



A QUIET REVOLUTION

Land Justice for Miskito Indigenous Peoples in Honduras

This case study tells the story of the Miskito Indigenous people's struggle in Honduras to regain land taken from them during the colonial period which has benefitted around 90,000 people. The eventual restoration and legal protection of their rights to ancestral land and to self-governance has righted a historical injustice and provided them with more secure access to land. It was achieved in a country where Indigenous rights had been long ignored and violated in the face of violence and opposition from a range of vested interests. Land titling was scaled and accelerated in recent years due to effective influencing and leveraging of national and international laws combined with community mobilisation. The case study shows how dogged pursuit of justice can eventually bear fruit. It also provides an example of how land reforms can be peacefully negotiated between Indigenous people and the government.

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Cover photo: Panoramic view of the Patuca River, municipality of Wampusirpi, department of Gracias a Dios, Indigenous territorial council of Bakinasta, cultural zone of the RHBRP. © Marcio Martínez

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Indigenous Miskito communities in the eastern region of Honduras, called 'La Mosquitia', have fought to obtain legal recognition and the titles of their land for hundreds of years. Their historic rights to traditional land and self-governance, along with Indigenous peoples, are enshrined in international conventions. They also have a special bond with the land¹ and interdependent relationship between their culture, subsistence and biological diversity.

Gracias a Dios is one of three departments (territories) within La Mosquitia which belongs to the Miskito. The territories were conquered by the British Empire during the 17th and 18th century, who in turn gave them to the Honduran Government when they left in 1859, with the promise, enshrined in the Cruz-Wyke treaty, that they must be 'returned' to their original owners, the Miskito (El Heraldo, 2014). The term 'return' meant giving the Miskito ownership, governance and a meaningful say over decisions affecting their territories. Yet the Miskito people have been denied full ownership and use of their own land for more than 150 years and have suffered exploitation, invasion from *ladino* groups², illegal occupation, and the government favouring colonization projects and land-grabbing of 'open lands'³ (Herlihy and Leake, 1992).

The MASTA is an association that represents the Miskito and stands for 'Mosquitia Asla Takanka' which means 'Unity of the Mosquitia'. MASTA was established in 1976 with the aim of helping Miskito obtain the right to and collective governance of their land. Before 2012, 496 individual titles were granted in favour of the Miskito people, representing around 21% of La Mosquitia (Forest Trends, 2015). After MASTA intervened, the scale of titling accelerated. In only three years, **from 2012 to 2015, 11 community titles were granted, representing 79% of the Mosquitia territory (Forest Trends, 2015)**. In the region, 17,500 families have benefited from this intercommunity land titling.

MASTA also became the first Indigenous organization in Central America to develop its own Biocultural Protocol as a mechanism to defend the collective right of the Miskitos to free, prior consultation and informed consent on proposed development projects in their territories. This in turn set a powerful precedent for other Indigenous communities.

Key insights

This case study is notable in that MASTA achieved land titling and self-governance in a country where Indigenous rights were long ignored and violated and where there is violence and opposition from a range of vested interests. It provides an example of how land reforms can be peacefully negotiated between native people and the government.

The Honduran government had been particularly slow and negligent in the recognition of titles for the Miskito, especially considering that its

neighbour Nicaragua began granting legal titles for the Miskito in 1905 (Elías, 2017) but in this latest stage proved willing at long last to fulfil a historic promise.

