LAND-at-scale

THEMATIC RESEARCH

SYNTHESIS

Equitable and sustainable land governance: insights from academic knowledge management of LAS programme

Synthesis report



Wetland community management Uganda (GLTN)

Author: Wytske Chamberlain

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LANDac

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements 2

1 Introduction 3

2 Approach and Methodology 3

2.1 Approach 4

2.2 Methodology 5

3 Insights on key themes 7

3.1 Tenure security 7

3.1.1 Sources of tenure insecurity 7

3.1.2 How to achieve tenure security? 11

3.1.3 Downstream effects of tenure security 12

3.2 Women's land rights 13

3.3 Rule of law and conflict sensitivity in (post-) conflict settings 15

3.4 Climate resilience 18

3.5 Scaling 19

4 Conclusion: Equitable and sustainable land governance to strengthen security 21

5 Bibliography 24

Annex 1 Thematic learning agenda 29

Annex 2 Academic KM publications 31

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the synthesis of insights derived from activities coordinated by the LANDac[1] academic partners within the LAND-at-scale (LAS) knowledge programme from 2020 to 2025[2]. During this time, our aim has been to strengthen the knowledge base of the LAS programme around themes of shared interest. Our strategy has focused on harvesting evidence, lessons, and insights across projects and exploring possibilities for the scaling of just, inclusive and sustainable land governance interventions. Our approach combined building and sharing knowledge through academic thematic research and analysis at the programme level with in-country longitudinal research. In this report we revisit the objectives we set out to achieve, namely to a) document promising impact pathways for equitable and sustainable land governance interventions, b) identify bottlenecks and risks, c) suggest ways to scale and innovate approaches to ensure equitable and sustainable land governance. In order to achieve these objectives, we have asked: how do assumptions underlying the LAS programme as a whole, and the projects implemented in different countries, align with most recent academic knowledge and resonate with lived realities documented from research on the ground?

Engaging in various activities to answering this question, the LAS knowledge programme's academic partners contributed to adaptive programming, exchanging knowledge and building a broader research community.

In the following sections, we outline how we have achieved these objectives and propose a future agenda. The next section provides insights into the approach and methodology informing the activities of the academic knowledge component and this synthesis report. Section 3 highlights the main insights that we have obtained on cross-cutting themes that inform the pathways and risks. The report ends with a conclusion that answers the overarching question and shows ways forward.

2 APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

This section describes how the LANDac academic KM partners approached its activities, and the methodologies used in its activities. Emphasis is on the activities in the period 1 May 2023 – 25 July 2025, after the KM programme was restructured and the academic partners were to fully work towards academic knowledge generation and dissemination. Nevertheless, they could built on

[1] LANDac, the Netherlands Land Academy, is a partnership between Dutch organisations and their Southern partners working on land governance for equitable and sustainable development. The LANDac network brings together actors, conducts research, and distributes information, focusing on new pressures and competing claims on land and natural resources.

[2] The following academic institutions were part of the academic consortium: International Development Studies (Utrecht University), Sociology of Development and Change (Wageningen University and Research), Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology (Leiden University) and ITC (University of Twente). Within the LAND-at-scale knowledge programme, the LANDac academic consortium, worked with the KIT Institute for project-level support and activities, the International Land Coalition for in-country embedding and uptake through multi-stakeholder approaches, and the Land Portal Foundation for supporting exchange, learning and communication.

activities between 1 June 2021 and 30 April 2023 when all knowledge partners (see footnote 2) worked together in a single consortium.

2.1 Approach

The academic KM partners applied an approach that combined programme-level, cross-project analysis with in-country research. Academic experts conducted thematic research related to LAS's theory of change (Netherlands Enterprise Agency, 2019). This research was complemented with, and fed by, in-country research and reflections from implementing partners in different countries.

Guiding the KM academic activities were cross-cutting themes of relevance for LAS as formulated in the programme's knowledge management strategy. These themes were identified based on common themes in country interventions, the priorities of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and RVO as respective programme donor and programme manager. It was also informed by the expertise of the LANDac consortium that supported knowledge management. The five themes identified were: tenure security, women's land rights, rule of law and conflict sensitivity in (post-) conflict settings, resilience for climate change and scaling. Annex 1 presents the initial questions formulated per theme.

Within this thematic learning agenda, the academic KM partners have conducted research synthesising relevant and recent academic insights and evidence on global trends and dynamics. Thematic experts from within the LANDac academic network collaborated with a LANDac senior researcher dedicated to the LAS academic KM project, as well as with relevant LAS implementing partners. This research has also identified contextual factors for success and potential risks of land governance interventions. As such, the academic consortium has been able to work on questioning and strengthening the assumptions underlying the LAND-at-scale programme overall, and the interventions at country level. The findings are formulated in five thematic reports[3].

To increase our understanding of local trends and contexts in settings where LAND-at-scale initiatives are situated, in-country research has been conducted under the coordination of the LANDac academic partners. In 2022/2023 research in four countries (Chad, Colombia, Mozambique and Uganda) was conducted to ground the projects in their broader local contexts. In 2022, a small research project in Mali to address a particular knowledge gap in the intervention was funded by LANDac and supervised by an academic expert from the LANDac network. Between 2023 and 2025, LANDac coordinated longitudinal data collection and analysis in the commune of Nyanza-Lac, Makamba Province, Burundi and the city of Bosaso, regional state of Puntland, Somalia. Project partners from both these countries demonstrated strong buy-in for such research. In Burundi, the longitudinal research built on, and strengthened, an initiative already started by the project partners. In Somalia, the research was to provide qualitative insights behind the extensive quantitative data collected by the project partners. In both countries, a researcher familiar with the project partners and the LAS intervention was responsible for research design, field work, data analysis and reporting. Findings from both countries offer an in-depth

[3] All thematic studies as well as other publications coordinated by the academic consortium are available on the LANDac website (https://landgovernance.org/publications-archive/) and the Land Portal (https://landportal.org/community/programmes/land-scale).

understanding of impact and impact pathways on the ground that contribute to formulating lessons on scaling. Many of these findings are presented in this synthesis. The references to our KM publications are marked with an asterisk(*) to assist in identifying the findings from the LANDac KM activities.

All research activities happened under the direction of a Steering Committee consisting of representatives of the four academic institutes, RVO, the LANDac senior researcher, and the two local researchers responsible for the longitudinal studies.

A central element in the overall approach for shared learning and knowledge dissemination was the annual LANDac conference and Summer School. Participation in these platforms provided opportunities for LAS partners and researchers to engage with wider audiences of academics, practitioners and others. More informal dissemination and exchange within the LAS community took place during so-called knowledge cafés. Lastly, academic partners have engaged in other events such as workshops, conferences and webinars.

Our approach has been able to draw practical, cross-cutting lessons from the LAS projects; embedded these into broader debates; and informed adjustments for improved interventions on the ground. Generating insights on changes on the ground, hearing local voices of people both affected and excluded from interventions, taking the time to reflect on ongoing interventions with a range of stakeholders, and learning from different contexts strengthened knowledge to recalibrate and ensure land governance processes are increasingly fair, just and sustainable. Building emerging knowledge on the processes identified ways to adapt and strengthen these, achieving better results in the end.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

The thematic researchers have used available material (academic sources, and LAS KM and project partner documentation), complemented with interviews with selected project partners and/or outside experts. The researchers have collaborated with colleagues from the wider LANDac network. The focus of this thematic work is on synthesis across geographies and themes, and learning towards scaling. Table 1 summarises the particular methodology for each of the thematic studies.

