Unpacking tenure security in rural Mozambique

K NOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT REPORT

LAND-AT-SCALE Mozambique

JAN 2026



Van Vollenhoven Institute for Law, Governance & Society

Universiteit Leiden

Authors: Bernardo Almeida & Carolien Jacobs

Citation:

Almeida, B. and C. Jacobs, 2026. *Unpacking tenure security in rural Mozambique*, LAND-at-scale Knowledge Management Report.

A Portuguese version of this report can be found with the following reference:

Almeida, B. e C. Jacobs, 2026. *Segurança da Posse da Terra nas Áreas Rurais de Moçambique*, Relatório LAND-at-scale.

The authors would like to thank Joel Horácio, Amande Masquine, and Terra Firma and Centro Terra Viva staff for their support in the field research. We also thank Joeri Reinders for his help in creating a map of the field sites, and Gemma Betsema and Imke Greven of RVO for their support to the project.

Bernardo's research time on this report was supported by the project *Climate change response in weak rule-of-law environments: protecting land rights of the most vulnerable*, which is financed by the Dutch Research Council (NWO).

LAND-at-scale is a land governance support program that aims to directly strengthen essential land governance components for men, women, and youth that have the potential to contribute to structural, just, sustainable and inclusive change at scale in lower- and middle-income countries, regions or landscapes.

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This material has been funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is managed by the Netherlands Enterprise and Development Agency. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the Netherlands Government's official policies.

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Table of contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS **2**
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **3**
1. INTRODUCTION **6**
1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTIONS 7
2. BACKGROUND **9**
2.1 THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS ON TENURE SECURITY 9
2.2 MAPPING AND REGISTRATION OF LAND TITLES 10
2.3 LAND RIGHTS, LAND REGISTRATION, AND TENURE SECURITY IN MOZAMBIQUE 12
3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH SETTING **15**
4. PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS TERRA FIRMA AND CTV **17**
4.1 TERRA FIRMA 17
4.2 CENTRO TERRA VIVA 19
5. LAND ACCESS AND LIVELIHOODS IN NHAMATANDA DISTRICT **22**
5.1. ACCESS TO LAND IN NHAMATANDA DISTRICT 23
5.2 CONSTRAINING LIVELIHOODS IN NHAMATANDA DISTRICT 25
6. ASSESSING INTERVENTION IMPACTS ON LAND TENURE SECURITY **27**
6.1 LEGAL LITERACY ON LAND RIGHTS 27
6.2 LEGAL TENURE SECURITY 28
6.3 PERCEIVED TENURE SECURITY 28
6.4 DE FACTO TENURE SECURITY 29
6.5 AWARENESS RAISING, REGISTRATION, AND TENURE SECURITY 31
7. FURTHER IMPACTS OF AWARENESS RAISING AND LAND REGISTRATION **34**
7.1 AWARENESS RAISING, REGISTRATION AND LIVELIHOODS 34
7.2 AWARENESS RAISING, REGISTRATION, AND CLIMATE CHANGE RESPONSES 36
7.2.1 Community responses to climate change *36*
7.2.2 State-led responses to climate change *37*
7.3 OTHER IMPACTS OF LAS INTERVENTIONS 39
8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS **41**
8.1 RECOMMENDATIONS 43
BIBLIOGRAPHY **44**

Executive summary

This study investigates how rural people in Nhamatanda district, central Mozambique, experience land tenure security, the external factors that shape it, and its impact on livelihoods and resilience. The research contributes to ongoing discussions on how LAND-at-scale Mozambique (LAS-Moz) interventions can more effectively strengthen tenure security in Mozambique.

Our findings show that people have limited awareness of the rules regulating their legal rights. Few respondents knew that their occupation of land—whether through customary arrangements or good faith use for more than ten years—already provides them with legal tenure security under Mozambique's Land Law. Many continue to assume that only formal documents that recognize a DUAT can guarantee security. Raising awareness about people's land rights is hence still needed. However, in Nhamatanda district threats to tenure security remain limited, with relatively low pressure over land, very few communal disputes, and no significant investor interest. As a result, many people who lack formal documents still feel secure, since their land is not threatened. Yet, literature on Mozambique, as well as responses from state officials, show that events such as investor interest on land can quickly erode the de facto tenure security which people currently have. Therefore, the current openness of state entities to the communal land registration conducted by Terra Firma is an opportunity to provide communities with tools to better respond to further threats.