The following factors helped the Miskito in Honduras finally correct this historic injustice and win the right to their land at scale:

- Peaceful and effective leadership and strategy: This included peaceful social mobilization, skilful negotiation, communications, unique institutional alliances, participatory mapping and a shift from individual to collective titling, although the process has not been without tensions and challenges.
- The successful harnessing of international laws and allies to persuade and pressure the Honduran government to protect rights: In obtaining the first legal title, MASTA made use of all the national and international legal tools available to them. This included International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal people, which the government had previously signed; the Wyke-Cruz⁴ treaty; the Honduran Constitution; and the Agrarian Reform, Modernization, Property and Forestry laws (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019). It also enlisted the support of the World Bank to pressure the Honduran government to implement land administration systems such as the Property Law and Land Administration Program I and II (PATH)⁵ and legalize the territoriality of the Garifuna and Miskito communities (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019).
- Practical support and legitimization from key allies: Including support from the Honduras-based international non-government organization (INGO) the Agency for the Development of La Mosquitia (MOPAWI), which specializes in land rights.
- A long struggle: The Miskito had been struggling for restoration of their land rights for hundreds of years. Between 1994 and 1998, leaders from different Indigenous groups organized mass demonstrations in the capital, Tegucigalpa, during the so-called 'Black and Indigenous peregrinations'. The leaders demanded that the Honduran government ratify ILO Convention 169 and create Indigenous municipalities in the Mosquitia region, the municipalities of Ramón Villeda Morales, Ahuas. Juan Francisco Bulnes and Wampusirpi. The ratification of this Convention was fundamental in obtaining the agreement of the government in 2012 to grant titles and self-governance for the Miskito people.

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

THE CHALLENGE

The Gracias a Dios part of La Mosquitia is one of the poorest regions of Honduras. The Indigenous Miskito communities in this eastern region had fought to obtain the legal titling of their land for hundreds of years. La Mosquitia extends through the border with Nicaragua, covers 1.6 million hectares and is the largest virgin tropical forest in Central America (Programa Adaptación al Cambio Climático en el Sector Forestal, 2020). In 2015 it was home to more than 94,450 people and 305 communities – mostly Miskito but also Pech, Tawahkas and Mestizo groups – living in six municipalities (INE, 2013; Elías, n.d.; Fondo Indígena, 2014).

The territories within La Mosquitia were conquered by the British Empire during the 17th and 18th centuries (Fondo Indígena, 2014) and were given to the Honduran Government with the promise they would return them to their original owners, the Miskito (El Herald, 2014). However, the government withheld the restoration of ownership to the Miskito and divided the territory into three regions. Two of them, Olancho and Colon were privatized for third actors, leaving only Gracias a Dios for the Indigenous communities.

Indigenous communities' rights to land, to self-governance and to choose their own path to development are fundamental collective rights enshrined in different legal bodies, including the Indigenous and Tribal People's Convention (No.169) of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). They are also fundamental to the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples (Forest Trends, 2015). The Miskito also have a special bond with their land;⁶ there is an interdependent relationship between Indigenous culture, subsistence and biological diversity, making them 'protectors of the earth'.⁷ Thus, threats to protected areas or ecological systems increases poverty and socio-environmental unrest for the Indigenous Miskito living in La Mosquitia (Elías, 2017).

Historically, the Miskito have lacked control over most of their land and have been subjected to exploitation, invasion from *ladino* groups, illegal occupation, and the government favouring colonization projects and land-grabbing of 'open lands'. The conflicts that arose resulted in La Mosquitia being the 'most aggressive agricultural frontier' in the Latin American continent (Herlihy and Leake, 1992). The associated mismanagement of this land has had disastrous consequences for the quality of life of the Indigenous peoples who live there and depend on the land to survive (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019).

The Miskito's struggle for land justice

Miskito communities in Honduras fought to obtain the legal titles of their land in an eastern region of Honduras, called 'La Mosquitia for hundreds of years. Despite having historical rights to their land, the Miskito people were not able to make significant progress on their claim of legal titling until 2012. The Miskito claimed that this was due to discrimination, the lack of political will and the interests of the government's agenda, which changed with shifts in power and often impeded land titling (Alvarez et al., 2017).

