



Implementation Manual

Global Programme Responsible Land Policy

UGANDA: Self-financing Model for Customary Land Registration

Imprint



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Disclaimer	<p>The model for UGANDA: Self-financing Model for Customary Land Registration presented in this manual was designed, tested, and analysed under the Global Programme Responsible Land Policy (GPRLP) which is part of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) special initiative. The programme is implemented by GIZ. The GPRLP has country modules in Uganda, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Cameroon, Niger, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast (and has already completed modules in Peru, Laos, Benin and Paraguay). Funding for these projects is provided by the BMZ under the "Transformation of agricultural and food systems" initiative. The responsible country module in Uganda is the Programme "Responsible Land Policy in Uganda – RELAPU".</p> <p>GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.</p> <p>Bonn, July 2025</p>

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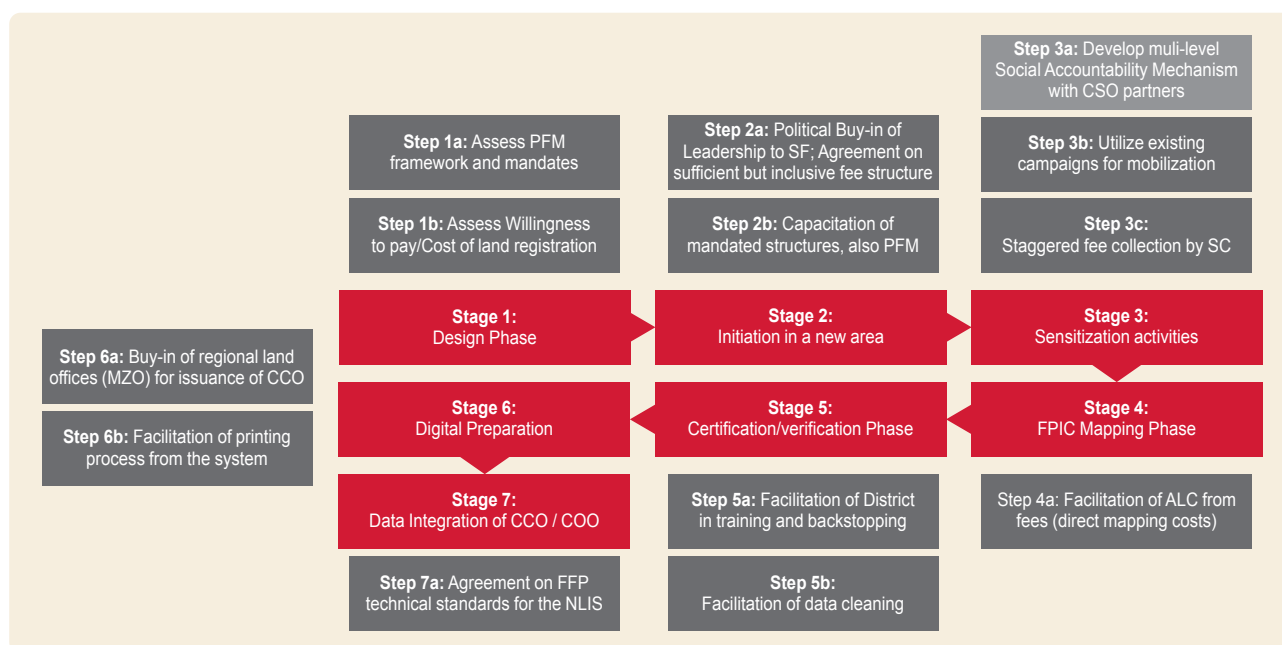
Acronyms

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
ALC	Area Land Committee
BMZ	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development)
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CCO	Certificate of Customary Ownership
CDO	Community Development Officer
CLIN	Customary Land Identification Number
CORDAID	Catholic Organization for Relief and Development Aid (Dutch)
CRISP	Cadastre register inventory saving paper
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DIPFS	District Integrity Promotion Forums
DLB	District Land Board
DP	Development Partners
DPP	District Physical Planner
DSS	District Staff surveyor
FFP	Fit For Purpose
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
GIS	Geographic Information System
GNSS	Global Navigation Satellite System
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GPRLP	Global Programme Responsible Land Policy
GPS	Global Positioning System
IRAS	Integrated Revenue Administration System
LC I	Local Council I
LIP	Land Inventory Protocol
MDA	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MLHUD	Ministry of Lands Housing and Urban Development
MZO	Ministry Zonal Office
NFA	National Forest Authority
NLIC	National Land Information Centre
NLIS	National Land Information System
MLHUD	Ministry of Lands Housing and Urban Development
NEMA	National Environment Management Authority
OIN	Occupancy Identification Number
PFM	Project Finance Management
RDC	Resident District Commissioner
RELAPU	Responsible Land Policy in Uganda
ScPPC	Sub County Physical Planning Committee
SCR	Sub County Recorder
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UgNLIS	Uganda National Land Information System

The **Responsible Land Policy in Uganda (RELAPU)**, a component of the Global Programme Responsible Land Policy (GPRLP), works to strengthen the land rights of rural smallholders, with a particular focus on women and minority groups who often face discrimination. RELAPU employs innovative and participatory approaches to register customary land, issuing Certificates of Customary Ownership (CCOs) and securing occupancy tenure rights on Mailo lands through Certificates of Ownership (COOs).

To ensure scalability through sustained land documentation for small holders in Uganda, the project has developed a **self-financing model** for customary land registration. This model relies on contributions from landowners, while leveraging existing government and community structures, with the **Subcounty Chief/Recorder (SCR)** at the core of its implementation and oversight. The self-financing model enhances local land administration, while ensuring affordable and easily accessible land registration services.

The key steps to set up the self-financing model (grey) complement the standard work flow for Customary Land Registration (red):



- ▶ **Affordable and sustainable land registration** by leveraging local resources and structures.
- ▶ **Scaling of land registration activities in the context of existing structures**
- ▶ **Empowerment** of local land services with systematic capacity development aligned to resource mobilization
- ▶ Means to **enhance social cohesion** and inclusion with fee structures sensitive to the resource capacities of vulnerable groups
- ▶ Local communities take **greater ownership** of the land registration process when actively involved in facilitating it, as opposed to a project-driven approach where they may sometimes question the intentions behind the initiative. Engaging communities directly helps build trust, transparency, and a sense of control over the process.

This model serves as a scalable solution for improving land administration in Uganda and other similar contexts, with a focus on equity, transparency, and sustainability.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

In Uganda, agriculture is a cornerstone of the economy, employing approximately 72% of the population and contributing 24.1% to GDP. However, most land remains unregistered in the Uganda National Land Information System (UgNLIS), leaving communities vulnerable to tenure insecurity, land disputes, evictions and limited economic opportunities.

