIERRA provided by partner organizations, including: Rainforest Trust, Stockel Family Foundation, Rainforest Foundation Fund) <p>This investment enabled AIDSESEP to assume leadership in coordination, while DIRDAGRI concentrated on technical and legal responsibilities.</p>	<p>Greater efficiency The partnership enabled the titling of more than 40 Indigenous lands covering 77,265 hectares between 2023 and 2026. What previously took decades was reduced to 8–18 months, with physical demarcation, conflict prevention, and full documentation in the public registry, ensuring legally recognized land titles.</p>
<p>Historical exclusion of Indigenous leadership from titling processes Previous land titling initiatives often excluded Indigenous leaders, instead relying mainly on NGOs and government agencies. This approach weakened Indigenous organizations' ability to participate and lead, perpetuating dependency instead of building organizational strength. Opportunities to strengthen Indigenous leadership and institutional capacity were therefore lost.</p>	<p>Indigenous-led public-private collaboration model AIDSESEP, representing Indigenous peoples across the Peruvian Amazon, and DIRDAGRI built a new public-private partnership that restructured traditional roles. AIDSESEP took on primary coordination, leading engagement with communities and Indigenous organizations, while DIRDAGRI provided technical and legal expertise to carry out demarcation and titling. This collaborative model, along with increased financial investment channeled through AIDSESEP, allowed both institutions to leverage their strengths and coordinate land titling efforts.</p>	<p>Institutional strengthening Through this partnership, AIDSESEP evolved from focusing primarily on advocacy to becoming a recognized institutional actor in titling and governance. This strengthened its organizational capacity and provided a framework for replication by other Indigenous groups.</p>
<p>Logistical barriers to accessing communities Land titling in Loreto requires transporting technical teams and materials across remote, river-based areas to conduct field surveys and legal demarcation. Traditional project-by-project approaches proved slow, costly, and inefficient. The lack of dedicated logistical networks and limited coordination with Indigenous organizations led to frequent delays in completing titling processes.</p>	<p>Indigenous logistics network In collaboration with ORPIO (Loreto's regional Indigenous organization) and local federations, RFUS supported the creation of Indigenous-led logistics networks specialized in territorial services. These networks provided transportation, financial management, and operational support. By leveraging traditional, local knowledge to resolve logistical challenges, the networks facilitated the transport of personnel, equipment, and materials to remote areas, while maximizing the proportion of project resources that directly benefitted local people.</p>	<p>Sustainable Indigenous logistical capacity The Indigenous-led logistics networks reduced reliance on outside contractors and created revenue-generating opportunities for Indigenous organizations. Profits were reinvested into strengthening long-term financial stability and governance capacity.</p>

3



IMAGE CREDIT: Sebastián Castañeda / Rainforest Foundation US

Reconnecting Fragmented Landscapes

SI-TIERRA applies a watershed-scale approach to evaluating communities seeking land tenure security. By aggregating contiguous communities, it reduces overall titling costs and helps weave together territories that might otherwise remain fragmented. Creating a contiguous block of legally protected lands also makes it far more difficult for deforestation drivers to gain a foothold and begin operations.

