



Netherlands Enterprise Agency



Land governance for sustainable development

LAND-at-scale highlights & results

Photo: Mozambique Terra Firma

Introduction

A large part of the world's population depends on secure access to land for their livelihoods. Fair and just land governance helps ensure more sustainable and efficient land use. It also leads to better use of natural resources for food, housing and production. Lastly, it reduces conflicts and competing claims over land.

Improved land governance is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Especially the goals related to food and nutrition security, gender equality, economic development, climate action and peace and stability. Land governance tackles questions such as: Who has access to land and natural resources? Who makes decisions about it? And who benefits from these decisions? Addressing these questions is essential for achieving positive and lasting change.

The LAND-at-scale programme (LAS) works on sustainable land governance for all. It is financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and managed by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO). In close collaboration with embassies and other local partners, it has achieved some remarkable results over the years.

This brochure explains why land governance matters for sustainable development. It also highlights the programme's impact, showcasing case studies and valuable learnings from its implementation. These demonstrate how LAS supports trade, improves safety and stability and provides solutions for displacement.

“The LAND-at-scale programme (LAS) works on sustainable land governance for all”



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Community mapping of the reserves in Solano, Colombia.
(Liliana Merizalde Caquetá, 2022)

The importance of land governance

Fair and just land governance is essential for making a lasting impact on a country's sustainable development, more specifically on the following themes.



Food security

Smallholder farmers often lack formally recognised rights to their farmlands, especially in low and middle-income countries, even though they produce one-third of the world's food. This situation makes them vulnerable to losing their lands. So, securing land rights improves food security as it enables farmers to invest in and use land sustainably.



Gender equality

Women are often dependent on a husband, son or brother for land access. In the event of death or divorce, women often lose access to their land and with it, their food and income. Equal land rights have a positive impact on food production and the use of sustainable farming techniques. It also improves health, nutrition and women's positions in local communities.



Economic development

Land rights and access to land are crucial preconditions for a strong local business environment. They lead to increased investments in land and infrastructure, easier access to credit and loans, and more efficient use of land and labour markets. Clear land rights also reduce conflicts, lowering investment risks. In short, secure land rights help the economy grow by boosting responsible investments and entrepreneurship. It supports private sector development and trade.



The importance of land governance



Climate resilience

Climate, land use planning and management are closely connected. Because of climate change, fertile land is becoming scarce. With a growing population, this leads to more food insecurity and land conflicts. Droughts and floods force millions to move in search of better opportunities, health and food. Good land governance supports climate resilience by promoting sustainable use, climate-smart farming and developing the capacity of governmental institutions. It also helps protect forests, wildlife and carbon storage over the long term.



Stability & rule of law

Land ownership is an essential source of livelihood, a valuable economic asset and holds cultural value. Because of its importance, conflicts over land are common. These can happen within or between households, communities, private investors and state actors. Unresolved conflicts cause poverty, food insecurity, migration or even violence. Good land governance helps prevent and resolve these conflicts and ensures fair access to justice.



What is the LAND-at-scale programme?

LAND-at-scale is a land governance support programme for low and middle-income countries, managed by RVO and financed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Active in about 12 countries with a €37.5 million budget, it promotes just, inclusive and sustainable land governance for all. LAS supports large and small projects with technical, legal and socio-economic solutions at national and local levels.

Long-term engagement

Since 2019, the programme has worked closely with embassies, project partners and local stakeholders. This long-term engagement builds trust, encourages learning and adaptive programming, and strengthens project results.

Enhancing land governance through continuous learning

LAS takes a programmatic approach to land governance. This means it focuses on adding value to existing efforts in each country. The programme continuously learns from what works and what does not.

Based on these insights, we adapt and make changes where needed. The case studies in this brochure are based on experiences from 5 project countries where we used this approach.

Several ways to work on land governance

LAND-at-scale projects aim to expand successful approaches of land governance or test new methods that can be widely used. One thing is clear: There is no single way to work on land governance. Land governance is more than land administration. So, a coherent mix of strategies proves most effective. LAND-at-scale combines several strategies within countries. They include the following:

- Raising awareness
- Conflict prevention and resolution
- Inclusive land registration and administration
- Strengthening the capacity of government and non- governmental stakeholders
- Participatory land use planning
- Engaging in legal, regulatory and policy discussions about land governance



Ugandan Minister for Lands, Housing and Urban Development hands over a Certificate of Customary Ownership to a blind lady and her daughter in Butaleja district.