Uganda operates under four parallel land tenure systems: freehold, leasehold, Mailo, and customary tenure. While freeholds and leaseholds are largely registered, customary tenure, which accounts for an estimated 80% of all land (and 90% in the Northern region), remains vastly undocumented.¹ Approximately 18 million parcels of customary land are unregistered, with only around 150,000 Certificates of Customary Ownership (CCOs) issued, many lacking standardized procedures or digital records.²

The lack of systematic first registration perpetuates tenure insecurity, impedes agricultural productivity, and hinders the empowerment of women and minority groups. Although customary tenure is recognized under the 1995 Constitution and the Land Act, it is still treated as inferior compared to titled forms of ownership, as highlighted in Uganda's National Land Policy (2013). Yet, there is a strong legal foundation for land registration, anchored in the Land Act (1998), its 2010 amendment, and the 2018 National Plan by the Ministry of Lands, Housing, and Urban Development (MLHUD), which advocates for modern Fit-For-Purpose principles to register all land and establish a nationwide land administration system.

Despite these frameworks, only about 75,000 parcels of customary land have been mapped and issued CCOs over the past decade, largely due to the estimated €500 million cost needed for countrywide registration. While development partners like the World Bank and European Union have funded projects, these initiatives address only a fraction of the issue, and pressure on customary land continues to grow.

Between 2016 and 2022, the Responsible Land Policy in Uganda (RELAPU) project, implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), piloted a self-financing model for customary land demarcation and registration in the Teso sub-region (Soroti and Katakwi districts), Kabulasoke in Gomba district, and later scaled it to the Lango sub-region in Northern Uganda. This model was designed to test the beneficiary contributory model for registering customary land at the local community level. It harnesses landowners' willingness to co-finance affordable land registration activities, using fit-for-purpose approaches and existing government and community structures to bridge funding gaps in the land sector. Key players include Subcounty Chiefs/Recorders (SCR), Area Land Committees (ALC), District Land Boards (DLB), and district land office staff, who implement and manage the registration process as mandated by law.

The model also prioritizes institutionalization by gradually transferring responsibility for land registration from project teams to mandated government institutions, thereby promoting long-term sustainability. Development partners or government agencies provide initial support through training and provisioning equipment for subcounty ALC and Recorder offices. CCO data collected through this process is ultimately integrated into the UgNLIS, enhancing tenure security and supporting national development goals.

1. UN Habitat, GLTN (2016) Fit-For-Purpose Land Administration Guiding Principles For Country Implementation, available at <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/Fit-For-Purpose%20Land%20Administration.pdf>, accessed on 7/11/2023.

2. These figures refer to a baseline assessment done by the Worldbank and estimates by UNHABITAT in 2022 for the data integration into the NLIS. However, these figures have not been officially released by the MLHUD

This document outlines key prerequisites for the implementation of the self-financing model based on the GIZ Responsible Land Policy in Uganda (RELAPU) project. It is based on the practical experiences implemented in Bululu Subcounty, Kalaki District as well as in the districts of Dokolo (Okwongodul & Adok sub counties), Amolatar (Acii & Aputi sub counties), Soroti (Arapai sub county) and Kapelebyong (Okungur sub county), Gulu District (Paicho Sub County), Pader District (Lunyiri Sub County) and Gomba District (Kabulasoke Sub County). This document includes orientation and annexes for stakeholders such as district land boards, recorder offices, and others involved in customary land registration. By promoting a community-driven approach, the self-financing model fosters accountability, affordability, and institutional ownership of land registration processes, paving the way for a more inclusive and secure land tenure system in Uganda.

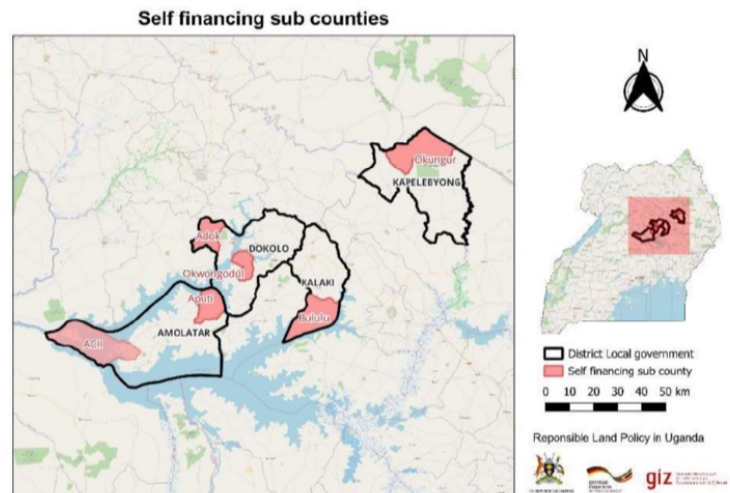


Figure 1: Map of self-financing pilot areas in Northern Uganda

The **primary target audience** for the Self-Financing Implementation Manual includes local government officials such as district chairpersons, chief administrative officers, senior assistant chief administrative officers, and technical staff involved in land management as well as the Area Land Committees. It also encompasses members of district land boards, the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, and other government agencies responsible for land administration.

The **secondary target audience** includes civil society organizations working on land rights and advocacy, private sector companies engaged in land acquisition and management, academic and research institutions involved in land-related studies, and community leaders such as village chairpersons, clan leaders, and other local authorities involved in land governance.

How to use the Self-Financing Implementation Manual

This self-financing implementation manual in customary land registration in Uganda and private mailo land is a practical guide for implementing land registration in context where landowners pay fees to co-finance the registration of their private mailo and customary land. This manual should be used in cross reference to the land policies, laws and regulations in Uganda. The lessons documented here should be contextualised to suit specific areas of implementation. This manual is designed to enhance self-motivated efforts of customary landowners to willingly register their customary and private mailo land rights through the services of mandated, decentralised, accountable land institutional structures for sustained and effective administration and management of land.

The Global Programme Responsible Land Policy (GPRLP) and Responsible Land Policy in Uganda (RELAPU)

The Global Programme Responsible Land Policy (GPRLP) is a component of the Special Initiative "Transformation of Agricultural and Food Systems," funded by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). GPRLP operates in Laos, Peru, Paraguay, Benin, Uganda, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, and Cameroon.

In Uganda, the GPRLP is implemented through the Responsible Land Policy in Uganda (RELAPU) project, led by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and funded by BMZ. The project is currently active in the districts of Dokolo and Amolatar in the Lango region, as well as in Butambala, Gomba, Kassanda, Kiboga, Mityana and Mubende in Central Uganda with EU co-financing under the Improvement of Land Governance in Uganda (ILGU) project component. RELAPU aims to improve land access for specific population groups, particularly women and marginalized communities in North, Eastern and Central Uganda, as a critical step toward reducing poverty and hunger in rural areas.

RELAPU's comprehensive approach to enhancing land rights and governance focuses on institutional improvement, which includes strengthening frameworks and processes to protect land rights. Key activities include a systematic land inventory to establish the basis for issuing land ownership and land use certificates. Additionally, RELAPU seeks to empower civil society in advocating for responsible land policies, enhance its capacity to inform the public, and guide Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes. The project promotes dialogue with the government and private sector and strengthens partnerships with civil society as a key implementing partner. Finally, RELAPU engages agricultural investors to raise awareness on responsible land policy.

2 Conceptual Approach

The self-financing pilot in Bululu was designed to test the **Beneficiary Contributory Model** for registering customary and private mailo land at the local community level. It capitalized on the interest and willingness of many landholders to contribute to registration costs, driven by a growing awareness of the benefits of secure land rights. Local populations increasingly recognize the value of “secured access to land,” which has created a strong demand for the initiative.