Table 1: Methodology applied in thematic studies

Thematic study	Methodology
Tenure Security	Literature review.
Tenure security & livelihoods	Literature review, interviews with LAS implementing partners combined with a review of (internal) LAS project documentation.
Women's land rights	Scoping review based on desktop studies and interviews with experts and practitioners from institutions in the land governance network representing using semi-structured interviews.
Rule of law/conflict	Desk-based research of LAS project documents and interviews with key stakeholders (Burundi, Chad, Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, and Uganda).
Climate resilience	A literature review to produce a framework to guide the investigation of project implementation experiences and a series of activities designed to document the experiences and insights form four of the LAND-at-scale projects in Colombia, Mozambique, Uganda and Somalia.
Scaling	Literature review, as well as discussions with a selection of partners involved in the LAND-at-scale programme.

The in-country longitudinal studies followed a qualitative methodology. A local researcher in each of the two countries established an on-the-ground infrastructure for real-life data collection. They coordinated field visits on two key moments during the intervention at selected sites and households in the intervention area, comprising interviews and Focus Group Discussions as well as conversations with key informants such as representatives from the local administration. These local researchers, together with the LAS implementing project partners, analysed the findings, adjusted the design of the next round where needed, wrote up the findings on key themes, and shared these with the LAS stakeholders and the academic consortium.

A similar qualitative methodology was applied by local researchers engaged in contextual research. Following a call for application by LANDac, research proposals addressing a particular learning question relevant to their intervention were formulated by interested in-country partners. Experiences and findings were shared between the researchers in a so-called Horizontal Learning Network (HLN). The HLN participants met on a monthly basis to learn from each other's activities and to provide a space for reflection on how the research project's activities, challenges, and findings could inform the country-specific LAS intervention, but also what could be learnt from those for the other countries. The HLN was facilitated by a coordinator from the LANDac network. The methodologies are described in more detail in the individual knowledge products (see Annex 2 for a list of publications). LANDac also commissioned and supervised a small research in Mali to investigate the particular position of more vulnerable groups in the context of a changed land governance policy as supported by the LAND-at-scale intervention. Such contextual research informed later in-country research funded directly by RVO.

Using these diverse methodologies, research built on and connected to experiences at the level of the projects. Using the insights generated across the LAS program, we have fed and stimulated academic debates. We have translated our findings into policy recommendations. Sharing and uptake has been diversified, and shaped to the target audiences, incorporating sessions at the

annual LANDac conference and other conferences, online publication of written knowledge products, webinars hosted by the Land Portal, and engagement with RVO.

By implementing these activities, the academic LANDac KM partners have been able to deepen the understanding of the contexts in which interventions are implemented, and broadened the debate beyond more traditional thinking about land governance .

3 INSIGHTS ON KEY THEMES

The objective of the LAS programme is to improve livelihoods by promoting just, inclusive, and sustainable land governance-related structural changes (Netherlands Enterprise Agency, 2019). Land governance determines tenure systems and therefore impacts tenure security. Interventions to strengthen land governance regard tenure security both as an objective in itself and as a building block towards other related outcomes (Zevenbergen & Van Westen, 2023)*. Tenure security is then regarded as a crucial link in a chain towards other objectives such as livelihood building, climate resilience, reduction of conflicts, or strengthened rights for women, other cross-cutting knowledge themes. This section addresses the findings from our work on each of these themes.

3.1 TENURE SECURITY

Strengthening land tenure security (LTS) is an approach that is applied in many programmes implemented by international development agencies working on land governance, including LAND-at-scale. The reasoning behind the approach, in short, is that land right holders are insecure in their land tenure, which prevents them from using their land sustainably and efficiently, and may even threaten their existence on the land. Increasing tenure security will result in, for example, a reduction in conflicts over land, higher investment into the productive use of land, and more sustainable land-use practices. Ultimately, in this line of thinking, strengthening land tenure security will lead to economic, environmental and social impacts and improved livelihoods for the land right holders.

However, as argued by Zevenbergen & Van Westen (2023)*, there is no agreement on what tenure security actually entails, as this concept is viewed and experienced differently by different people. The term implies that tenure is secured against threats, but not all threats come from the same source, nor are they experienced in the same manner by different right holders (Zevenbergen & Van Westen, 2023)*.

3.1.1 Sources of tenure insecurity

Rather than looking at the sources of tenure of security, our work has stressed the importance of knowing why people are insecure in their tenure. One of the most prevalent sources of tenure insecurity relates to **intra- and inter-community** uncertainties stemming from contested claims relating to traditional and historical rights, and disputed boundaries. Intra-household tenure insecurity is driven by conflicts and inequal rights within a family. Inheritance practices, customary marriage traditions and high degrees of land fragmentation are factors that cause insecurity for

certain household members, women and youth in particular (Cavallaro, 2024; Malloum & Soumaïne, 2023; Niyonkuru, 2024)*.

More generally, those with secondary land rights tend to be more vulnerable in their tenure. This applies to people renting land, such as migrant farmers and IDPs, but also to those groups with temporary user rights such as pastoralists and people who (for many generations) occupy land gifted to them as was found in the Kati area in Mali (Sissoko & Dougnon, 2023)*. Their insecurity comes from fear that their (oral) contract will not be renewed (van Leeuwen et al., 2022), from fear that they are unable to pay the fees for their land or house (Cavallaro, 2024; Niyonkuru, 2024)*, or from illegal practices such as multiple contracts for the same plot of land, informal agreements, or even the destruction of harvests (Balemesa, 2023). People moving into areas often rely on such informal arrangements as they cannot acquire land through inheritance. They obtain access through a variety of arrangements such as rental or sharecropping arrangements, and also including buying land, but a certain precarity of their rights may persist, varying by context. In such situations, tenure security is closely related with economic security, being secure in having sufficient money or income to pay for their temporary land rights.

Tenure security is increasingly threatened by broader developments. One of these is interest in land from **commercial investors** in agriculture, forestry, industry, mining, conservation, but also real-estate developers as several of our in-country studies found (Malloum & Soumaïne, 2023; Niyonkuru, 2024; Tamele et al., 2023)*. Particular attention needs to be paid to the role of the State which, in cases, fails to adequately protect the interests of local communities, does not take sufficient measures in case of illegal activities by commercial investors, and even increases these pressures by supporting external investors to establish commercial activities. Contributing to the insecurity of land right holders when facing commercial pressure is a trend of land commodification combined with a poorly regulated market where land transactions take place both in a formal and informal ways (Niyonkuru, 2024)*. Such contexts stimulate land transactions that induce speculatory prices, with businesses and elites acquiring vast plots of land at the expense of rural and poor communities (Malloum & Soumaïne, 2023; Niyonkuru, 2024)*.

Box 1: Local approaches to land governance - the case of Nyanza-Lac, Burundi

The longitudinal research in Burundi is situated in the commune of Nyanza-Lac, Makamba province. This area is characterised by a high incidence of land rental and purchase by investors interested in commercial crop production and tourism, as well as people returning following years of displacement. The LAND-at-scale intervention implements participatory mapping and registration, combined with dispute resolution, with a particular focus on more equal land rights for women. In most cases, this strategy has acknowledged and strengthened women's land rights and position within the household. Women have also been able to claim their fair inheritance rights. Nevertheless, the legal and regulatory measures and guarantees have also led to resistance at the community and political levels. Furthermore, the intervention primarily approaches land rights through ownership and has not (yet) effectively addressed other land rights beyond, especially those acquired through renting land.

