

## More peaceful and inclusive communities through empowerment and training of indigenous leaders on conflict and gender



Workshop with indigenous leaders in the Amazonian region of Peru

### Issues:

- **Indigenous land rights**
- **Communication skills**
- **Cultural and gender sensitivity**

*"I'll be more patient and understanding, and I will listen to both sides."* These were the words of a female indigenous leader of the Shawi people, who recognized in herself a change of attitude after participating in a training course on local conflict management. This course was organized by the Regional Government of San Martín in Peru and *ProTierras Comunales* and implemented in coordination with the regional and local indigenous organisations in 2018.

*ProTierras Comunales* is part of the Global Project "Responsible Land Policy", implemented since late 2015 by German development cooperation in six countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America to promote the Voluntary

Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT, 2012). In this context, SDG Indicator 1.4.2 "Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land ..." receives special attention, but the project also contributes to several other SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, especially to SDG 16.1 (prevention and reduction of violence).

In the Peruvian Amazon, the approximately 50 indigenous peoples face diverse and complex obstacles when they attempt to secure collective rights to their ancestral territories. First of all, since the 1970s, they have had to organize in currently about 2,150 *comunidades nativas* (native communities) which are the only legal entity which can receive a collective land title. This has fragmented their territories. Also, the Amazon has been made accessible by road construction and airports, leading to settlement processes and extractive activities. Many of the current obstacles faced by

native communities during the titling processes are of a political-administrative nature due to the overlap of, for example, protected areas or timber concessions with indigenous land claims.

In the project's conflict classification, these overlaps are considered "structural conflicts", since they fall within the responsibility of either the national or regional government and are not necessarily visible on the ground – until they slow down or prevent land titling. At the same time, there are diverse "local conflicts", be they in or between native communities, or with their usually more powerful nonindigenous neighbours (squatters, migrants or villages), which sometimes escalate and even become violent. Comparisons with other countries in the Global Project, supported by studies conducted by Center for International Forestry Research CIFOR (Monterroso and Larson, 2018), show that while the diversity and frequency of conflicts during the titling of indigenous territories in Peru are high, there is a legal and institutional vacuum with regard to conflict prevention and management in the land sector which for a long time hardly received any government attention.

Working on the structural conflicts requires intensive policy advisory processes. For this reason, *ProTierras Comunales* at the national level collaborates with the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, especially with the unit supervising land titling. At the regional level, the project cooperates with the Regional Directorates of Agriculture in the Amazonian regions of Ucayali and San Martín which are in charge of implementing the demarcation and titling of native communities.

At both levels, *ProTierras Comunales* works together with indigenous organisations as strategic partners,



supporting their role as political actors and working towards their active involvement in all relevant decisions and processes. While there has been some progress with regard to solving the overlaps between production forests and native communities, protected areas and timber concessions still constitute serious obstacles to the titling of native communities.

### ***From conflict to peaceful and sustainable solutions***

#### **Course on conflict management**

The course on conflict management focused on preventing and finding solutions to local conflicts, especially those within and between native communities. Therefore, the participants were female and male indigenous leaders belonging to the Kichwa and Shawi indigenous peoples delegated by 5 of the 8 indigenous federations in San Martín with the highest incidence of conflicts in ongoing land titling processes. Despite a participatory selection process according to jointly established criteria, some of participants had difficulties in reading and writing and/or fluency in the Spanish language, which demanded challenging methodological adaptations.



#### **Key message**

***The resolution of conflicts involving indigenous communities requires legal empowerment, changes in attitudes and communication skills***

The course, offered in the second half of 2018, had three modules (each lasted 3-4 days, with a total of 80 teaching hours):

1. Conflict, interculturality and communication;
2. Legislation and the relationships between the State and indigenous peoples; cartography;
3. Conflict analysis and management.



### **Communication skills**

Fostering relevant knowledge and abilities, reflection on their own conduct and the ability to change attitudes were the main goals of this capacity development process. Strengthening communication skills was a thread throughout the three modules, especially in case of women, some of whom needed to overcome their fear to speak in public. Listening actively to the others, reframing what the others say and understanding their interests and needs were important instruments. Role playing “to put oneself in the others’ shoes” was a challenge but also a positive learning experience for the participants.