(UN-Habitat @ United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2023)

Collaboration at the core

RVO has an extensive network in the Netherlands and internationally. We provide funding, contracts and support knowledge exchange to organisations working on the topic of land. LAS collaborates with:



Project partners including
NGOs, CSOs, social
enterprises and United
Nations agencies



Multilateral
& bilateral partners



Knowledge institutes



Embassies



Countries

- | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Burkina Faso | 5. Egypt | 9. Palestinian Territories |
| 2. Burundi | 6. Iraq | 10. Somalia |
| 3. Chad | 7. Mali | 11. Rwanda |
| 4. Colombia | 8. Mozambique | 12. Uganda |



Case studies and results



Food security | Chad

Tenure security as the foundation of sustainable food systems

The situation

Chad has one of the highest hunger rates in the world, facing food insecurity and internal conflicts, often linked to land disputes. The outdated land registration system makes land ownership even more uncertain.

Project activities

This project focuses on improving women's access to land, promoting food security and business development opportunities. It works on land registration with communities and the government. The project promotes *champions*: Chiefs who are open to granting land-use rights to women groups, an uncommon practice. The project ensures transparency through Femmometre, a digital platform that publishes and monitors land granted to women, promoting accountability and long-term impact.

An awareness campaign on women's land rights has reached 3,000 women and 1,900 men, inspiring similar efforts in neighbouring regions by local authorities. In Mayo Kebbi-Est, the project successfully allocated 80 hectares of land to women and youth organisations.

Recognising that land rights alone cannot solve hunger, the project has organised women into groups and cooperatives. Along with collective land certificates, participants benefit from agricultural training, business support and loans for micro-projects. This approach ensures that business ideas align with the specific context and needs of women and youth, benefiting the wider community. The new Land Code is now being used through collaboration among civil society organisations, the government and local communities. Feedback and learning are used in policymaking, contributing to an inclusive process in which all groups in society are heard. Combining technical expertise with inclusive dialogue helps Chad's land registration system develop further, leading to more tenure security.

Results

So far, the project has secured more than 10,300 hectares of land for women and youth. Women groups have also increased their productivity by 40%, particularly in rice farming.



Partners

Oxfam Intermon, FAO, and Kadaster International



Campaign for women's land rights in Chad.

(Oxfam Intermon, 2023)





Gender equality | Burundi

Transforming gender relations through advocating and securing equal land rights

The situation

Women's land rights are crucial for gender equality, but women face significant cultural, legal and economic barriers to land ownership in Burundi. Traditional customs and patriarchal norms typically restrict land ownership to men, making it uncommon for women to own land, even if they can use it.

Project activities

This project promotes gender equality in land ownership through strategies such as systematic registration of land tenure in women's names on certificates, as well as conflict mediation and awareness-raising activities.



53,000
land plots
registered in
24 collines

2,300
land conflicts have
been resolved
through mediation

Training for government officials and judges on land tenure laws and how to mediate local land conflicts is also a focus. Many women expressed a strong desire to inherit family land during focus group discussions.

Results

This project has achieved significant results, registering over 53,000 land plots in 24 communities, with 65% recognising women's land rights. More than 2,300 land conflicts have been resolved through mediation, fostering peace and securing women's land tenure. Attitudes have shifted, with many now supporting women's ownership and inheritance of land. Many plots are registered in both spouses' names. One woman said, "Men can no longer make decisions alone without consulting their wives. When an owner is selling land, the buyer will only pay unless the wife and children also sign the agreement." (FGD participant, Mvugo)



Partners

ZOA, VNG International, MiPAREC
and LADEC



Measuring plots of land, with community members as witnesses in Nyanza-Lac, Burundi.

(Mark Williams Wasswa, 2023)



Economic development | Uganda

Land rights enabling investments, entrepreneurship and trade

The situation

Secure land rights are crucial for small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs as they encourage investment and growth. When people have clear rights, they can confidently develop their land and access financial support, making it easier to improve their businesses and increase production. Ensuring secure land tenure empowers farmers to boost productivity, improve living standards and contribute to national food security.