MASTA was founded in 1976 by a group of Miskito students and professionals in Tegucigalpa with the mission of *'being the maximum authority of territorial political representation, to revendicate, defend the individual, collective and ancestral rights and the identity of the Miskito. To search for the strengthening of the autonomy and governance of the Indigenous territory, revitalizing the culture and guaranteeing the legalization, administration and collective control of their land, territory and natural resources'* (Fondo Indígena, 2014).⁸

Many of MASTA's members had previously participated in some kind of social organization, like federations or militant groups, during their studies so were experienced in social mobilization. Importantly, MASTA was supported in its work by the Agency for the Development of La Mosquitia (MOPAWI). MOPAWI was founded by a Honduran-based international humanitarian organization to support with different needs of the Miskito people in Honduras. and in 1987 it started a Land Legalization Program to protect the Miskito's land from invasion. As a first step, MASTA and MOPAWI issued a joint public declaration for the 'legalization of land tenure in favour of the Indigenous peoples of La Mosquitia' in 1988. Following this, both organizations worked together and achieved various important milestones in the titling process. A key turning point occurred when MOPAWI decided to stop pursuing individual titling and to start pursuing collective titling instead, due to it becoming obvious that the territory was interconnected and indivisible. This led to the participatory mapping processes being carried out in 1992, the development of subsistence zones maps, the initial division of the territory into federations⁹ and the eventual designation of MASTA as the representative body for the territory.

Another key chain of events was the creation of other alliances of Indigenous peoples and their subsequent incorporation into MASTA, including the Land Vigilance Committee (CVT) and the Federation of Indigenous and Native Peoples of the Rio Segovia Zone (FINZMOS). In order to create a united front in negotiations with the government and resist the division of Miskito territory, MASTA and MOPAWI convinced the new federations to accept MASTA as the overarching, representative decision-making body for the territory and the Miskito.¹⁰ MOPAWI's support and previous experience¹¹ helped MASTA in this role (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019).

Following increased awareness of their territory and the natural resources within their land gained from participatory land mapping in

1992 (see below), the Miskito started working on the political organization of the territories. With government support, the Miskito divided Gracias a Dios into six municipalities in their first attempt at territorial governance (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019). At the same time, MASTA was working to establish an effective governance system. It decided to combine customary land use practices with traditional Honduran legal norms to create a new tenure category called territorial councils (CTs). By the time the titling was completed (2016), it had established and strengthened 12 CTs to govern the newly titled land. Each CT has a general assembly, directive council, executive committee, council of elders and a transparency committee (Tappan and Herlihy, 2018).

In the early 2000s, MASTA focused on establishing their credibility and embarked on a new participatory mapping of La Mosquitia in 2003, financed by the World Bank. This mapping is considered to have been the most effective at including the Miskito as partners, not as 'assistants' (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019). The Miskito chose a group of local investigators, elected on their merits or leadership qualities, to be trained on the tools of mapping. These leaders were then introduced to various skills, from drawing cognitive sketch maps of the land and water sources to the use of land use questionnaires and recording resource use sites by name (Tappan and Herlihy, 2018). The training took time and relied on external stakeholders providing geographers and resources. The new map produced had little to contribute in cartographic terms, but, since it was financed by an international organization, MASTA was able to use it to influence the ongoing structural reforms of property rights. (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019).

POVERTY IMPACTS

MASTA and its work towards the legalization of the Miskito's land began in 1987 when they received their legal charter and put their first petition to the Honduran government asking for the Miskito territorial rights to be respected (Tappan and Herlihy, 2018).

In 1992, MASTA engaged in the first participatory research mapping of the Mosquitia region and produced subsistence zones maps (Galeana, 2017). In August 2012, the government issued the first intercommunity title to CT Katainasta, covering 553 km², 50 communities and 7,000 residents (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019). A second title, covering another 520km² was issued to CT Auhya Yari.