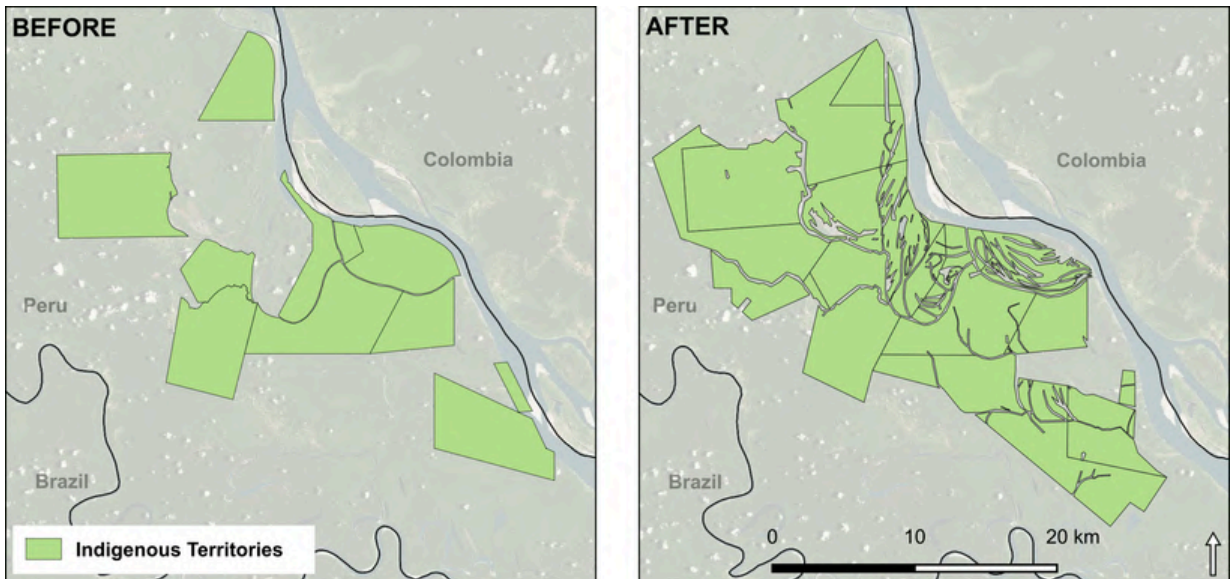


Diagram 3: In the tri-border area of Brazil, Peru, and Colombia, Ticuna communities belonging to FECOTYBA (Federation of the Ticuna and Yaguas Communities of the Lower Amazon) before and after implementing the SI-TIERRA process. CREDIT: Rainforest Foundation US

4

Recommendations

The implementation of SI-TIERRA has demonstrated some of the strategies needed to accelerate progress. Several practical recommendations emerge from this work for stakeholders to improve future efforts.

4.1 Allied Partner Organizations and Funders

4.1.1 Sustained and Flexible Support

- Secure long-term funding streams to maintain continuity of titling brigades, community participation, and dispute resolution efforts.
- Encourage adaptive funding mechanisms that allow partners to respond to changing political contexts or unexpected obstacles without disrupting fieldwork.
- Invest in capacity building for both Indigenous and government technical teams, ensuring that local expertise remains even if political or institutional conditions shift.

4.1.2 Integrated Field-Based Models

- Prioritize integrated, field-based methodologies—including on-site GPS verification and use of boundary markers—to avoid fragmented, step-by-step titling approaches that generate inefficiencies.
- Support data systems and monitoring tools that strengthen transparency and allow partners to share and track progress across institutions.



Everyone wins: communities win, and state authorities win because they are making progress in resolving their historic debt to Indigenous peoples by recognizing their territories.



Plinio Pizango
Head of Technology Transfer, RFUS



4.1.3 Support for Monitoring and Evaluation

- Invest in the development of a unified government database to make accurate, up-to-date data on the status of community land tenure widely available. In Loreto, a platform exists, but it is not updated frequently enough, limiting its usefulness.
- Regularly monitor progress to detect bottlenecks early and inform adaptive management.
- Encourage partnerships between technical teams, Indigenous organizations, and research institutions to generate and share learning from SI-TIERRA's implementation.

4.2 National and Regional Government Agencies

4.2.1 Institutionalization and Streamlining

- Institutionalize holistic titling procedures that combine all technical, legal, and participatory steps into an integrated workflow.
- Standardize field verification protocols using GPS and physical boundary markers to prevent overlaps and ensure reliable mapping.

4.2.2 Coordination and Interagency Collaboration

- Establish interagency working groups with Ministerio de Desarrollo Agrario y Riego (MIDAGRI), Servicio Nacional Forestal y de Fauna Silvestre (SERFOR), Servicio Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas por el Estado (SERNANP), Superintendencia Nacional de los Registros Públicos (SUNARP), and regional governments with Indigenous technical experts to reconcile overlapping data on concessions, forest lands, and protected areas.
- Promote legal clarity through harmonization of national regulations governing titling, forest classification, and protected areas to remove conflicting mandates.



In 2012, Colombian [hunters] would come in here and nobody said anything to them because it wasn't our land. They would come and take large quantities of curassow bird, howler monkeys, and even peccaries from here. Now we don't let strangers in anymore.



Edilson Pinto Pérez

Leader and Community Forest Monitor, San Juan de Barranco



4.2.3 Sustainability and Continuity

- Plan for political transitions, ensuring that technical and data systems established by SI-TIERRA can be transferred seamlessly and remain active despite government turnover.
- Invest in training and retention of public officials at regional and local levels to preserve institutional memory and sustain long-term momentum.

4.3 Indigenous Organizations

4.3.1 Leadership and Participation

- Deepen Indigenous participation throughout all stages of the titling process –from design and boundary negotiation to dispute resolution and monitoring.
- Strengthen Indigenous technical teams to co-lead field verification, map validation, and data management, ensuring that local knowledge guides every stage.
- Build institutional capacity within federations and community organizations to engage effectively with government agencies and technical partners.

4.3.2 Knowledge Integration and Governance

- Embed traditional land-use knowledge into boundary-setting and conflict resolution processes, reinforcing legitimacy and long-term stewardship.
- Collaborate with government agencies in monitoring and evaluation systems, contributing local insights to adaptive management and verification.