The involvement of local authorities and community-based conflict resolution structures has reassured the parties to the conflict and deters future unfounded claims. Through this approach the intervention has contributed to the management of land conflicts, particularly those relating to boundary disputes. But, the existing conflict management structures and mechanisms are ineffective in the face of conflicts between individuals and the State and when dealing with resolving conflicts between residents and returnees.

Another important element that emerged during the research is that it remains difficult to envisage profitable agricultural investments in the rural context of Burundi. land security, understood narrowly as the formalisation of land rights over small and isolated plots of land, frequently subjected to progressive fragmentation, remains insufficient as a basis for agricultural investments.

Sources: (Niyonkuru, 2024; Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b, 2025a)*

In many contexts, the **State** assumes the mandate to formalise land rights, for example through statutory law making, land administration, or land governance policies often implemented in collaboration with donors such as the World Bank, embassies and NGOs. However, government is regularly perceived as an actor that causes tenure insecurity. Besides government policies that support external investors, politicians themselves acquire large tracts of land, and people fear losing their land to the State (Huntington et al., 2023; Knight, 2019; Zamchiya & Musa, 2023). Firstly, in many countries, the State is owner of the land and thus has the authority to reallocate this land to other users. The case of the Nyanza-Lac commune in Burundi illustrates how tension between government discourse and local land use has created uncertainty about land ownership, with residents fearing potential displacement (Niyonkuru, 2024)*. Secondly, the role and authority of the state is not always clear where there is lack of coordination between local and higher levels of government (Serwat, 2024)*. Thirdly, at both local and national level, governments support (directly and indirectly) commercial investment (see previous paragraph) and land-use change. LANDac-coordinated research has found land dispossession by government agencies in for example Chad (Malloum & Soumaïne, 2023)* and Mali (Sissoko & Dougnon, 2023)*.

In **(post-) conflict** contexts, there are particular challenges, especially related to forced displacement and return. In such contexts, overlapping land rights occur, where multiple parties claim ownership, or use, of the same land. Historical rights are erased where conflict causes displacement. Decades of conflict in Burundi have resulted in situations where multiple families often have legitimate claims to the same piece of land, based on different historical moments and legal frameworks (Niyonkuru, 2024; Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b)*. Effective land governance systems to deal with such overlapping rights add to the complexity of post-conflict contexts. Whereas conflict causes displacement, this displacement in itself drives conflict in the communities where Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and migrants seek safety (Chivambo & Rafael, 2023)*. Tenure security is often low for IDPs due to a combination of legal, social, and economic challenges (Cavallaro, 2024)*. This also applies to people displaced following natural disasters, such as cyclones in Mozambique or draught in Somalia (Cavallaro, 2025a; Chamberlain, 2024)*. Lastly, conflict undermines tenure security in a physical manner. Even where people have legal land rights, they are not always safe to physically be on their land as is the case in Bosaso, Somalia, Palestine or Colombia (Cavallaro, 2024; Hanegraaf, 2022)*.

Climate change and environmental developments represent a final context that influences or exacerbates tenure insecurity. Climate related events leave land (permanently) unusable, causing insecurity firstly around whether the land can still support people in their livelihood and secondly through subsequent displacement. In Somalia, "climate change is increasingly recognized as a multiplier of insecurity and fragility" (Boers et al., 2023, p. 46)*. People's perception of tenure security in the intervention area in Burundi is directly related to the ability to use their land freely and sustainably, with people worrying if they are still able to use their land in the years to come due to increased land degradation, regardless of their formal rights over a plot (Emerusenge – 't Lam, 2024). Tenure security thus goes beyond mere access to land or holding documentation to prove rights; it also encompasses the ability to effectively exercise those rights.

Overall, **power imbalances** are a source of tenure insecurity. Mapping and registration of rights to access and use land, often designed to address insecurity, are implemented in this arena of politics and power. These processes themselves become integral to the ongoing struggle over land and resources, reflecting the power institutions hold to register and enforce rights. Indeed, power imbalances tend to intensify as land becomes commodified and pressure on land increases (German, 2022; Zevenbergen & Van Westen, 2023*).

Whereas identifying and targeting insecurities may sound straightforward, in reality land governance interventions that address tenure security often have limited positive effects, or even contribute to negative impacts on the ground (German, 2022). Thus, "interventions need to be based on an explicit notion of tenure security: what is tenure security and what does it need to achieve in a particular context, while also being aware of the risks for certain groups, and how to mitigate those risks (Zevenbergen & Van Westen, 2023, p. 5)*. Trade-offs, compromises and choices unavoidably need to be made.

3.1.2 How to achieve tenure security?

There is also ongoing discussion on how to achieve tenure security (Zevenbergen & Van Westen, 2023)*. "Most interventions take, or at least include, a 'mapping and registration' approach, which is closest to the legal view (Zevenbergen & Van Westen, 2023, p. 5)*. In our case studies we find that issuing **certificates** does seem to foster a higher perception of security, even where the rights enshrined in the certificate are not fully clear (Cavallaro, 2024)*, or even in cases where people do not actively collect their physical certificate (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b)*. Technologies used for land certification may strengthen the perception of tenure security (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b)*.

> *"My land is registered in a machine" (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b, p. 27).*

In the Somali city of Bosaso, IDPs are relocated from inner city camps to a designated site outside of the city called Gribble. To prevent people from leaving their allocated house and plot in the Gribble relocation site, the Bosaso city municipality has decided that IDPs who were moved to this site in the most recent relocation phase will only receive their property certificate after having lived in Gribble for a period of two years. Although the relocated IDPs still consider tenure security of their new location as much higher than in their previous inner city camp, they still fear eviction as long as they don't have their document (Cavallaro, 2025b)*.

Tenure security is strengthened particularly by **participatory, inclusive, and context-sensitive processes**, guided by the principles of empowerment, integration, and collaboration. Inclusive engagement with communities prior to, during design, and whilst implementing an intervention is critically important to become aware of localised and differentiated perceptions to security within communities and subsequently address threats in a way that is appropriate and suitable to the specific context. Furthermore, such an approach provides an avenue for communicating decisions on whose/what concerns cannot be addressed, what trade-offs, compromises and choices are made, and why. Plus it is a platform where collective knowledge is built and can be transferred, minimising knowledge gaps when community representatives are replaced by new representatives. This approach builds trust, supports mindset change, promotes knowledge, and enhances the social capital and fabric (Schüller, 2023). Participatory processes to map individual, but also communal, land rights and boundaries, combined with resolving disputes arising during this process by community-based groups, are a key component as they are often executed in transparent and localised ways, and contribute to building social cohesion. Critically, they help individuals become agents of their own transformation. Positive developments from land certification are thus mostly observed with regard to intra-community threats where claims are made against neighbours and other individuals living in the same area.