By 2016, the government had completed the intercommunity land titling for all of La Mosquitia, directly benefiting 17,500 families (Tappan and Herlihy, 2018). The restoration of Indigenous land via land titling and establishment of self-governance has corrected a historic injustice and provided more secure access to land for the Miskito. It also offers the potential for improved well-being, food security and protection of biodiversity. Some consider that, since the titling has been fulfilled, it is no longer necessary for MASTA to work on this specific issue (Equator Initiative, 2019). Nevertheless, there is still work to do with regard to the

effective governance of and protection of the titled land, which is still a challenge for MASTA and the Miskito.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

Land titling

The new titling of Miskito land is a vital element in enabling the Miskitos to realise their right to govern under their own rules and beliefs. It is also an important factor protecting them against eviction (UNHCR, 2017). However, land titling and governance on their own are not sufficient to protect against eviction. Protecting against it also requires both government enforcement and community mobilization.

Knowledge empowerment and community mobilization

Likewise, issuing and receiving a land title is insufficient without proper knowledge of the land and the Miskito's capacity to defend it and manage it. Building this knowledge took time, effort and commitment, as communities were involved in the development and publication of the two participatory mappings of the land. The benefits of mapping go beyond its cartographic use. For example, mapping gave the Miskito the tools to transform their spatial knowledge into consensual maps (Herlihy and Knapp in Tappan and Herlihy, 2018), and it strengthened their sense of ownership and belonging and their organization skills. It also challenged power dynamics between the State and Indigenous peoples. States use mapping practices to impose their own idea of order in a territory. Thus, a 'counter-mapping' activity also helps Indigenous organizations to acknowledge their own forms of territoriality, based on their unique perspective (Galeana, 2017).

The first participatory mapping was in 1992 and the second one in 2003. They provided cartographic information to sustain the legalization of Miskito land (Tappan and Herlihy, 2018), but most importantly, they also supported the process of decolonization. By using participatory mapping, the Indigenous peoples and their knowledge were harnessed to demonstrate how the communities understood and managed their land. After the first participatory mapping, it was clear that ownership was not clear cut and territories overlap, with expanses of forest, open lagoons and rivers often shared. This mapping was deemed the first 'formative experience for Miskito leaders' and '*the first attempt to understand their community-based territoriality*' (Tappan and Herlihy, 2018).

'We had our political organization MASTA before, but until we had the maps, we didn't have tangible evidence to prove our occupancy and use of resources. The 1992 [Tierras Indígenas] map gave us a powerful tool to negotiate and defend our ownership and property rights.'

– Kelly et al., in Herlihy and Tappan, 2019.

In addition to the mapping, so far more than 50 Indigenous leaders have been trained in territorial governance to help better manage the territory (Equator Initiative, 2019).

Law enforcement

Another one of MASTA's important achievements has been to get the government to enforce the law on illegal occupation, invasion and any other activity that disrespects the earned titles of the Miskito. The organization has successfully protected artisanal fishermen, who have fishing rights on the Caribbean Sea (Equator Initiative, 2019) from industrial competition, particularly in the Miskito's Cays archipelago (still going through the titling process). This was achieved through titling of five (CTs), six coastal communities and the negotiation of protection agreements with the government. Additionally, when a group invaded the zone of Auka and started to cut the forest down, the Miskito and CT had the government expel these illegal groups, which was possible thanks to the work of MASTA (Equator Initiative, 2019).

Effective governance through prior consultation

Prior 'institutionalized management' of Miskito land and resources by the Honduran government (including the creation and administration of 'protected areas') proved to be extremely problematic for the Indigenous peoples. It forced families to leave their land and yield control over it, overlooked collective rights of the community and didn't involve any consultation with the local authorities (Elías, 2017).¹² The issue was raised by MASTA and in 2011 it demanded that management of the land had to originate from the 'cosmovision' – or world view – of the Indigenous peoples. In the same year, a peaceful demonstration in Tegucigalpa, which lasted for a month, influenced the government to respond to the demand. It also revitalized the government's efforts to grant the titles (Elías, 2017). This success inspired MASTA's subsequent work to ensure that all developments in the Miskito's territory (by private or public actors) require prior consultation. This work culminated in the development of a **Biocultural Protocol, with MASTA becoming the first Indigenous organization in Central America to have one** (Equator Initiative, 2019).