The pilot aimed to combine **Fit-for-Purpose principles** with a contributory model that mobilizes and transparently manages fee contributions by landowners to facilitate the steps required for registering customary and mailo land and obtaining a Certificate of Customary Ownership (CCO) and Certificates of Occupancy (COOs) respectively. On one hand, the approach aimed to strengthen the capacity of local land authorities to issue CCOs and COOs effectively. On the other hand, it sought to enhance their understanding of harmonized and socially accountable public financial management for decentralized land services. By engaging in discussions about fee structures, the model guided local authorities to better understand the costs associated with land demarcation and the subsequent production of certificates.

Under the self-financing model, the Senior Land Management Officer (SLMO) is critical for overseeing the process at the district level, guiding recorders and stakeholders at the sub-county level to ensure that land registration complies with legislation. The SLMO also leads a team of Master trainers to build the capacity of various stakeholders across implementation areas within the district.

To set up an institutionalized self-financing model for customary land registration, local authorities should follow a seven-stages approach from the onset of the Programme with the following seven key steps:

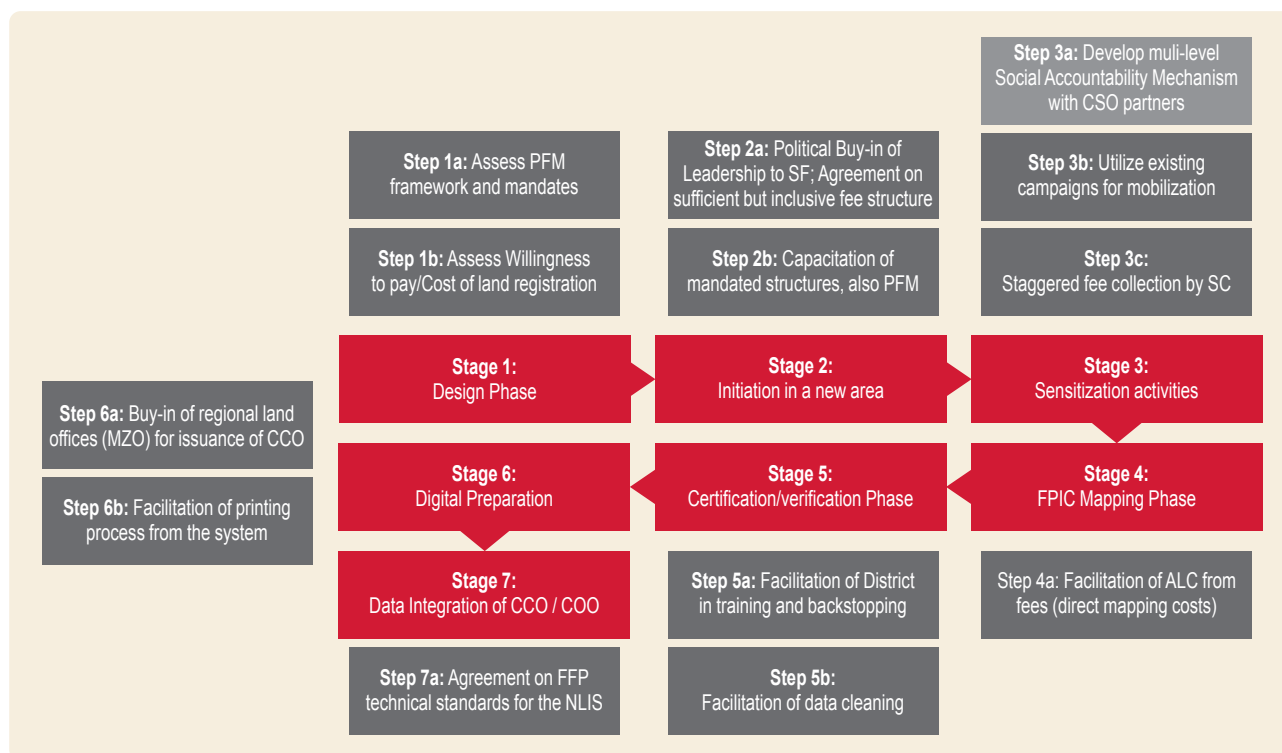
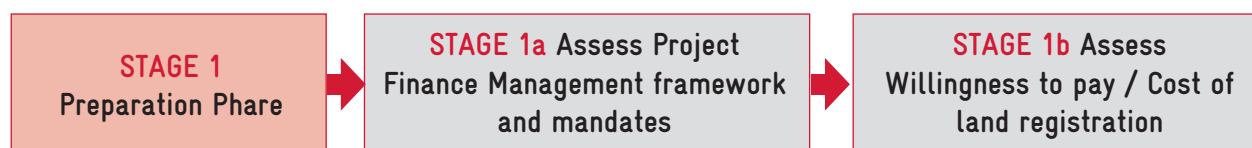


Figure 2 : Figure illustrating the different steps of the self-financing model for land registration

Stage 1: Assessment of partner interest



Beneficiary contributions toward securing their land rights require the active buy-in of various stakeholders involved in the processes necessary to strengthen customary land rights. The initial steps entail a review of the actors' roles and responsibilities to ensure that they are sufficiently engaged and in support of the activities that follow.

Step 1a: Assess Project Finance Management framework and mandates

Table 1 shows the roles of different stakeholders related to self-financing. Government entities bear specific institutional mandates in line with the local government act, land act, and other policy and legal frameworks. Engagement of the District Local Authorities at District and subcounty level is paramount to ensure that the political and technical leadership embrace and institutionalise the approach.

Table 1: Role of different stakeholders

Stakeholder category	Stakeholder(s)	Roles
Government	Ministry of Lands Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD), Ministry Zonal Office (MZO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy formulation in relation to land especially on self-financing fees setting, collection and management. Quality assurance and provision of orthophotos by Ministry of lands. Facilitating digital printing of CCOs Training of trainers and the district/regional levels Monitoring and oversight
	District and sub county councils, District land Board, District land office, Sub County offices and ALCs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting and approval of self-financing fees Training of sub county leaders Approval and processing of land documents Field land mapping by ALCs
Civil Society	Civil society organisations (CSO), Faith Based Organizations, Customary landowners, Traditional authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocating for land rights protection CSO organs, support with initial kick off of self-financing model Mobilizing households to embrace self-financing approach Ensuring social accountability mechanisms Creation of Awareness and supporting Alternative dispute resolution
International Organizations	UN Habitat, Dutch Cooperation, BMZ, EU, GIZ, Cordaid (Dutch Catholic Organization for Relief and Development Aid)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing technical assistance e.g. equipment, funding and expertise Scaling self-financing in other areas
Research/Academia	Makerere University, Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), World Bank Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducting research and providing expertise on land related issues in line with the self-financing model
Private Sector	Local media, farmer groups, financial institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminating information on self-financing Mobilizing farmer groups to finance land registration Adopting/using CCO, COOs and Land Inventory Protocol for assessing credit worthiness of farmers and developing loan products for rural farmers.