But in those places where threats to tenure security derive from powerful external actors, land registration interventions have less direct impact on tenure security. While people still fear losing their land, such as in peri-urban areas, they remain hopeful of receiving some form of compensation, given their awareness of their land rights. The support of communities by paralegals in Mozambique illustrates that (legal) mapping and certifying community land can strengthen their bargaining position in negotiations with commercial investors interested in the land. For example, the Cubo community in Mozambique did sign a contract handing over land for

a large game farm, while at the same time securing ownership in this farm and negotiating a plot for communal agriculture (Tamele et al., 2023)*.

It needs to be remarked that the wider objective of land governance is determined by those in **power** who tend to adhere to the narrative of land as economic asset. Since vulnerable rightsholders contribute little towards economic development and/or the consolidation of power, land governance systems seldom protect their existing rights (German, 2022). Zevenbergen emphasises indeed that most efforts need to focus on diminishing inequalities, but that in practice "interventions focus on doing things more efficiently, instead of being more equitable" (quoted in Sorensen & Chamberlain, 2022)*. This is confirmed by Serwat (2024)* regarding land dispute resolution where the LAS indicator of institutional strengthening considers effectiveness in terms of efficiency and timeliness, rather than the outcomes for certain actors.

3.1.3 Downstream effects of tenure security

Land registration seems to stimulate **land market** activity, particularly when it concerns temporary transfer of rights. Land owners feel better protected against claims by renters, rentals provide a source of income for those who lack the resources to work the land themselves, and the rental market offers access to land for land poor households (Bizoza & Opio-Omoding, 2021; Deininger et al., 2008). Land prices for registered land also increase (Chamberlain, 2025; Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b). This is a positive development for those owning land, but makes land unattainable for poorer segments of the population, risking unfair accumulation that benefits the rich (Chamberlain, 2024*; Fabbri, 2021; Otto, 2009). In the Nyanza-Lac area of Burundi, where pressure on land is high, poorer families are deprived from buying additional land and tenant farmers can no longer access land (Niyonkuru, 2024). And whereas registration does support land market activity, land transactions also take place without formal land certificates and administrative systems (German, 2022).

What such registration efforts do bring on is a **re-shaping of customary tenure systems** where rights have been more formalised and recognised in statutory systems and where power has shifted from traditional leaders to government (Chimhowu, 2019). This has also been observed in Bosaso, Somalia, where relocated IDPs rely on government to protect their tenure, whereas IDPs in the inner city camps rely on camp structures (Cavallaro, 2024)*. Lastly, our research on LAS interventions has highlighted the importance of engagement with those groups not included in an intervention as they might perceive their tenure as weakening compared to their neighbours (Cavallaro, 2024; Icco Conexión & Tropenbos Colombia, 2023)*. Whereas choices need to be made as to whose rights to strengthen, interventions should thus not be blind to the situation of those not included.

As part of the LAS knowledge management programme LANDac has explored the links between tenure security and **livelihood pathways** (Chamberlain, 2025)*. There is general positive evidence that tenure security stimulates investment by landowners, agricultural and otherwise. This is reflected in Nyanza-Lac, Burundi, where it was found that formalisation of land rights activities was followed by investment in crops such as oil palm and banana trees, increased soil fertilisation practices and the erection of more solid buildings in peri-urban settings, although these changes

are not necessarily fully linked to each other (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b)*. Such effects do not occur where perceived tenure security under customary arrangements is already strong (Abubakari et al., 2020), or where landowners, after registration, remain with a retained lack of tenure security (Cochrane & Hadis, 2019; Huntington et al., 2023). Increased investment does not necessarily translate into higher levels of production or income. Barriers to market, finance and knowledge prevent land owners to translate their land asset into income. Similarly, absence of supporting policies and institutional strengthening prevents landowners from increasing their income from land-related activities. Benefits from registration do not accrue to more vulnerable groups such as women and youth, with several authors of reviewed studies warning of the risk of elite capture (Higgins et al., 2018; Holden & Ghebru, 2016; Lawry et al., 2014).

Overall, the tenure security and livelihood pathways study concludes that "Communities operate within societal processes that affect their livelihoods, such as rapid urbanisation, climate change, violent conflict and financialisation of resources. Strengthened tenure security can reduce the vulnerability of land right holders, and even generate opportunities related to these processes. It is important to first of all understand how these processes threaten tenure security and livelihoods. Secondly, security depends not solely on having a document. Equally important are the structures to uphold these rights and the access to these structures. Thirdly, how land right holders can use their land as instrument in their livelihood strategy is affected by broader capabilities and developments including (financial) assets, knowledge and environmental changes. At the same time, these dynamics also apply to non-land related livelihood opportunities. Individuals, households and communities make trade-off decisions on how to use their land as part of a wider suite of livelihood tools. Livelihoods are affected by different factors, increasing vulnerability for some, offering opportunities to others. As such, tenure security should be regarded as a piece of a bigger, dynamic livelihood strategy" (Chamberlain, 2025, p. 17)*. The next sections will zoom in on if, and how increased tenure security contributes to gender equality, climate resilience and reduction of conflicts.

3.2 Women's land rights

Current land governance interventions often have a specific gender focus to address gender inequality. In particular recording women's names on land certificates puts women, at least on paper, on par with their husbands. This strategy has seen married women in particular experiencing higher levels of tenure security (Dadey et al., 2023)*. In the intervention areas in Nyanza-Lac, Burundi, our longitudinal study found that women have become more vocal about their rights to land. Interestingly, to protect their rights, women sometimes opted for not including their male partner on land they had come to own, for fear of loosing it in the future (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025a). Whereas women mostly appreciate the approach of joint registration to strengthen their rights to family land, men have more mixed, or even negative, views. They find that joint certification makes land transactions more complicated as they need the consent of their wife, and they sometimes resent their female family members (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b)*. Following processes of sensitisation, resistance by men to this new practice is starting to reduce in the Nyanza Lac commune in Burundi. Consultation between husband and wife on land rental and sale is becoming the norm and the general status of women in the household increases

(Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b)*. Joint titling has also resulted in couples formally registering their marriage in order to qualify for a joint certificate. Women are also strengthening their capacity in claiming their inheritance and marital rights, with names of daughters added to a land certificate to secure her inheritance. Another positive finding is that women feel more equal when it comes to court rulings.

> *"The husbands' land rightfully reverts to the women, now that it is recorded on the certificates" (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b, p. 21)*

At the same time, the longitudinal study in Burundi found that the most valuable plots of land in the intervention area were reserved for the father of the family (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b). It is also important to note that **not all women experience the intervention as positive**. As joint titles are only available to legally married couples, women in polygamous relationships suffer a loss of their rights if their husband decides to officially marry one of his wives. This development has resulted in an increase of conflict at the household level. Lastly, the research has uncovered a latent resistance among men, which is reflected in local governance structure, that threatens the sustainability of the rights women have obtained when the implementing partner is no longer on the ground to support this transformation (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025a)*.

Tenure security for women in the Saameynta programme in Bosaso, Somalia, has equally increased after relocation from IDP camps and receipt of a small plot and house in their name. At the same time, this move has also "reinforced gendered divisions of labour and reduced women's access to livelihood opportunities" (Cavallaro, 2025a, p. 19)*. Since income opportunities in the Gribble relocation site are very scarce, families adopt coping strategies in which men remain in the more insecure IDP camps in the city with easier access to work whilst the women move to the relocation site and give up employment.