The **Biocultural Protocol** sets out clear terms and conditions for government and the private, research and non-profit sectors for engaging with Indigenous and local communities and accessing their local resources and knowledge. This includes a methodology that must be followed before the approval of any development project in La Mosquitia. The methodology has at its core the pre-approval and prior consultation rights of the Miskito community on any decision that concerns their natural resources (Equator Initiative, 2019). It was successfully used in the negotiation with the oil company British Oil and Gas (BG). BG agreed to give an annual amount of \$250,000 to finance development projects during the exploration phase of the agreed work (Equator Initiative, 2019).

CHALLENGES AND SUSTAINABILITY

The situation in La Mosquitia is still challenging, especially considering that MASTA still has a way to go to achieve true 'Indigenous governance', which requires coordination with the existing governmental institutions and the strengthening of local organization skills (Elías, 2017). This area is also attractive to different groups for many reasons. The Miskito have therefore experienced invasion by palm plantations, the presence of groups connected to illegal activities and organized crime, and the expansion of cattle farms into their territory, all of which have seriously endangered the zone. A 2017 report by UNHCR, for example, recognizes that the presence of organized crime groups within the Indigenous territory poses a significant risk to effective governance (Betancur, 2017). The presence of criminal groups has also been used to justify strong military presence in the zone, although this military presence is commonly believed to actually be to defend private economic interests from power groups (Forest Trends, 2015). As with any struggle, there have of course been, internal tensions within MASTA's membership and between MASTA and other organisations at various stages.

One of the biggest challenges to ensuring effective governance and defence of the territory is lack of enforcement. There is no specific Indigenous legislation or titling of lands or that can guarantee remedial action in case of invasion by organized crime groups or colonizers (Betancur, 2017). Also, institutions like the Instituto Nacional Agrario (INA), which are supposed to deal with land disputes lack the funding to do so.

HOW CHANGE HAPPENED

Scaling of the land titling process was both a result of intentional and spontaneous processes. The preparation process took more than three decades but laid out the path ahead and established the needed tools, skills and structures (e.g. maps, improved local organization, territorial divisions and a united body of representation. Together, these planning activities began applying pressure to enshrine collective and Indigenous rights in national legal bodies. In contrast, the consolidation and issuing of the titles, happened in four to five years, with the first title being granted in 2012 and the last one in 2016. This was the result of years of preparation but also the critical turning point that occurred with changes in leadership in both the government and MASTA. Increasing international pressure for Indigenous rights, pacific demonstrations and legal frameworks also helped accelerate scaling also played a role.

SCALING PATHWAYS AND STRATEGIES

Scaling the titling of Miskito lands was achieved both vertically and horizontally. Vertical scaling was achieved through MASTA and MOPAWI leveraging national and international laws to influence the government and achieve the legal changes they sought. Horizontal scaling occurred via the participatory mapping, ongoing empowerment and community mobilization of Miskito groups across the territory and the development of the Biocultural Protocol, which set a precedent for other Indigenous communities and international organizations.

Some of the change strategies used by MASTA and MOPAWI to achieve scale are detailed below.

Leveraging law instruments and definitions

To obtain the first legal title, MASTA made use of all available legal instruments and took advantage of some new ones (like ILO Convention 169) and the international pressure around them to force the government to act. Indeed, the first title was explicitly based on the Wyke-Cruz¹³ treaty, the Honduran Constitution, ILO Convention 169 and the Agrarian Reform, Modernization, Property and Forestry laws (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019). Regarding division of the territory, MASTA is considered successful in establishing new tenure categories in order to help gain legal title over ancestral homelands. This was done through the CTs, with their unique characteristics reflecting the Indigenous-State interaction and the fact that landownership and territoriality are constantly changing (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019). Formalizing their own conception of tenure and customary land, which was different from the one imposed by the State and independent in its way of governing, was successfully done *while including* the State, universities, and NGO actors (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019).