Project activities and results

The LAND-at-scale project in Uganda has provided land registration services, including systematic mapping, adjudication and dispute resolution. These services have greatly improved land tenure security for men, women and youth.

By registering 18,997 parcels of land, the project has directly benefitted 22,372 smallholder farmers, comprising 12,104 men, 10,268 women and 6,806 young people.

With legally registered land, individuals and businesses can be more confident in their property rights. This reduces the risk of disputes or land grabs. Also, secure land tenure allows landowners and entrepreneurs to use their land as collateral for loans or other forms of financing. This access to credit is crucial for starting or expanding businesses, improving trade conditions.

A woman from Butaleja shared how obtaining a land certificate has completely changed her life. After securing ownership of a piece of land through the land registration project and receiving a small loan, she was able to invest in the land. Eventually, she bought a maize mill that she also rents out to community members. This investment has provided her family with a steady income and empowered her to make her own decisions and build her own house. "I can now invite people into my own home, cook for them, and serve them using the plates I bought from my own money." - Testimony from a woman from Butaleja, Uganda, June 2024.



Partners

Global Land Tenure Tool (GLTN) /
United Nations Human Settlements
Programme (UN-Habitat)



Miss Jessika obtained a land certificate and built a business, Butaleja, Uganda.

(Cindy Zongo, 2024)

22,372
smallholder
farmers

18,997
parcels of land





Climate resilience | Colombia

Participatory land administration and land use planning for forest conservation and climate resilience

The situation

Even after the end of armed conflicts, access to land and tenure security still cause conflicts and inequalities. Inequalities. They particularly affect indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, who are the most vulnerable. These groups often struggle to protect their land, which makes it hard to improve their lives and manage natural resources. This issue is particularly prominent in Solano, a town located in the deforestation arc of the Colombian Amazon. Conserving this forest is crucial for combatting climate change. Local people are principal partners in monitoring and adapting forests to these changes.

Project activities and results

In Salano, the project works with the Koraguaje and Makaguaje indigenous people in La Teofila Arenosa Resguardo. They live in this resguardo, an area that belongs to indigenous communities. This collective form of property provides excellent security as others cannot occupy, use or own it.

Because of the project, these communities are now better able to protect their land in 2 ways. Firstly, the project used the Fit for Purpose Land Administration (FFPLA) method to map, delineate and secure 30,000 hectares of land. Secondly, the project supported the creation of a climate change adaptation plan. The plan focuses on:

- restoring damaged areas and water sources;
- strengthening cultural and spiritual traditions for better land management;
- growing traditional crops for food security;
- providing environmental education; and
- monitoring changes in the climate.

The project has supported the community in improving oil extraction from milpeso palms, leading to a 20% increase in production. Through sustainable practices and restoration efforts, these initiatives have strengthened the indigenous peoples and contributed to Amazon forest conservation against climate change.



Partners

Kadaster International, Tropenbos and ICCO Conexión



Community mapping of the reserves in Solano, Colombia.
(Liliana Merizalde Caquetá, 2022)



Stability and rule of law | Iraq

Securing land rights and resolving land conflicts for internally displaced people and returnees

The situation

Iraq has faced significant mass displacement and conflict, particularly affecting minorities like the Yazidis. Today, many displaced people and returnees struggle to prove their land ownership or usage rights after being forced from their homes. The lost or missing documents and cadastral records complicates their ability to reclaim land. This makes it harder to rebuild livelihoods in war-affected areas of northern Iraq.

Project activities and results

LAND-at-scale works to secure land rights and resolve land conflicts for internally displaced people (IDPs) and returnees in war-affected areas in Sinjar. Using the Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM), an internationally recognised method, helps Yazidi families register their proper-ties and provides legal and technical support for their return after years in camps.

Once ownership certificates are issued, the project helps families file compensation claims with the Iraqi government and offers financial resources for rebuilding their lives. This project contributes to their security and reintegration in their areas of origin.