Below is a stakeholder map outlining the key actors essential for the successful self-financing implementation of customary land registration under RELAPU in Uganda.

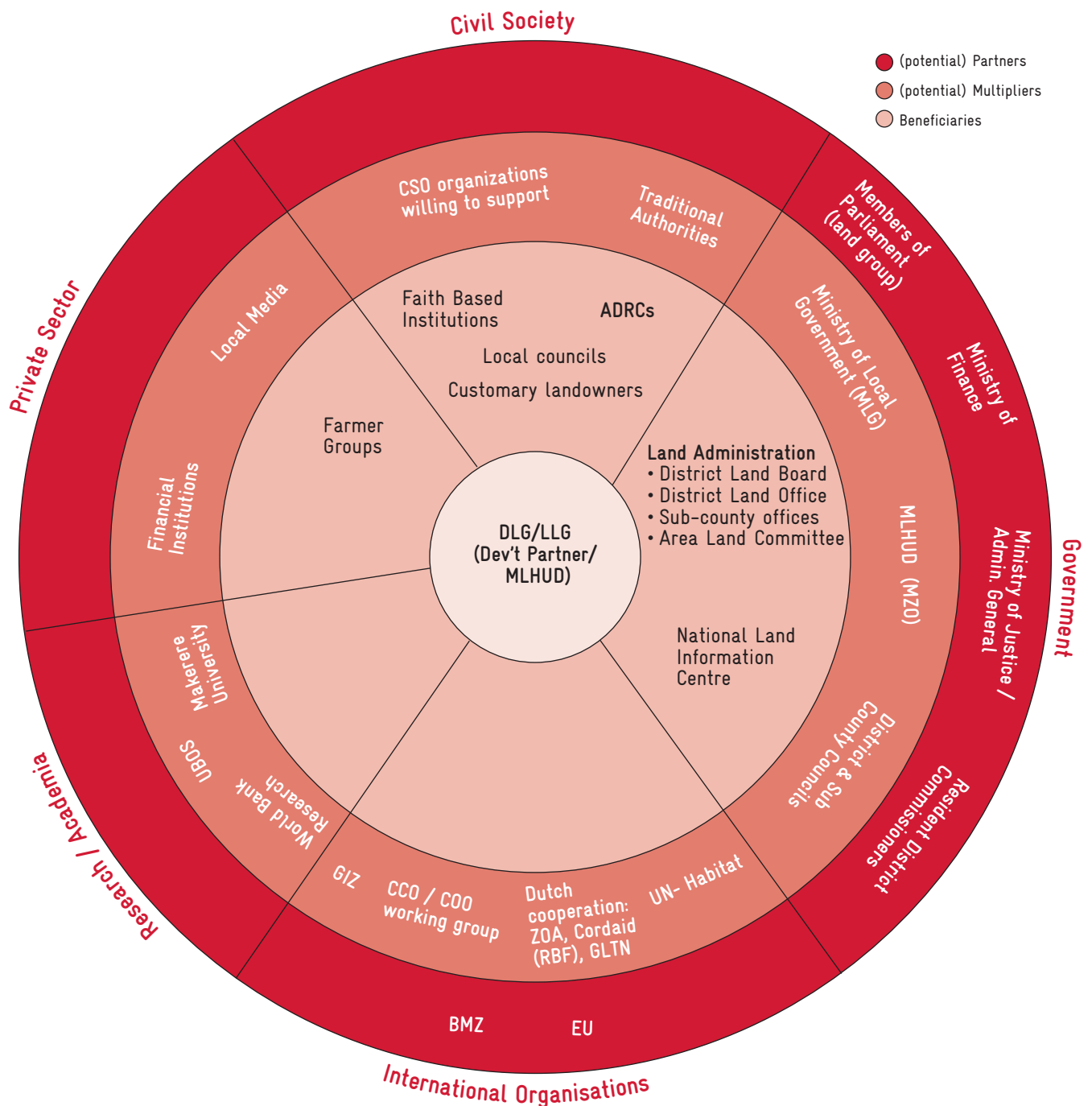
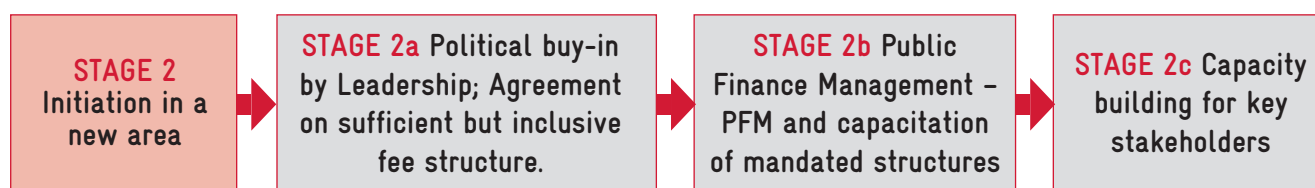


Figure 3 : Self-financing in customary land registration stakeholder analysis

Step 1b: Assess Willingness to pay / Cost of land registration

Assessing smallholder farmers' willingness to contribute to land services is essential for engaging district and sub-county authorities. Such assessments help cover service costs, support long-term sustainability, and enable policymakers and practitioners to set affordable fees at the district level.

Stage 2: Initiation in a new area



Step 2a: Political Buy-in by Leadership; Agreement on sufficient but inclusive fee structure

Preliminary meetings with District Executives — particularly the District Local Council V Chairperson, the Chief Administrative Officer, and land office staff — are critical for securing political and technical commitments to support fee-based land services through the mandated structures at district and sub-county levels. Considerations for an affordable and inclusive fee structure (see table below) are made by the sub-county councils and submitted to the district council for standardization and approval through the District Land Office. Once approved, the fee structure is formalized through a District Council resolution and applied uniformly across all lower administrative levels. Introducing the district administration to Fit-for-Purpose approaches is crucial at this stage, as maintaining affordable fees depends on the systematic application of modern and incremental methods. The administration is sensitized to the economies of scale achieved through these approaches, which serve as a practical basis for setting minimal, inclusive fees—ensuring access to land services for vulnerable groups such as widows, orphans, and the elderly.

Step 2b: Public Finance Management-PFM and Capacitation of mandated structures

Local governments are mandated to levy fees, including for land services, in accordance with Section 80 of the 1997 Local Governments Act. In line with Sections 63 and 66 of the 1998 Land Act, the expenses of land administration structures at the district and sub-county levels are to be covered by district administration funds.

While land fee collection is intended to cover both operational and recapitalization costs, mandated structures often require initial support in the form of land governance training, technical skills, and essential equipment—such as office supplies, mapping tools, and data quality control systems. Beyond land administration training, the effective delivery of fee-based land services also demands capacity building in the accountable and transparent management of collected fees. In this context, the experience of Bululu Sub-county in Kalaki District stands out as a best practice. Through the Integrated Revenue Administration System (IRAS), the sub-county has successfully managed self-financed customary land documentation. Land fees are remitted back to the local administration in a timely manner—typically twice a month—enabling the smooth and sustained operation of land registration activities.