Civil society strengthening through participatory mapping

The first map was produced in 1992, with a second one following in 2003. Both maps showed the spatial patterns of Miskito subsistence activities, confirming that communities consistently use extensive areas of land and water for basic subsistence (Tappan and Herlihy, 2018). The second mapping accounted for some inconsistencies and changes from the one produced in 1992, however, not many significant changes were identified. All of the information was eventually converted into a Geographic Information System (GIS) and became a core reference for the titling process (Tappan and Herlihy, 2018).

Advocacy, campaigning and community mobilization

The Miskito community, led by MASTA, used non-violent collective action and activism such as demonstrations and media coverage to put pressure on the government. It enrolled the support of and worked with other government agencies, the World Bank and NGOs such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Critically, it also worked hard to engage and involve the Indigenous peoples in the process of titling (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019).

Previous mobilization

Several Indigenous leaders from different Indigenous groups organized a march to Tegucigalpa during the so-called 'Black and Indigenous peregrinations' from 1994 to 1998. The first mobilization of black and Indigenous peoples marched to Tegucigalpa in 1994 with an unprecedented number of protesters and delivered a list of demands, including the ratification of ILO Convention 169 (Lara, 2002). These mobilizations, combined with the territorial mapping, contributed to the State ratifying ILO Convention 169 and creating Indigenous municipalities (e.g. in the Mosquitia zone the municipalities of Ramón Villeda Morales, Juan Francisco Blunes, Ahuas and Wampusirpi). The Indigenous leaders also raised the matter of irresponsible exploitation and were able to close some sawmills and push for the creation of protected areas (Portal Territorio Indígena y Gobernanza, 2020).

CONTEXTUAL DRIVERS AND CONSTRAINTS

The struggle to reclaim rightful ownership of land in La Mosquitia had been going on for hundreds of years. A combination of different factors facilitated the scaling of the initiative pursued by MASTA. One of them was the combination of effective leadership within MASTA and a sympathetic head of government. On one side, the fresh leadership of Norvin Goff as president of MASTA was rejuvenating and pivotal for the organization. Goff was a university-educated young man who incorporated community-based approaches that consolidated collaboration among the CTs. With fresh enthusiasm, MASTA engaged in lobbying efforts to develop the proposal of 'collective territoriality'. On the other side, the president of Honduras at the time, Porfirio Lobo Sosa (2012–2014), was surprisingly keen to support the initiative (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019). The president's political will was fundamental to facilitate the process.

Another important factor was the existence of legal conventions that protect the rights of Indigenous peoples. ILO Convention 169, UNDRIP, the World Conservation Congress of the IUCN and the World Parks

Congress, for example, all enshrine Indigenous communities' rights to land and self-governance (Elías, 2017).

Other allies were also fundamental in supporting the land titling. The role of the World Bank in helping address Indigenous titling in recent years, not only for Honduras but for other countries in Latin and Central America, has been recognized as 'fundamental' by some academics and third party actors (Offen, 2009). The World Bank supports Indigenous peoples with funds and public support as part of a new discourse of 'ethno-development', which began in the early 2000s (Offen, 2009). Since 2004 to 2010, it had been working on land administration reformation with the Honduran Government, and the approval of Property Law was a result of this work.¹⁴ Furthermore, in 2004 the Land Administration Program (PATH) was also approved, having been coordinated by consultants who acted as mediators between the World Bank and the Honduran government. The legalization of Garifuna and Miskito communities was included as part of this work (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019). In 2011, the IUCN developed complementary projects and began supporting the titling lobbying process (IUCN, n.d.).