The project collaborates with the Iraqi government to improve land rights laws and policies, aiming for a fairer land governance system through national dialogues and stakeholder meetings. It focuses on digitalising paper-based land records, which reduces tampering risk and speeds up the land registration process. This is crucial for expanding secure land registration in Sinjar and across Iraq. In a focus group discussion, the residents of Tel Uzair shared that securing housing, land and property (HLP) rights is essential for rebuilding their lives. As many still live in refugee camps, they see access to land and housing as the first step toward a new future.



Partners
UN-Habitat



Awareness raising on housing, land and property (HLP) rights in Sinjar, Iraq.

(UN-Habitat 2024)



What can LAND-at-scale offer you?



Advisory services

Are you interested in learning how to incorporate land governance into your programmes? Are you not sure of how to get started? Ask for our advice.



Knowledge management & exploration

Get in touch to explore research opportunities with us.



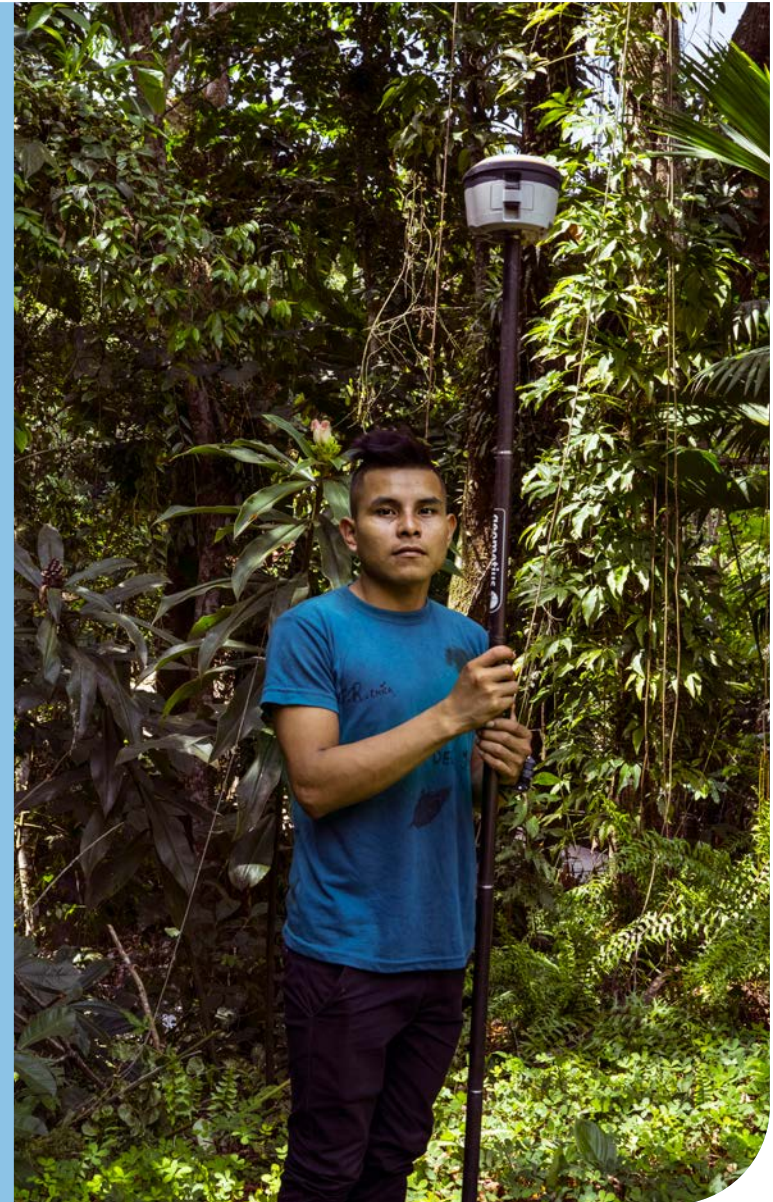
Connector and networking

Be sure to follow us on [LinkedIn](#) and connect with us.



Building partnerships

Do you have ongoing projects in related regions or topics? Let's work together.



Contact us

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We produced this publication in cooperation with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

© Netherlands Enterprise Agency | May 2025 | Publication number: RVO-078-2025/BR-INT

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