### **Legal framework and participatory mapping**

Equally important was to get to know the legal framework, learn where to place complaints and how to get relevant information. Participatory mapping and a practical session on the use of GPS were instrumental to map community territories and their boundaries.



### **Analysing and addressing existing conflicts**

All these were steps to come to a better understanding of land conflicts and their possible solutions and reach the core topic of the course: conflict analysis and management. The last module worked specifically on conflicts that currently exist in the participants’ communities. The cases were analysed with tools like participatory mapping and actor analysis and addressed through mediation,

negotiation and some elements of indigenous justice, i.e. legal concepts existing among the two indigenous peoples.

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## ***Cross-sectoral approach: Land, culture, gender and conflict transformation***

The project is currently analysing its training experiences with indigenous peoples and communities which pose specific challenges not only with regard to the logistical issues, but also because of tensions between the two important principles of cultural and gender sensitivity: male indigenous leaders in San Martín often still argue that supporting indigenous women’s rights and interests is against indigenous culture or can divide and weaken its organisations (see also Larson et al., 2019). They give a lot of reasons why women will not or cannot participate in organisational and land titling processes, starting from obligations at home and with the family, or the travelling costs which women allegedly would not be able to afford. Indigenous men also argue that it would be too hard for women to walk in mountainous terrain during land titling processes – arguments that indigenous women increasingly reject. The course also attempted to involve people of different generations. The Shawi included several young people while the majority of the Kichwa participants were mature adults. Overall, the course contributed to strengthening the role of women and young people.

## ***Success factors and limitations***

There is still a need for a better understanding of and support for learning processes of indigenous adults. The facilitators used examples from indigenous daily experiences and were sensitive to cultural differences among the participants. The challenge was to understand and adjust to these different ways of learning, in view of the course objectives and several rather complicated topics that needed to be covered in the syllabus (laws, institutions, conflict management concepts and methods etc.).

Role-playing proved to be a promising instrument, especially when indigenous participants had to step into the role of non-indigenous actors or other opponents. Also, participatory exercises and visual instruments like time lines, sketch maps and conflict mapping could be



## **Success factors contributing to conflict prevention**

- **Working on real conflicts and based on indigenous experience**
- **Role-plays as a useful tool in training: learning to put oneself in an adversary's shoes**
- **Focus on attitudes and communication skills, starting from the ability to listen**
- **Integration of elements of indigenous justice**

adapted for the course and were useful tools. Nevertheless, the project team recognizes that in the endeavour to strengthen indigenous peoples' capacities there is still a lot to be learned and improved.

### **Perspectives of expansion and replicability**

The course was a first and important experience in which male and female indigenous leaders learned how to conduct a constructive dialogue, act more strategically and use simple tools to analyse, prevent and manage conflicts or "impasses", as they prefer to call them. Between the two groups, 36 participants, among them 15 women, finished the course. The trainees will be "multipliers" and pass on what they learned in their own cultural terms to their communities, contributing to the search for peaceful solutions to local conflicts as a precondition to increase tenure security. ProTierras Comunales will accompany them in this process.

From 2019 onwards, ProTierras Comunales will also work with – male and female – regional government officials to deepen their knowledge about indigenous peoples

and relevant legislation and to increase their skills in intercultural communication and conflict management. This will be a contribution to fill the institutional vacuum mentioned above, which slows down the solution of structural conflicts and the serious local conflicts between native communities and non-indigenous actors. In this context, government officials should facilitate rights-based, peaceful and equitable solutions that contribute to indigenous land tenure security. But to be able to do so, they will also have to learn to listen to all sides.

### **References and further reading**

- Larson, Anne M. et al., 2019: Gender and the formalization of native communities in the Peruvian Amazon. Bogor: CIFOR Info Brief No. 238.
- Monterroso, Iliana and Anne M. Larson, 2018: Progress in formalizing "native community" rights in the Peruvian Amazon (2014-2018). Bogor: CIFOR Info Brief No. 23.
- ProTierras Comunales: Regional conflict assessments and other publications [<https://cooperacionalemana.pe/Biblioteca/index/0/12>]

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