Lastly, whereas women in Burundi do perceive a stronger position in court when disputing land, Serwat (2024)* finds that women struggle with accessing and using the justice system, and local mediators find it more difficult to resolve cases involving women. Numerous constraints in practice remain, such as prevailing customary norms and bias against poor right holders leaving opportunities to enhance equity during dispute resolution (Cavallaro, 2024; Serwat, 2024)*. Contradictions exist between statutory laws, religious laws, and customary practices in the protection of women's and children's inheritance rights. The underlying formal and informal frameworks to reduce the inequality in rights and to protect women's rights are not changed. Fundamental inequalities are thus not resolved.

> *"Men come to collect what they have not toiled for"*
>
> *Jordana Wamboga, UCOBAC (Chamberlain, 2023a, p. 4)**

These findings illustrate that interventions can support women in their efforts to strengthen their access to and rights over land. At the same time, women remain in a position of dependency on the men in their households. Joint registration is thus "a step in a longer process to bring about tenure security for women. This process encompasses creating awareness of rights throughout the communities, how to protect these rights and preparing women for when they loose their husband" (Dadey et al., 2023, p. 7)*.

Box 2: Land governance for IDPs in Bosaso, Somalia

In the Somali city of Bosaso, IDPs are relocated from an extremely vulnerable environment in a camp in the inner city to a site outside the city (Cavallaro, 2025b)(Cavallaro, 2025b). Relocating had two objectives: to make the land available for inner city development and to provide a permanent solution to displacement. Selected IDPs have received a small plot of land with a house and a title document (of which the explicit rights on inheritance and sale are unclear) in the relocation site. Relocation has significantly increased the tenure security of these relocated IDPs, but questions regarding this approach remain. Although tenure security was mentioned consistently as a key element to exit displacement, it is often unclear what respondents mean by "getting a piece of land" as this could be a document and land from the government, having finances to buy their own piece of land, or simply having a secure rental plot. With the lack of income opportunities in the relocation site, economic security may have been compromised at the expense of tenure and physical security. More fundamentally, relocation has not contributed towards emptying out the inner city camps . Firstly, such relocation efforts depend on limited donor funding that cannot finance the relocation of all IDPs in the camps. Secondly, new people are moving into the camps, and even members from the relocated households continue to live in the inner city camps to retain access to employment. Furthermore, this case illustrates that although this intervention has improved tenure security, the greater issue of income security for IDPs has not been tackled. This requires broader economic and social approaches beyond land governance. This case shows that land governance is a path under construction: land tenure has been addressed for some, but the broader aspect of land policies (including on inner-city development) and legal frameworks (the rights to which a document holder is entitled) have not been fully formulated.

*Sources: (Cavallaro, 2024, 2025b, 2025a)**

3.3 Rule of law and conflict sensitivity in (post-) conflict settings

Zevenbergen & Van Westen, p. (2023, p. 5)* stress that the outcomes of mapping and registration interventions "are only as good as the ability and willingness of institutions and actors to uphold the documented rights; be it the arms of national government, the local authorities, the courts, traditional authorities or society at large". In the short term, land registration appears to reduce conflicts over land, although the process of mapping and registration does initially bring many conflicts to the surface. Immediate, on-the-ground mediation to address disputes over land can settle most of these conflicts on the spot (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b)*. These disputes particularly relate to boundaries. Following a process of boundary demarcation, supported by witnesses, and captured in a computer system, boundaries are clear for the entire community. Similarly, the new plots in the Somali relocation site of Gribble are clear and thus not (yet) disputed. Nevertheless, whereas boundaries are clear, the particular rights enshrined in the document received together with the house and plot may be unclear, as the case in Bosaso, Somalia, shows (Cavallaro, 2025a)*. Confusion also exists with regards to the rights the holders of the document issued to the relocated IDPs in Gribble/Bosaso, Somalia. Even the mayor and Director of Land Department provided conflicting information particularly regarding whether the holders of the document had the right to sell the house and land (Cavallaro, 2024)*. "It is deeply concerning that

several rounds of relocation have by now already been carried out without first ensuring clarity on what "tenure security" actually entails (Cavallaro, 2025b, p. 21)*.

As such, local, participatory approaches that combine registration with alternative dispute resolution do result in a decrease in land related conflicts. At the same time, disputes relating to **inheritance rights** within households have increased in number. This has led some people in the project area in Burundi to note that certification has pushed land conflicts from the community to the household level (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b)*.

Particularly sensitive are situations characterised by **forced migration and return**. Land governance intersects with policies regarding IDPs, refugees and returnees in multiple ways. Firstly, it can formulate laws and policies on the land rights of IDPs, refugees, host communities and returnees. Secondly, it facilitates future land claims by registering boundaries, rights and right holders, both for host communities and displaced people. In Uganda IDPs have a legal right to a piece of land (Balemesa, 2023). In contrast, Burundi's land restitution policies have regulated (and largely failed) to find solutions for overlapping land claims following multiple waves of forced migration and return (de Satgé & Baquero, 2024; Tchatchoua-Djomo et al., 2018). These cases underscore the urgent need for "institutional coordination in dispute resolution between disparate actors or broader groups" (Serwat, 2024, p. 9). The longitudinal research in Nyanza-Lac, Burundi, illustrates this challenge. Fear of conflicts regarding returnees remain and authorities are reluctant to address these complex conflicts. The government has also failed to resolve ongoing ambiguity over land claimed by the State but occupied by communities for generations—a problem brought to light again by recent certification processes (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025a)*. Similarly, conflicts remain around so-called peace villages, for which government obtained land to house returnees (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b)*. Local dispute mechanisms are unable to address such broader concerns.

Analysis of country interventions within the LAS programme finds that the main strategy to long-term strengthening of the rule of law focuses on strengthening institutional capacity, particularly of formal institutions (Serwat, 2024)*. A patchwork of organisations form a hybrid network of actors involved in resolving disputes over land. In the displacement affected context of Bosaso, IDPs, host communities and relocated families all rely on a mix of non-government actors when dealing with land-related disputes. These include IDP camp committees, clan elders and religious leaders who all feel a shared responsibility to resolve conflicts (Cavallaro, 2025b)*. These actors all rely on each other, and attest of a good relationship. Relocation to the Gribble site does seem to have increased trust in the municipality to uphold land rights as evidenced by the issuance of land titles (Cavallaro, 2025b)*. In Nyanza-Lac, Burundi, three formal dispute resolution mechanisms operate alongside traditional players (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b)*. These also seem to work well together, with members of different institutions consulting each other and even members participating in multiple bodies (Emerusenge – 't Lam, 2024).

In the intervention areas in Burundi and Somalia, both characterised by a context of forced migration, government authorities have been able to enhance their power, capturing control over land governance from customary actors (Cavallaro, 2024*; Tchatchoua-Djomo & van Dijk, 2022). Whereas this might strengthen the **social contract** between government and citizens, and for

some people enhance their tenure security (e.g. IDPs relocated to government-owned land in Bosaso, Somalia), others experience uncertainty in their tenure rights due to multiple changes in policies and stakeholders (Tchatchoua-Djomo & van Dijk, 2022). Unclear legal rights in (government-issued) documents undermine the de-jure security (Cavallaro, 2025b)*. Changes in how institutions are coordinated across different administrative levels – and the resulting shifts in power and key actors – can increase the vulnerability of certain groups (Serwat, 2024)*. The evolving of rules, regulations and organisations requires flexibility and adaptability in land governance itself, as well as in donor interventions working on land governance (Chamberlain, 2024; Niyonkuru, 2024)*.