It is important to distinguish between the statutory land fees outlined in the land regulations — UGX 5,000 for the application and UGX 5,000 for certificate issuance — and the additional fees associated with the systematic Fit-for-Purpose approach. Self-financing pilot local governments have recognized the importance of ring-fencing these additional charges specifically for land services, ensuring they are remitted back to the respective sub-counties. To operationalize this, the Sub-county Recorder must formally write to the District Chief Finance Officer (CFO), through the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), clearly stating the total land-related revenue collected and the portion to be remitted. After deducting the district's 35% share from the UGX 10,000 statutory fees, the remaining amount is transferred back to the sub-county to support land registration activities. The table below provides a costing structure to guide District Councils in setting appropriate fee levels.

Table 2 : Costing structure for self-financing fees

Costing for Self-financing fees					
S/N	Item/Description	Cost Category	Amount	Note/Remark	Payment point
1	Application fee for CCO	Statutory (Local Revenue)	5,000	Payable per file	Paid at Sub County
2	Cost for CCO Issuance	Statutory (Local Revenue)	5,000	Payable per file	Paid at Sub County
3	Land Inventory Protocol (LIP) printing fee	Non-statutory		Payable per file	To be paid to ALC
4	Sensitization and photocopying of forms	Non-statutory		Fuel/transport for the sensitization team.	
5	Land inspection/demarcation fees (ALC facilitation)	Non-statutory		Payable per file	
6	Area LC1	Non-statutory			
7	Facilitation for Technical person - para-surveyor	Non-statutory		Payable for a day worked	
8	Facilitation for physical planning committee, DLB Meetings as well as support supervision by land office and environment.	Non-statutory			
9	Quality control & Generation of maps	Non-statutory			
10	Digital printing of CCO	Non-statutory			
Total					

To enhance affordability for vulnerable groups and leverage the economies of scale inherent to the systematic approach, councils are encouraged to set land registration fees in the range of USD 20 to 25 per application. Lower fees have been shown to incentivize broader community participation in land registration efforts.

Incorporating fee collection estimates into budgetary planning is essential during the local governments' annual planning and budgeting cycle. To ensure transparency and accountability, a monitoring framework should be institutionalized—from sub-county to district, and up to the sectoral Ministry of Lands and the Ministry of Local Government. This framework should enable regular reporting on community awareness activities, land conflict resolution, applications received and processed, and certificates issued.

To manage resources effectively, it is critical to maximize the use of existing capital and human resources. Capacity building for fee-based land service provision can be delivered through Training-of-Trainers (ToT) sessions held in district and sub-county council halls, targeting technical staff at both levels.

Step 2c: Capacity Building for key stakeholders

The trainings are tailored for key land service providers, including Area Land Committees (ALCs), Recorders, and other technical staff such as Community Development Officers (CDOs), parish chiefs, agricultural officers, and accountants. The main focus is on strengthening their understanding of land administration and the customary land registration process.

These trainings follow a Training of Trainers (TOT) model, in which master trainers from the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) first build the capacity of district and regional trainers. These district trainers then deliver training to stakeholders at the sub-county level and to District Land Boards (DLBs).

This approach is designed to promote sustainability: when staff changes occur—such as transfers or replacement of Area Land Committee members—the district trainers are equipped to train the new staff, ensuring continuity and consistent application of land administration practices.

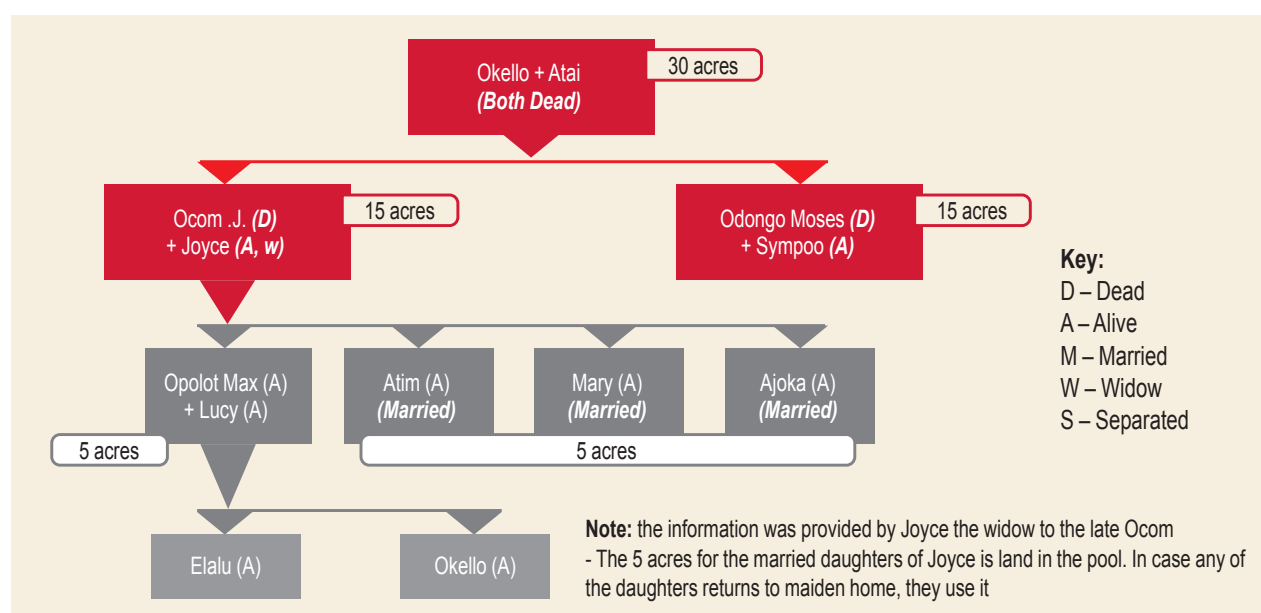
Land Administrative Training.

The Land Administration training is a three-day program delivered by district land office staff trained as trainers, including the District Senior Land Management Officer, District Staff Surveyor, District Physical Planner, and District Natural Resources/Environment Officer.

On the **first day**, participants learn about policy and legal provisions in customary land management, physical planning, the self-financing model, natural resource management, and the family land rights tree. LC3 councilors are encouraged to attend this session to gain a general understanding.

The **second day** covers the roles of land management institutions, anticipated challenges, use of field equipment, and the preparation of inspection reports and sketch maps.

The **third day** focuses on the practical completion of standard land registration forms and the development of action plans.



Training of Sub-County Technical Staff in Mapping Equipment

Select sub-county staff, such as parish chiefs or Community Development Officers (CDOs) with IT skills, participate in a two-day training on using CRISP software and mapping equipment. Once trained, these staff members work alongside Area Land Committees (ALCs) during the land mapping process, gathering both personal and spatial data. This approach helps institutionalize the process by relying on existing sub-county personnel rather than hiring external staff who would require additional compensation, ultimately lowering the overall cost of land registration.

Training on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

To help resolve land disputes and support households in registering their land—including disputes between tenants and landlords under Mailo Land—a dedicated ADR training is organized at the sub-county level. This training targets selected community mediators such as LC1s, clan leaders, and religious leaders.

