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## **Power Play — Not a Quest for Mutual Benefit! Creating the Conditions for Communal Forest Governance in the Brazilian Amazon, Pará**

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### **Abstract**

The paper analyses the trajectories of five tenure reform projects that aim at securing smallholders' rights to land and forest to allow for sustainable resource use by them. These rights are infringed upon by logging companies and “land thieves”. It draws on five contrasting case studies conducted in the years 2006–2008 in the federal state of Pará. In three of which smallholders successfully fought for the demarcation of their lands.

Results show that smallholders need to overcome heavy resistance by those who benefit from the status quo. Misinformation, violence, and cooptation of fellow smallholders are among the strategies employed by reform opponents. Smallholders find it difficult to call upon the state to enforce their rights, as municipal administrations are often co-operating with those actors who disrespect smallholders' rights. The presence of federal Government agencies is sporadic. To overcome this situation of “might is right”, smallholders need to form a strong local resistance and to enter alliances which allow them to take their struggle to other arenas. Globally operating environmental NGOs are crucial to achieve this. The paper emphasises that changes in power account for the success of tenure reform. The importance of “power plays” stands in stark contrast to the “quest for mutual benefit” motive highlighted by much of the literature on collective action for sustainable communal resource management. Efforts to create the conditions necessary for sustainable communal forest governance need to address the political nature of tenure reform processes and employ measures to support local civil society movements during tenure reform processes.

The paper reports on the struggles of smallholders for secure rights to land and forest. It suggests a framework that highlights the many ways power was exercised during the reform processes and highlights the challenges smallholder communities need to confront when they are striving for secure rights to land and forest.

**Keywords:** Amazon, communal forest governance, smallholders, traditional people