The focus is on capacitating such institutions (both 'formal' and 'informal') to increase the rate of land disputes resolved in a timely manner and address the backlog of court cases. But, this approach does not necessarily account for who benefits from settling these dispute cases" (Serwat, 2024)*.

> *"Resolving numerous cases or a high rate of resolution does not guarantee equitable results but may be the result of highly unequal power dynamics between disputing parties or the inability of vulnerable groups to voice differing perspectives as mediators themselves." (Serwat, 2024, p. 5)*

It is thus important to pay attention to the **actors and power relations** when it comes to assessing access to, and outcomes from, justice and dispute resolution. In his analysis of LAS documents, Serwat, p. (2024, p. 12)* found that "Several studies showed high rates of resolution in favour of powerful landholders, such as the state against an individual landholder, police or military forces and civilians, or wealthy investors against smallholder". This is starkly illustrated by the case of Mozambique where it was noted that whereas "72% of the cases involved local communities against larger-scale private investors, only 34% were resolved in favour of the local communities" (Terra Firma and Centro Terra Viva, 2021, as cited by Serwat, 2024, p. 12)*. Similarly, challenges and lower rate of resolution are reported when disputes involved broader ethnic-communal identities or along clan lines (Serwat, 2024)*.

At the local level, where many LAS interventions operate, hybrid structures of formal and informal power themselves are vying for institutional power. Even the 'apolitical' nature of the structure of "local mediators" remains fragile, with risks of political manipulation by the dominant political power structures, administrative authorities and/or power abuse by mediators (Niyonkuru, 2024; Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b)*. Elites are also in a position to manipulate laws by recognising, defining, or denying rights and making decisions through preferential combinations of pluralistic laws, norms, and practices (Niyonkuru & Munezero, 2025b*; Whitehead & Tsikata, 2003).

This local, participatory strategy of LAS can be seen as fairly successful with regards to the reduction in land related conflicts during and after implementation. The case of relocation of IDPs in Bosaso, Somalia, underlines the importance of **transparent and participatory processes** in the wider process of governing the implementation of projects. A relocation committee is formed with representatives from humanitarian and development agencies as well as the municipality. This committee defines the selection criteria for relocation. Interviews with IDPs, both selected and not selected for relocation, revealed that despite a general understanding of relocation, there

was “limited awareness among IDPs regarding crucial aspects of the relocation process” (Cavallaro, 2025b, p. 31)* such as the selection criteria, and the role of the different actors involved. This gives ground for rumours of discrimination and favouritism. Those IDPs not selected felt that selection is arbitrary or even unfair. They also lacked a channel to express their questions, concerns and grievances. Overall, the study concluded that “relocation is not just a logistical process but an emotional one marked by loss, uncertainty, and complex social dynamics” (Cavallaro, 2025b, p. 34)*.

Land governance can thus contribute to a reduction in land-related conflicts, particularly through transparent, inclusive processes at a local level. Beyond such localised interventions, limits to land-related conflict management were highlighted. In (post-) conflict settings, land rights are characterised by a certain fluidity, in which case Almeida (2021, p. 1) argues that “due to its complexity and political nature, transitional justice for land grievances is ultimately a search for acceptable, rather than optimal, solutions”. Land governance measures also cannot address physical insecurity. Even where land rights can be safeguarded on paper, the impact of such interventions will be negligent if the rights holders are not safe to work their plots or live in their house.

3.4 Climate resilience

Climate change is generally regarded as one of the world’s most pressing global challenges. It has very strong links to land, and land use, and therefore to land governance (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022). The LAS programme acknowledges the importance of building climate resilience, including this as a selection criteria for project funding. Two particular strategies are implemented to increase climate resilience: land use planning and strengthened tenure security.

Local community-based initiatives for **climate resilient land use planning** have been successful within several LAS projects. These in-situ activities are implemented in contexts where people feel the negative impact of climate related events and are thus motivated to tackle their challenges. Examples are the break down of the ecological function of wetlands in Uganda, and deforestation and changes in climatic patterns in indigenous reserves in Colombia (Mwesigye et al., 2023; van der Hammen & Roderiguez, 2023)*. Both have resulted in a decrease in agricultural production and income. LAS has facilitated the formation and training of community structures tasked with the planning of collective resources. These community structures, that include men and women, fill a gap in more formal land use planning processes where public land institutions may be functioning to a limited extend and have insufficient knowledge and resources to plan, implement and monitor climate resilient land use plans (Sliuzas et al., 2023)*. Furthermore, top-down land use planning by government institutions and legal limitations on land use in high-risk areas can be unrealistic as people do live on, and use, such high-risk land, making trade-offs between risk and livelihoods. In these situations, rather than being protected by the State, the land use laws can be used as a tool for dispossession (Jacobs & Almeida, 2020). On the other hand, the case of Somalia illustrates how migration as coping strategy to climate change can be associated with instances of maladjustment when land use plans are absent. “As a result of poor land use and lack of up-to-date regulatory frameworks to guide urban growth, several urban settlements in Somalia have informally encroached on public lands, peri-urban agricultural areas, forests, and wooded

lands, as well as on low-lying areas and other meteorologically hazardous areas ill-suited for human settlement. In many cities, vulnerable groups, including refugees and poor rural migrants, live in areas prone to flooding risks. This unchecked urbanization via displacement settlements not only poses environmental risks in urban and peri-urban areas, but also intensifies pressure on already scarce resources like water, food, and energy" (Boers et al., 2023, p. 47)*. In the Gribble relocation site, conscious maladaptive measures are implemented, with the site being prone to flooding as it is situated close to a river, and with boreholes being dug in a water scarce area. On a positive note, temperatures in this relocation site are cooler, motivating family members to move from the inner city camps for an extended period during the hot summer months (Cavallaro, 2025a)*.

A second strategy to build climate resilience is to **strengthen tenure security**. The assumption is that this allows for investment in strengthening adaptive capacity and reduction of vulnerability to climate hazards. Evidence for this assumption is generally positive (Chamberlain, 2025)*. Secure, long-term tenure through ownership or inheritance allows farmers to apply long-term soil conservation strategies, investments to prevent erosion, and/or agro-forestry, whereas short-term leases prevent such strategies. In addition to tenure security, smallholder farmers need capital, technical training and knowledge on climate change and appropriate adaptation strategies as well as supportive government policies. Field research in Burundi indicates the important role of resilience stewardship training on farmers investment into sustainable land management (Schüller, 2023). Research has also found that people without secure tenure rights are also more vulnerable to climatic changes. In particular pastoralists, forest dwellers and relocated people suffer from weak tenure and high vulnerability to their livelihoods through climate related changes. Lastly, **climate change itself impacts on (perceived) tenure security** as farmers are unable to pay their land rental, climate hazards cause temporary or permanent displacement, and the construction of climate resilient infrastructure leads to displacement. As community members move away, social networks are eroded, resulting in cultural and psychological impacts. Government policies and global processes that monetise natural resources negatively affect communities livelihoods (Spierenburg, 2021)*.

Based on analysis of four LAS interventions, Sliuzas et al. (2023)* reflect that community-based initiatives are to be appreciated and can produce durable and sustainable outcomes, but these need to address the diversity within a community and be backed by government bodies. Climate resilience strategies also play at a wider scale, such as through large-scale migration and urbanisation. Clear legal frameworks and institutions need to guide land governance and climate resilience building, with awareness of the many connections between both fields and identifying potential risks of maladjustment and negative consequences for certain groups.