Stage 3: Sensitization activities



Step 3a: Utilize existing campaigns for mobilization

At the district level, it is essential that political, opinion, religious, and traditional leaders are informed and actively engaged in raising community awareness about the importance of sustained land services that ensure no one is left behind. Both district and sub-county leaders — political and technical alike — must understand and support the principle of achieving a critical mass, which is key to maintaining affordable land fees for all.

Sub-county technical staff and Area Land Committees should incorporate land awareness messaging into their regular community outreach and support activities. At the parish and village levels, awareness campaigns on land rights and the procedures for securing them must include clear, accessible information on the officially approved fee structure authorized for collection by sub-county authorities.

Step 3b: Develop multi-level Social Accountability Mechanism with CSO partners

The collection of land fees must be clearly distinguished from mandatory tax collections and managed with full transparency to ensure that smallholder contributors ultimately receive the tenure documents they seek. The effective oversight of civil society organizations is crucial to holding mandated structures accountable for the efficient use of collected fees, ensuring timely processing of applications and issuance of certificates.

Equally important is the role of the District Integrity Promotion Forums (DIPFs), chaired by the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) with the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) serving as secretary. These forums are responsible for strengthening coordination, promoting accountable leadership, and closely monitoring the implementation of self-financing mechanisms and the management of land service fees.



Picture 1: LC 3 Chairperson conducting a community awareness raising session on land rights



Picture 2: SACAO & LC3 of Bululu sensitizing community members on land registration.

Step 3c: Staggered fee collection by the Sub-county

To empower all smallholders — including the most vulnerable — land fee collection mechanisms must be designed with flexibility and equity in mind. Staggered payment options should be introduced, along with provisions for reduced fees for women, widows, orphans, and persons with disabilities. Implementing systematized field mapping activities that leverage economies of scale can further lower overall costs, making services more accessible.

Self-financed land documentation approaches should also be aligned with smallholders' income cycles, particularly seasonal harvest periods. Additionally, farmers' cooperatives and savings groups should be engaged as potential facilitators of upfront fee payments, helping to increase participation in systematic land registration initiatives.

Stage 4: Free, Prior and Informed Consent Mapping Phase

Step 4a: Facilitation of ALC, ScPPC, DLB and recorder from fees (direct mapping costs)

Operational costs associated with land administration at the sub-county level — such as the activities of the Area Land Committee (including public notifications, field mapping, and documentation), Physical Planning Committee meetings, and the work of the sub-county Recorder (e.g., delivering applications to the District Land Board, travel to the Ministry Zonal Office to print CCOs, and fuel for parish-level sensitization meetings) — should be covered by the land fees collected from beneficiary landowners and users at the point of application.

To maintain affordability, the cost of reviewing applications processed by the Area Land Committee at the District Land Board (DLB) level should be reimbursed through government quarterly releases allocated for DLB meetings. It is essential that all involved committees adopt bulk processing of applications to achieve economies of scale and keep the unit cost per application as low as possible.



Picture 3: Community members off-setting road meters during land mapping



Picture 4: Community members inspecting and demarcating land boundaries in Okungur sub-county

Stage 5: Verification and Certification Phase



Step 5a: Facilitation of District in training and backstopping

The District Land Office plays a pivotal role as a master trainer, responsible for building the capacity of lower local government structures in land administration, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), and Fit-for-Purpose (FFP) land rights documentation. This approach ensures continuity and safeguards institutional knowledge, even amidst staff turnover at the sub-county level. To sustain effective service delivery, District Land Office staff should also provide regular backstopping support for sub-county activities, including community awareness raising, ADR processes, and FFP land documentation.



Picture 5: MZO staff training on Physical Planning

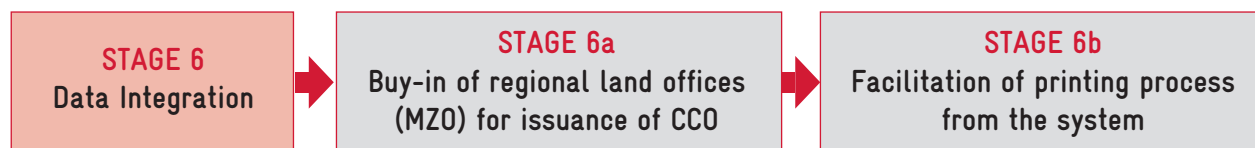


Picture 6: Technical staff undertaking practical training in FFP equipment use

Step 5b: Facilitation of data cleaning

The District Land Office is mandated to oversee data quality control and cleaning, particularly due to the limited capacity at the sub-county level in managing Fit-for-Purpose tenure data using open-source Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Periodic field visits by district technical staff for data verification and cleaning should be financed through the land service fees collected. Ideally, these costs should be jointly supported by district and sub-county budgets, in alignment with the 35%–65% allocation of application fees between the district and sub-county levels, respectively.

Stage 6: Data Integration



Step 6a: Buy-in of regional land offices (MZO) for issuance of CCO

To enable the integration of Certificate of Customary Ownership (CCO) data into the Uganda National Land Information System (UgNLIS), a secondary quality assurance process is carried out by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD). This step ensures that both spatial and attribute data meet the standards required for integration and generation of CCOs within the UgNLIS.

Consequently, self-financed land documentation efforts must involve Ministry Zonal Office (MZO) staff during the capacity building of District Land Office teams — particularly on data quality assurance — to ensure that files submitted from sub-counties are compliant with national integration standards. Prior to this engagement, it is essential to strengthen MZO staff capacity in customary land administration and Fit-for-Purpose (FFP) land rights documentation.

Once these capacities are in place, MZO technical staff can provide ongoing support to district-level land services, including backstopping data quality control processes and printing of CCOs through the designated land officer at the MZO.

Step 6b: Facilitation of printing process from the system

The printing of Certificates of Customary Ownership (CCOs) and the registration of occupancy rights at the Ministry Zonal Office (MZO) ensures that comprehensive land services are accessible within the region served by the MZO. This regionalized service delivery model supports the affordability of land fees for contributing beneficiaries. To sustain this approach, the costs associated with printing certificates from the UgNLIS should be incorporated into the overall land fee structure. This structure should be formally approved by the District Council and authorized for implementation by sub-county local authorities.

Stage 7: Data Integration of CCO / COO

Step 7a: Agreement on FFP technical standards for the NLIS

Integrating Certificate of Customary Ownership (CCO) and Certificate of Occupancy (COO) data into the Uganda National Land Information System (UgNLIS) is essential, as it significantly reduces the risk of overlapping land records and potential land rights disenfranchisement. Through this integration, information related to a specific parcel can be easily queried and verified within the national system.

To enable this process, CCO and Certificate of Occupancy (COO) data must be collected and processed in line with the technical standards set out in the Technical Instructions for CCO and COO Data Collection, issued by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD) with support from GIZ. These instructions outline the required equipment, methodology, and data exchange formats necessary to ensure that spatial and attribute data meet the quality thresholds for integration into UgNLIS.

Once generated through UgNLIS, CCOs and COOs are automatically reflected on the national parcel fabric, greatly minimizing the likelihood of duplicate or overlapping titling.