Other national institutions such as the Honduran Property Institute and the Ministry of Environment also contributed in one way or another to protecting the territory and initiative from the interference of third actors, many of whom tried to insist on individual titling. MASTA, however, knew that they had to obtain intercommunity titles due to the nature of the Miskito's subsistence and overlapping ownership. The INA supported this view, as it determined that the land was '*legally inalienable, imprescriptible, indefeasible and indivisible*' (INA in Herlihy and Tappan, 2019). When the process showed that some of this land belonged to a protected area 'Biósfera del Río Plátano' (BRP) but some didn't (which would have meant a change of jurisdiction and delays in the process). The Congress issued the 36-2013 Decree which allowed the inclusion of these lands in the reserve, facilitating the process and allowing them to be collectively titled with the others inside BRP (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019).

TIMELINE

1987: MASTA's work towards the legalization of the land begins with their first petition to the Honduran government for Miskito territorial rights. Partnership with MOPAWI allows MASTA to be enlisted as an ally in the request to start a Land Legalization Program. As only three titles are obtained, the focus changes from individual titling to inter-community titling.

1992: The first mapping and participatory research activities are conducted. The subsistence zones maps that result from this constitute the beginning of Miskito community-based territoriality and are an important reference for the titling process.

1994–1998: Mobilizations and demonstrations put pressure on the government. Several Indigenous leaders take part in the so-called 'black and Indigenous peregrinations'. Under public pressure, the Honduran Government signs ILO Convention 169.

1995–1996: In 1995, MASTA proposed its first land legalization model to the INA, and by 1996 they had established seven federations. In 1996, the territory of La Mosquitia is divided into six municipalities; however, this division did not reflect fundamental issues like Indigenous settlement and land use patterns.

1998–2011: Based on the initial seven CT, twelve other CTs are organized and established in Gracias a Dios, making sure the communities in each CT share historic, cultural and logistical patterns of land and resource use.

2011: IUCN joins the cause.

2012: The first intercommunity title was issued to CT Katainasta by INA.

2012–2016: 17,500 families been benefited from the intercommunity land titling.

Funding

For the past eight years, the Ford Foundation has supported MASTA, as has the International Cocoa Organization and the Consejo Indígena de Centro America. However, this support is not permanent and much of it is tied to the implementation of specific projects, rather than core funding (Equator Initiative, 2019).

ANNEX: CASE AT A GLANCE

Case study name	<i>A Quiet Revolution: Land Justice for Miskito Indigenous Peoples in Honduras</i>
Key organizations	Mosquitia Asla Takanka (MASTA), an Indigenous association The Agency for the Development of La Mosquitia (MOPAWI), an international humanitarian not-for-profit organization
Geographical location	Department (territory) of Gracias a Dios, -La Mosquitia region, Honduras. It is one of the poorest regions of Honduras, with the majority of the population being Miskito Indigenous people who survive on agriculture and fishery.
Geographical indicators	Honduras: Income: a lower middle-income economy with 53% of people living in poverty and 17.2% of people living in extreme poverty, the second highest rate in Latin America after Haiti (World Bank, 2019; World Bank, 2020b). Inequality: high levels of inequality with a Palma ratio of 2.87 in 2018 (UNU-WIDER, 2019) Human Development Index: ranked 132 nd out of 189 countries in the UN HDI (UNDP, 2019) Gender gap: 58 th out of 153 countries (WEF, 2020) Civic space: rated as 'repressed' (CIVICUS, 2020) Fragility: over 41 homicides per 10,000 inhabitants in 2019 and an elevated fragility warning (Fund for Peace, 2019) Climate risk: highly vulnerable, ranked 42 nd out of 181 countries for 1999–2018 (Eckstein et al., 2020). Ecological threat: Low exposure, ETR count:1 (Ecological Threat Register, 2020).
Time period	The main changes occurred between 2012–2016, although the Miskito's struggle goes back hundreds of years
Systemic challenge	Economic inequality
Type(s) of poverty reduction	Righting of historical injustice: the restoration and legal protection of Indigenous people's historic rights to ancestral land, providing the potential for improved well-being, food security and biodiversity protection. More secure access to land