3.5 SCALING

Scaling is at the heart of the LAND-at-scale programme. Scaling and scaling potential are key in the way the programme was designed and is reflected in its main three pillars. The first pillar is about scaling successful initiatives and projects; the second pillar focuses on land governance innovations with scaling potential; and the third pillar covers knowledge management, with a focus on gaining a deeper understanding on the conditions required to make scaling successful

(Chamberlain & Betsema, 2022)*. Strategies implemented by project partners focus on capacity building for sustained impact, documenting lessons learned to share with other stakeholders, and engagement with multiple stakeholders, particularly local and national governments (Chamberlain & Betsema, 2022)*.

Literature review shows that approaches to, and ideas about, scaling have changed over time, and cautions against regarding scaling as automatically desirable and possible (Spierenburg, 2023)*. While in some policy contexts there is still a strong belief in technological development as the most important driver of change – especially in a context of rapidly evolving AI techniques – there is a growing recognition that change and interventions to bring about change are context dependent (Greven, 2023)*. Furthermore, there are many definitions and meanings of scaling. Types of scaling can refer to spatial, temporal or institutional change, whereas scaling can also be regarded as a process towards scaling up (to increase output), scaling out (increase production), or scaling deep (changing beliefs) (Lam et al., 2020; McLean & Gargani, 2019).

What has come to the forefront is that it is important to understand how change is happening. This involves understanding the **interconnectedness of social, institutional and technical change**. Change is an "iterative process in which technological change is adapted to local, social and institutional contexts, but once implemented, requires renewed attention to the social and institutional situation as these will (need to) adapt to the changes resulting from the implementation of new technologies" (Spierenburg, 2023, p. 3)*. These processes play out at multiple levels. Scaling risks are associated with distortions created due to simplifications and reductions of change processes and the contexts in which these take place, and because of limitations in the linear approaches often associated with scaling innovations and change, and what Wigboldus refers to as a 'misguided pro-scaling bias (Wigboldus, 2018).

In section 3.1 it was stated that tenure security is strengthened particularly by participatory, inclusive, and context-sensitive processes. To be effective, sustainable and scalable, such local processes need to be interlinked with regional, national and international actors. Land documents need to be recognised by credit providers if access to credit is an objective. Neighbouring districts need to be involved if climate-resilient land use plans are to be effective. And local dispute resolution bodies are often insufficient when dealing with conflicts that extend beyond their boundaries or involve outside actors (Serwat, 2024). Furthermore, interventions take place within a complex web of interconnected relationships - even among categories often presented as opposites, such as statutory vs customary rights, local vs national regulations and human vs non-human interests (Chamberlain, 2024)*. Understanding these relationships is essential for establishing an effective and equitable land governance system.

Our research has also found that there are severe limitations to scaling certain approaches in practice. The relocation of IDPs in Bosaso, Somalias is a particularly striking example (Cavallaro, 2025b)*. Over a period of five years, IDPs have been moved from inner city camps to the Gribble relocation site outside Bosaso. In Gribble, they experience physical security and security from eviction. At the same time, they appreciate this because it comes for free, paid for by development partners. Relocating all IDPs is beyond the capabilities of these partners. Furthermore, the relocation process was designed to empty the inner city camps so as to free these areas for

city/infrastructure development. In practice, new IDPs continue to move into these camps. There is no monitoring or enforcement to keep the vacated plots empty, there is no clear strategy for the development of the camp area, and there is no financial incentive for the private owner of the land to keep the area empty. These insights in the processes behind relocation lay bare the limitations of this approach.

> *"The prevailing sentiment is clear: Gribble is not a panacea, but for those who have lived in the camps for years, it is a welcome alternative – as long as it remains for free." (Cavallaro, 2025b, p. 37)*

"**Responsible scaling** takes time and calls for a reflexive approach, including posing ethical questions about scaling. What is the purpose of scaling, what visions of the future are at stake, whose visions, and who ultimately benefits? […] This approach to scaling starts at the local level, with a collaborative exploration of the problem at hand, the way the context impacts the problem, to develop a diversity of response options to address the problem. It is the start of an iterative process in which locally-based interventions are evaluated, as well as the changes occurring when interventions are scaled – when scaling is deemed possible. This approach directs our attention to the possible unintended/negative impacts of scaling, and emphasises the need to establish interlinked, but also inclusive networks of stakeholders and partnerships to coordinate scaling" (Spierenburg, 2023, p. 5). This does require supportive donors who allow longer-term funding and look beyond rapid, quantifiable results (Greven, 2023)*.

4 Conclusion: Equitable and sustainable land governance to strengthen security

Through the LAND-at-scale programme, and particularly its knowledge management component, valuable lessons have been learned that contribute toward equitable and sustainable land governance. Further insights have been formulated on how land governance contributes to improved livelihoods, in particular through strengthening tenure security.

Localised, participatory processes, regulated by local structures of decision making have addressed localised sources of tenure insecurity. Clarification of boundaries, as well as collective land use mapping are tangible examples. Hybrid networks of local structures have been capacitated to uphold and enforce land-related decisions. Such localised approaches can also open the discussion on unequal customary practices and actively strengthen land rights of vulnerable groups. Dialogue that brings together conflicting groups and interests can work towards aligning priorities and mitigating some of the risks, at least when it comes to local decision making. Land governance can also play a key role in strengthening intra-household tenure security for women, particularly through targeted policies and regulations during critical life events—such as birth, death, marriage, and divorce—when the direction of their security path changes, often towards increased vulnerability. Tenure security can be strengthened as a result. The subsequent attribution of strengthened tenure security to improved livelihoods remains complex, with economic and educational capabilities impacting on the ability of land right holders to use their land.

It needs to be stressed that tenure security is not a binary situation or clearly measurable parameter (Zevenbergen & Van Westen, 2023)*. Rather, it is a path with steps being made by different people at different speed. Nair Ambujam (2024) argues to rethink land security as a verb, that requires continuous negotiation and work. This holds particularly for vulnerable communities and people at the margins of society "for whom land security is not a guarantee but a continuous and ongoing struggle— one that requires sustained action to uphold". Land governance can be a step that can contribute to overcome certain forms of insecurity at a particular point in time. In line with this path thinking, it helps to search for acceptable solutions, instead of optimal outcomes (Almeida, 2021), and revisiting regularly as to what a next acceptable solution would be.

Furthermore, tenure security is not solely determined by land governance. In contexts of conflict and violence people are physically unable to access their land. Climate change leaves land degraded, or unusable, and forces people to relocated to other locations. In such situations, land governance can mitigate negative effects, but it cannot address the root causes of insecurity.

At the same time, localised approaches are situated within wider contexts of change, politics and power. Land governance at local level links into such processes. It is at this level where changes can address structural inequalities in access to, and use of, land. Directions as to the role of land are also set beyond the local context, for example through providing legal protection to lands of indigenous communities to acknowledge that land is more than an economic asset. Neo-colonial and neo-liberal thinking and protection of privileges and power undermine desires for more equal land policies (Chamberlain, 2025*; German, 2022). Interventions that implement registration of ownership rights align with such thinking and have been found to pose severe risks to the vulnerable groups they claim to protect. They contrast with "many actors who do not frame land tenure primarily in economic terms, but rather in social and cultural terms, questions of historical redress, and the importance of securing the rights of indigenous peoples as part of strategies to tackle climate change" (Sorensen & Chamberlain, 2022)*. Who gets to decide what the bigger picture is, whose rights need protection, and who determines what is fair (Chamberlain, 2023b)*?