Picture 7: A female land surveyor trains the Banda Sub-County Area Land Committee in using improved fit-for-purpose technologies, while a female landowner observes and provides her details

3 Necessary Prerequisites

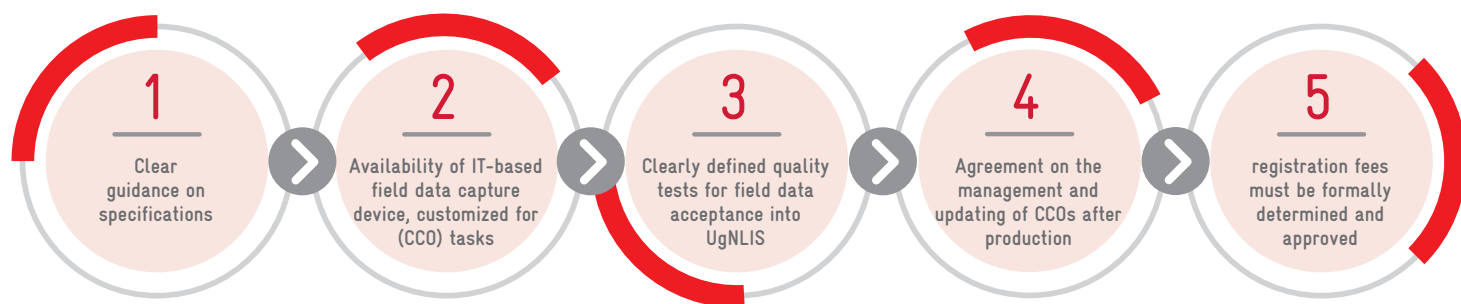


Figure 5 : Necessary prerequisites for the self-financing model

For the self-financing model to function effectively, four key prerequisites must be in place:

1. **Clear guidance** is essential on the formats, standards, and operational procedures for the collection, processing, quality assurance, sharing, and integration of CCO and COO data — both digital and printed. This applies to both spatial (parcel) data and non-spatial (registration) data. The guidance should comprehensively cover specifications for the required equipment, standards for data collection, the necessary technical expertise, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities of all actors involved throughout the workflow — from application submission to the final production of the Certificate of Customary Ownership (CCO) and Certificate of Occupancy (COO).
2. The proposed model requires the use of **digital data capture devices specifically customized for Certificate of Customary Ownership (CCO) tasks**, to complement the physical forms used in the CCO workflow. Accordingly, the necessary equipment — including tablets, GNSS receivers, printers, storage devices, and reliable power sources — must be provided and should conform to the recommended standards for Fit-for-Purpose land administration as outlined by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD). Furthermore, the final electronically printed CCO must adhere to the official specifications published in the Uganda Gazette of September 18, 2020, under the ‘Notice of Modification of the Certificate of Customary Ownership Form’.
3. **Clearly defined quality tests for field data acceptance into UgNLIS** are necessary. It is essential to establish clear guidelines on how quality assurance tests will be conducted and to define the mandatory processes that must be followed prior to any further mapping activities. This clarity is critical to ensure that field teams fully understand and adhere to the required data standards. To this end, close collaboration with the Department of Surveys and Mapping in Entebbe is necessary to develop and validate these technical guidelines.
4. **Agreement on the management and updating of CCOs after production** is essential, covering transaction types, fees, roles, and responsibilities. The self-financing model envisages a smooth transmission and sharing of CCO data between the land administration structures within the district and the Ministry zonal office. It is pertinent that the modalities and key players involved in the data transmission are clearly defined to further streamline the process of generation and associated process transaction that proceed the generation of CCO from the UgNLIS subsequent processes.
5. In addition, **registration fees must be formally determined and approved** by both sub-county and district councils, in accordance with their respective administrative mandates.

These prerequisites must be addressed and resolved before implementing the contributory approach.

4 Key principles of Customary and Private Mailo land registration under the Self-financing Model

4.1. Free, Prior and Informed Consent

The Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) Principle³ affirms the right of community members and landowners to approve or reject any action that could impact their land, boundaries, or ownership rights. It ensures a bottom-up approach to participation and consultation, allowing landowners to make informed decisions before proceeding with land registration by obtaining application forms, paying district-set fees, and documenting their customary land to acquire Certificates of Customary Ownership (CCOs) and Certificates of Occupancy (COOs).

What does Free, Prior, and Informed Consent mean?

- ▶ **Free:** Consent must be given voluntarily, without coercion, intimidation, or manipulation.
- ▶ **Prior:** Consent must be sought well in advance of any authorization or commencement of activities, respecting the time required for community consultations and consensus-building.
- ▶ **Informed Consent:** Communities must receive comprehensive information covering:
 - The nature, size, pace, reversibility, and scope of the proposed project or activity.
 - The purpose and duration of the project.
 - The locality and affected areas.
 - A preliminary assessment of potential economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts, including risks.
 - The personnel involved in executing the project.
 - The procedures the project entails.

The FPIC process also includes the **right to withhold consent**, ensuring that **consultation and participation** are integral components of decision-making.



Picture 8: A household head helping his wife and children thresh their harvested beans

3. FAO (2016), Free Prior and Informed Consent – An Indigenous Peoples' right and a good practice for local communities. Online, retrieved on March 2025: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6190e.pdf>.

4.2. Empowerment of decentralization structures through fit-for-purpose solutions for land demarcation

Uganda's land governance system faces significant challenges, including inefficient land administration, inadequate funding, and limited capacity at the local government level. The self-financing model, implemented through decentralized land management structures, offers a sustainable solution to these issues by empowering local governments to effectively manage land and provide essential land services to communities.

Key activities to strengthen decentralized land structures:

- **Capacity Building:** Training, technical assistance, and resource provision are critical to enhancing the skills and knowledge of local government officials in land management.
- **Institutional Strengthening:** Developing robust **institutional frameworks, policies, and procedures** at the local level is essential for effective land governance. Unlike project-based approaches where implementing organizations take the lead, the **self-financing model** ensures that **mandated land service structures** are responsible for the entire process.
- **Community Engagement:** Encouraging **participatory land management** ensures that communities play an active role in decision-making processes. **Sub-county leadership** raises awareness of land rights, empowering community members to make **informed decisions** about land registration and ownership.

By addressing these key areas, the self-financing model enhances the **efficiency, sustainability, and accessibility** of land services while reinforcing **local ownership and governance** in Uganda's land sector.

4.3. Involvement of traditional authorities in the sensitization and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms

Traditional authorities play a **vital role** in Uganda's customary land registration process. Their involvement is essential for **raising awareness and mobilizing communities** by working closely with sub-county officials to engage clan members. They encourage participation in community sensitization events, share knowledge on traditional land management, and advocate for the importance of land registration. Additionally, their deep understanding of customary laws and practices enables them to facilitate **dispute resolution** effectively.



Picture 9: The coffee harvest of a widow from Banda Sub-County, whose land documentation secured her right to use the land

5 Rationale behind the Integration of CCOs and COOs into the Uganda National Land Information System (UgNLIS)

A **Land Information System (LIS)** is a management tool designed to streamline the administration and oversight of land. In line with this, the Government of Uganda developed the computerized Uganda National Land Information System (UgNLIS), integrating all land administration processes and procedures into a single, unified platform. This system facilitates the registration of land rights and the issuance of titles across the country's diverse tenure systems, including Mailo, Freehold, and Leasehold.