	Self-governance: MASTA, an Indigenous association, has become the recognized representative governing body for the territory.
Scale of poverty reduction	17,500 families and 90,000 Miskito inhabitants securing land titles.
Structural Changes	Collective land titling Empowerment and community mobilization Strengthened enforcement of land titles Legal requirement to have free, prior and informed consent for development projects in Miskito territory
Pathways to scale	Vertical via a peaceful long struggle to influence and leverage national and international laws to achieve self-governance. Horizontally via (a) community mobilization and (b) setting a precedent for other Indigenous communities through the Biocultural Protocol, which requires prior consultation with Indigenous communities on any decision pertaining to their land.
Types and quality of evidence	There is lengthy, high-quality evidence such as academic papers, publications from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Equator Initiative and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and newspapers about the titling process. There is little evidence of the impact of legal titling on livelihoods, income or well-being or longitudinal reports about significant changes before and after the titling.

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NOTES

- 1 The bond between the Miskito and the Yapti Tasba or 'mother earth' is of historic importance. The Miskito are protectors of the land and this mission defines their identity (Testimony of a Miskito elder, transcribed by Miguel Gonzales for the newspaper 'Confidencial', 2015).
- 2 Ladino is the name used for the mestizo ethnic groups in Honduras.
- 3 Open land refers to the territories where there is no human settlement or infrastructure and with relatively less dense vegetation.
- 4 The Wyke-Cruz treaty (1859) was signed between the British Crown and Honduras, and in it the Mosquitia region and Bay Islands were ceded to Honduras. It protects the rights of the Miskito: 'they shall not be disturbed in the possession of any lands or other property which they may hold or occupy' (Herlihy and Tappan, 2018; New York Times, 2013).
- 5 The PATH II was particularly helpful in demarcating the land (The World Bank, 2019).
- 6 The bond between the Miskito and the Yapti Tasba or 'mother earth' is of historic importance. The Miskito are protectors of the land and this mission defines their identity (Testimony of a Miskito elder, transcribed by Miguel Gonzales for the newspaper 'Confidencial', 2015).
- 7 The Miskito are the largest Indigenous population in Honduras and their main economic activity is based on the coast. During the dry season, from December to April, they use their land to hunt, fish and cultivate. First, fields are managed as secondary regrowth or guamiles, which are human modified and attract edible animals. A guamil belongs to the individual that clears it, and many families have cultivated plots of banana, rice, yuca in them. All these clearings are usually widely distributed, with it taking a one day walk or longer to reach them (Herlihy and Tappan, 2018).
- 8 The information quoted as 'Fondo Indígena' belongs to a formulary-type document signed and filled by the President of MASTA, Norvin Goff. This information is part of an application to Fondo Indígena in the name of MASTA.
- 9 The federations were a form of ethnic organization proposed by MOPAWI. The intention was to give each federation their own territorial jurisdiction; however, this division (that had its own mapping) was not used in the final proposals by MASTA (Tappan and Herlihy, 2018).
- 10 The CVT and FINZIMOS were both organizations created independently from MASTA. The first one relied on MASTA to negotiate with the government because they lacked their own legal inscription. The second one did not originally have any intentions of joining MASTA; however, the need to show a united front convinced them in the end (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019).
- 11 MOPAWI helped the Tawahka create their federation in 1987. However, the Tawahka differ greatly from the Miskito, they are fewer in numbers and their location more uniform.
- 12 Elías (2017) describes how some protected areas such as Biosfera del Río Plátano and Montaña de la Flor del Pueblo Tolupan faced challenges because of the lack of prior consultation with the Indigenous peoples.
- 13 The Wyke-Cruz treaty (1859) was signed between the British Crown and Honduras, and in it the Mosquitia region and Bay Islands were ceded to Honduras. It also protects the rights of the Miskito: 'they shall not be disturbed in the possession of any lands or other property which they may hold or occupy' (Herlihy and Tappan, 2018; New York Times, 2013).
- 14 The Property Law brought the functions of land registry, cadaster and mapping into a single agency, making processes easier for the Miskito (Herlihy and Tappan, 2019).



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