Lastly, external interventions that work in the area of land governance are exposed to risks that undermine the long-term changes on the ground. The first concern is that changes cannot be sustained when external financing is withdrawn. Secondly, without monitoring and continuous dialogue driven by implementing partners, structural changes to unequal customary practices are slowly eroding. Training of local champions often takes longer than the duration of project cycles. Finally, more fundamental questions are raised regarding the local fit of such interventions if local realities are not accommodated.

Although overcoming entrenched "western" thinking of ownership, established networks of power, and dealing with increasing shifts in weather patterns, is no easy feat, we can learn from previous experience and nurture the seeds sown in the past. We need to acknowledge that "People's relations to the land are shaped by varied histories of land dispossession and acquisition. They are determined by the complex interplay between social values, customary and statutory law, politics, poverty, relative power, conflict and climate vulnerability. They reflect the ways these relationships play out in time and place. It is these factors to which we must attend if we are to make progress in securing equitable land rights for all (de Satgé, 2022).

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ANNEX 1 THEMATIC LEARNING AGENDA

Informing the activities were core questions on cross-cutting themes of relevance for LAS. These themes were identified based on common themes in country interventions as well as the priorities of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs as donor, and RVO as programme manager. The themes and questions we worked towards, and for which this synthesis has started to provide answers to are:

Tenure security

a) What can be learnt from different approaches to promoting land tenure security in terms of: if and how they strengthen tenure security, for whom, and under what conditions? What are the risks reported for different approaches and how can these be mitigated or avoided, also in relation to efforts to scaling?
b) To what extent do secure tenure rights enable the environment for other development objectives; under what conditions? What combinations of interventions make positive contributions to achieving these down stream objectives?
c) How to ensure improved land governance and tenure security are sustained after a project intervention?

Gender

a) How to ensure that activities aiming to secure women's land rights have a long-term, positive impact on women with regards to i) their social status in their local communities; ii) their food security; and/or iii) their income/financial position?
b) How to scale successful approaches to securing women's land rights without losing the effectiveness of these approaches?

Rule of Law and conflict sensitivity in (post-)conflict settings

a) How to adapt land-related interventions to changing circumstances in conflict and volatile situations?
b) Do no harm principle: how to apply this principle in practice and monitor over time?
    (i) How to identify vulnerable groups without creating a harmful power disbalance at the community-level, and how to ensure continuous meaningful input from those groups?
    (ii) What kind of grievance mechanisms exist/are used in LAS projects? How to ensure that these aren't symbolic in nature, but are effectively used and trusted by local communities?
    (iii) How to anticipate and manage the impact on conflict dynamics around and due to interventions and strengthen formal and informal mechanisms for conflict resolution and access to justice?
c) How to ensure tenure security in settings affected by forced displacement, for IDPs and returnees as well as the staying population. Are there regional differences? What can be learnt from approaches globally?

Resilience for climate change

a) How and under which circumstances can land use planning be an effective tool for climate change adaptation/decrease land degradation?
b) What is the relationship between security of land tenure and climate change and how/under what conditions can the promotion of land tenure security contribute to combatting climate change and building land users' resilience?

Scaling

a) What are possible/suitable approaches to scaling for land-related interventions?
b) What (pre-)conditions need to be in place to successfully scale a land intervention? Under which conditions does it work/when doesn't it work? In what ways does the context play a role? What are the risks involved in scaling when one does not control contextual factors?
c) How can LAS scaling strategies be improved?

ANNEX 2 ACADEMIC KM PUBLICATIONS

Thematic studies

Synthesis of existing evidence on longer-term effects of gender-focused land interventions.
Dora Dadey, Monica Lengoiboni, Ajay Bailey, Wytske Chamberlain

Land governance and climate resilience. A review and case studies from LAND-at-scale projects.
Richard Sliuzas. With contributions by Wytske Chamberlain-van der Werf, Borges Chivambo, Berta Rafael, Simon-Peter Mwesigye, Teddy Kisembo, Jordana Wamboga, Evelyne Ajambo, Maria Clara van der Hammen, Carlos Rodriguez, Karel Boers, Federica Acquaviva, Marta Cavallaro, Monica Lengoiboni

Scaling in context. Towards responsible scaling in land governance interventions.
Marja Spierenburg

Understanding Institutional Access Strengthening and Coordination for Land Dispute Resolution. Experiences from LAND-at-scale Interventions.
Ladd Serwat

Land tenure security as the Holy Grail – Do mapping and registration bring what is often assumed? (FIG 2023 Working Week paper)
Jaap Zevenbergen, Guus van Westen

Land Tenure Security – Assumptions Reviewed. Annex to paper "Land tenure security as Holy Grail"
Kim Hillenbrand

Tenure Security for Sustainable Livelihoods – Applying the Sustainable Livelihood Framework to strengthen impact pathways from land to livelihoods
Wytske Chamberlain

Longitudinal research

Amahoro@Scale Longitudinal Study. Synthesis Report
René-Claude Niyonkuru & Camille Munezero

Amahoro@Scale Longitudinal Study. Phase 2 Final report.
René-Claude Niyonkuru

Amahoro@Scale Longitudinal Study phase 3-4. Final report EN
René-Claude Niyonkuru & Camille Munezero

Amahoro@Scale étude longitudinal phases 3-4. Rapport final FR
René-Claude Niyonkuru & Camille Munezero

Displacement, tenure security and land governance in Bosaso, Somalia. Final report.
Marta Cavallaro

Phase 1 Somalia final report and Phase 2 Somalia final report
Marta Cavallaro

Phase 2 Somalia report
Marta Cavallaro

Policy briefs

Shifting actor and power relations to the centre of land dispute resolution. Recommendations based on LAND-at-scale experiences.
Ladd Serwat

Déplacer les parties et les relations de pouvoir au centre de la résolution des litiges fonciers.
Ladd Serwat

Sustaining Tenure Security for Improved Livelihoods – A policy brief
Wytske Chamberlain

Horizontal learning network / contextual research

L'accès au foncier sécurisé des femmes rurales du Tchad : analyse à partir de quelques localités dans le Chari-Baguirmi et Hadjer-Lamis.
Mahamat Abdoulaye Malloum, Soumaïne Adoum Soumaïne

Visions and expectations of young people in the municipality of Solano Caquetá, Colombia.
ICCO Conexión and Tropenbos Colombia

Paralegals and the Protection of Land Rights in the Communities of Manhiça and Massingir, Southern Mozambique.
Crescêncio Tamele, Lino Manuel, Teresa Nube

Final report HLN
Dominique Schmid

Sécurisation foncière et inclusion sociale des groupes vulnérables en milieu rural. Rapport de la recherche dans les villages de cinq communes du cercle de Kati (2023).
Fatoumata Sissoko, Bitibali Monique Dougnon

Curated conference reports

Land Governance and the Politics of Fair Transitions: Deepening the Search for Social Justice (2024).
Wytske Chamberlain

Fair Transitions and the Politics of Land. Institutions and Imaginaries for Inclusive Futures (2023).
Wytske Chamberlain