Challenges with customary tenure

Chapter 4.3 of the **National Land Policy (2013)** highlights several challenges associated with customary tenure:

- Lack of tenure security for landowners.
- Obstacles to the development of land markets.
- Discrimination against women.

Although the 1995 Constitution and the Land Act formally recognize customary tenure, it is often treated as inferior to other registered tenure systems. This perception is compounded by the absence of **Certificates of Customary Ownership (CCOs)** in the UgNLIS, which limits their utility as proof of ownership.

Vulnerability of occupants on Mailo and Native Freeholds

On Mailo and Native Freeholds, the **Land Act** provides for the separation of land ownership from the ownership of developments by lawful or bona fide occupants. For enhanced tenure security, Section 33 allows tenants by occupancy to apply for **Certificates of Occupancy (COOs)**. However, the absence of the spatial limits of COOs in the UgNLIS leaves such tenants vulnerable to arbitrary evictions, undermining their security of tenure.

The need for integration

The integration of CCOs and COOs into the UgNLIS has been identified as critical to:

- a) **Enhancing tenure security:** This integration will prevent the creation of overlapping rights and protect the interests of customary rights holders and tenants by occupancy.
- b) **Improving decision-making:** The UgNLIS can ensure that overlapping rights, such as multiple registrations on the same parcel, are prevented.
- c) **Ensuring spatial consistency:** All mapped CCOs and COOs will be spatially verified and aligned.
- d) **Facilitating data storage and archiving:** The integration will support the secure and systematic preservation of data.
- e) **Supporting national development planning:** Data generated through integration will aid in national development planning.

By incorporating CCOs and COOs, the UgNLIS will bring uniformity to data collection and improve standards, particularly for CCO data, while ensuring that the processing tasks remain simple and affordable.

It is important to note that integrating CCOs and COOs into the UgNLIS does not replace the statutory functions carried out at the sub-county level. These processes, as outlined in the **Land Act (Cap 227)** and the **Land Regulations (2004)**, will continue to be executed at the sub-county in compliance with existing legal frameworks.

6 Lessons learned, challenges and benefits

For the self-financing model to succeed, **capacity building** plays a pivotal role in ensuring an effective and self-funded land registration process. **Political, farmer group and key opinion leaders** can inspire **broader community participation** by taking the initiative to register their own land, **serving as examples** for others to follow. **Targeted sensitization** efforts at the village or cluster level are crucial to secure informed consent from households and to guarantee the inclusion of vulnerable individuals in the land registration process.

The success of the model also relies on both political and technical leaders **taking full ownership of the process, fostering accountability and commitment. Training and establishing Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) committees** is essential to support vulnerable individuals in resolving any land disputes that may arise during or after the registration process. Additionally, **providing sub-county leaders with informational materials** ensures they have reliable references to guide village sensitizations effectively.

Regular backstopping by district land office staff, ideally on a monthly basis, helps to maintain momentum and address any technical challenges. Strong collaboration between political and technical leaders is equally critical to ensure the model's seamless implementation. Finally, in villages where **Local Council 1 leaders take the lead in mapping their land** and demonstrate active commitment, there is a notable increase in the willingness of households to apply for land registration, further strengthening the model's impact.

The model presented relies on initial investment at the district and sub-county levels, followed by activities based at the sub-county level. However, **it is challenging to envision how the district can make the initial investment without external funding** or direct support from the Government of Uganda (GoU). Additionally, there are significant financial management issues to consider. The model requires costs to be covered at both the sub-county and district levels, which may lead to clear cash flow and financial management challenges. These challenges could potentially hinder the smooth implementation of the model, especially if the necessary financial resources and management structures are not in place. Effective management of collected fees through the Integrated Revenue Administration System (IRAS) is essential, with a strong emphasis on ring-fencing these funds to ensure they are exclusively used to support land services for contributing applicants.

Upscaling challenges

The provision of land services faces several challenges that hinder its effectiveness and sustainability:

- 1** One significant issue is the entrenched reliance on project funding, which has diminished leaders' sense of ownership and responsibility in delivering land services. This dependency on external resources weakens long-term commitment and accountability.
- 2** Moreover, the functionality and dedication of management teams at the sub-county level often suffer due to a lack of motivation. Without deliberate efforts to incentivize and support these teams, their performance and engagement remain limited.
- 3** A critical factor contributing to these challenges is the failure of local governments to integrate and prioritize land service provision within their annual plans. This omission reflects a broader neglect of land governance in local development agendas, leaving the sector underfunded and poorly supported.
- 4** Additionally, routine staff transfers within local government structures further exacerbate the issue. Frequent changes disrupt continuity and reduce the capacity of teams to build expertise and institutional knowledge necessary for effective land service delivery.

The model offers several benefits that significantly enhance land registration and governance. It provides improved tenure security for rural landowners, with a **particular focus on women and marginalized groups**, ensuring their land rights are better protected. By employing participatory and decentralized processes, the model promotes efficient land governance, enabling communities to play an active role in managing their land resources. Additionally, **the approach is both affordable and sustainable**, as it leverages local resources and existing structures to reduce costs. Integration with the Uganda National Land Information System (UgNLIS) further strengthens the model, ensuring consistency in land data, safeguarding land rights, and supporting broader national planning initiatives. The **self-financing model serves as a scalable solution for improving land administration** in Uganda and other similar contexts, with a focus on equity, transparency, and sustainability.



Picture 10: A rural farmer with secured land tenure in Kiganda Sub-County, Kassanda District, shifted from seasonal crops to perennial crops

Conclusion

The self-financing model outlines a sustainable approach to customary land registration. Experiences from Bululu in Kalaki, Acii and Aputi in Amolatar, Okwongodul and Adok in Dokolo, Paicho in Gulu, Lunyiri in Pader, Kabulasoke in Gomba, and Okungur in Kapelebyong have shown that communities are willing to invest in land registration services. However, the model's success hinges on the commitment and ownership of both political and technical leaders at the local government level.

The capacity development strategy ensures knowledge transfer from national-level Master Trainers to district-level Trainers of Trainers and ultimately to sub-county practitioners. This approach facilitates the model's sustainability and scalability across different districts.

While the model initially relies on district and sub-county investments, followed by sub-county-based activities, it is unclear how districts can secure the necessary funding without direct government support. Additionally, financial management challenges may arise as costs are shared across multiple levels, requiring careful cash flow planning.

Overall, the pilot experiences demonstrate a strong willingness within communities to pay for land services. To sustain this momentum, it is crucial to clearly define how sub-county and district authorities should manage and utilize the collected land registration fees. These funds must be applied efficiently and transparently to ensure the timely delivery of land services, without delays or diversion. To this end, local authorities should consider retaining a significant portion of the fees at the sub-county level to directly support field operations, thereby avoiding service delivery bottlenecks and ensuring that applicants receive their land documentation without undue delays.



Picture 11: A widow from Banda Sub-County, whose land documentation has secured her rights to use the land, proudly displays her bumper coffee harvest