4.4 Cross-Cutting Conclusion

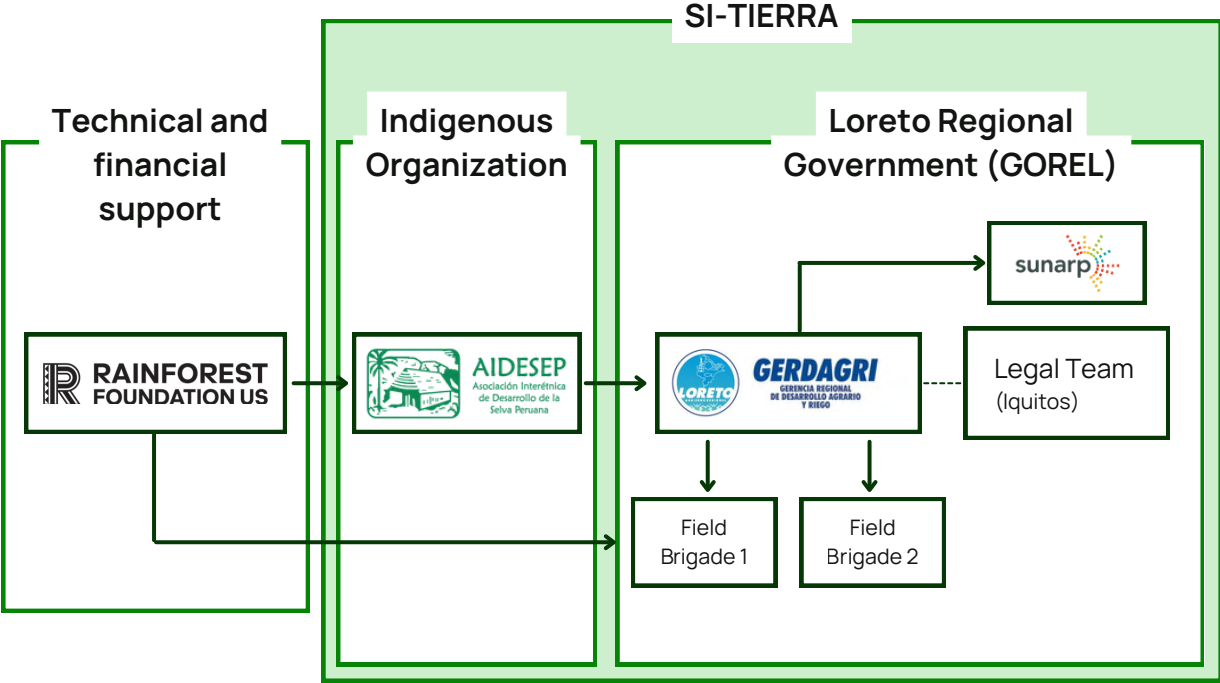
To achieve lasting progress on Indigenous land tenure security in Peru, SI-TIERRA emphasizes a shared responsibility model, where:

- Government agencies simplify procedures and strengthen coordination.
- Funders and partners sustain and adapt their support.
- Indigenous organizations lead and shape implementation.

Only through political commitment, legal-policy innovation, and Indigenous leadership—backed by reliable funding and institutional continuity—can Peru consolidate the gains from SI-TIERRA and close the persistent land tenure gap.

Diagram 4

How SI-TIERRA strengthens Indigenous land tenure security institutions in Loreto



Additional financial contributors to SI-TIERRA: Rainforest Trust*, Stockel, Rainforest Fund.

*Rainforest Trust has also supported land tenure efforts across Peru through multiple partners and approaches.

Diagram 5

Land titling brigade field team composition





5

IMAGE CREDIT: Adobe Stock

Project Expansion Projections

SI-TIERRA's proven methodology positions it for significant expansion in Loreto and potentially other regions of the Peruvian Amazon.

With sustained partner support and political commitment, SI-TIERRA could significantly expand its impact through the following pathways:

- Scaling up the model to address the estimated 700 communities still awaiting titles in Peru's Amazon, with a focus on more than 350 located in Loreto.
- Replicating the approach in other regions of Peru facing similar challenges, adapting the model to local contexts.
- Integrating SI-TIERRA's best practices into national land tenure policies and donor-funded programs to maximize impact and efficiency.



IMAGE CREDIT: Rainforest Foundation US

6

SI-TIERRA in Numbers

Hectares of Indigenous territories in Peru where RFUS has supported advances in land tenure security:



Since its inception, SI-TIERRA has demonstrated remarkable efficiency and impact.



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IMAGE CREDIT: Rainforest Foundation US

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