The key exception regarding perceived tenure security relates to the Gorongosa National Park (GNP). Community members living in the current buffer zone of the park often expressed concerns that wildlife undermines their livelihoods and feared that a future expansion of the park could displace them. This fear feeds into a general climate of distrust toward the park, despite its investments in this area, in terms of livelihood support, education, and health care. Unless livelihood protection improves—such as through stronger fencing systems—and communication between the park and communities is enhanced, these tensions are likely to persist. In this regard, people report that communal land registration would give them a stronger voice towards the GNP.

Another significant challenge arises from the impacts of climate change: During the field visit, a long-lasting drought threatened people's agricultural production and resilience. While tenure security itself does not hinder community-led climate adaptation, problems emerge when the state intervenes, for instance by relocating people from high-risk areas. Without clarity on their rights, communities risk becoming the ones who bear the costs of resettlement. The involvement of CTV in land use planning represents an opportunity to integrate risk mapping, particularly if communal-level mapping is prioritized before (and feeds into) district-level planning to ensure that local realities are captured.

In conclusion, interventions under LAS-Moz can have a transformative impact if they continue to strengthen awareness of rights, prioritize inclusive communal registration, integrate climate and land planning, and make better use of available land data.

Recommendations

- **Training on land rights is essential** to deconstruct legal myths and to raise awareness about the rights which people have, regardless of a formal title document. Such training should be well-tailored to the capacity of communities and avoid technical jargon when targeting community members and paralegals. It is preferred to provide training in local languages and not in Portuguese to increase accessibility for all.
- **Training cannot be a one-off event.** For awareness raising to be effective, activities should take place with some regularity. Training should also be paired with materials like short leaflets that provide more information and refresh people's memories. These can serve as a resource when the state, investors, or other land claimants approach communities.
- **Pay attention to inclusivity.** In the process of raising awareness, training, mapping, and registration, the diversity of perspectives and experiences within a community must be considered. The rights of newcomers and women, for example, may be weaker and based on secondary rights. They risk losing out if incentives are provided for individual registration. Although trainers already address this issue, it remains an ongoing priority to ensure inclusive participation.
- **Link land use planning with climate risks.** When developing land use plans at communal and district levels, attention should be given to areas at risk from climate change: Where are these areas located? Who uses them? What measures can reduce risks? Ideally, communal land delimitation and communal plans should precede district plans and form their foundation.
- **Prioritize communal over individual registration** in areas like Nhamatanda, where land-related disputes are rare, land pressure is low, and investor interest remains limited. Individual registration risks disempowering some members (e.g., newcomers) in favor of others (e.g., customary leaders), without clear benefits. Given state support for communal registration, resources should be concentrated here. Communities should also be clearly informed whether individual parcel delimitation will follow, while the protective value of communal delimitation should be emphasized.
- **Update registered land.** Where individual registration is undertaken, a system must be in place to keep records updated. This system should be simple enough to be managed by trained community representatives. Outdated records risk undermining the relevance of registration and creating new disputes.
- **Capitalize on existing data.** Terra Firma's online database contains substantial amounts of valuable land data that remain underutilized. Greater use by government, investors, civil society, and researchers could support more targeted interventions and accountability.

- **Strengthening State Ownership of Community Land Registration**. While the Mozambican model of civil society–led communal land registration offers many advantages, the literature on land registration in other countries shows a latent risk that its results may later be rejected by state officials and/or politicians. It is therefore important to explore opportunities to further engage and secure the commitment of state officials and politicians to the final outcomes of the land registration process.
- **Manage expectations around investors.** Communities often see land registration as a way to attract investors, without being fully aware of the risks. Training and registration processes should provide a realistic perspective on both the benefits and downsides of outside investment. Livelihood interventions should also explore alternative, more independent paths for development.

1. Introduction

This report presents findings of the study 'Unpacking tenure security in rural Mozambique', commissioned by the Dutch Enterprise Agency (RVO). RVO is responsible for the implementation of LAND-at-scale (LAS), a multi-year land governance support programme funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme contributes to 'improving land governance as a building block for food security, economic development, and peace and stability in developing countries'.[1] LAND-at-scale Mozambique (LAS-Moz) aims specifically on scaling community legal literacy, land rights certification, and climate resilience.[2] For this purpose, LAS-Moz works with two main partners: Terra Firma, which focuses primarily on community land rights certification through its project *"Scaling Community Land Rights Certification in Municipal Areas of Mozambique"*, and Centro Terra Viva (CTV), which implements the project *"Scaling Community Legal Literacy, Land Rights Certification and Climate Resilience."* Both projects are supposed to operate in synergy with each other and together contribute to improving communities land tenure security.

After the backlash of De Soto's assumptions on the benefits of individual land titling, the last two decades have been marked by a growing push from academics and practitioners for alternative solutions to improve tenure security, such as community titling. The 1997 Mozambican Land Law allows this type of communal titling, and the country has a considerable track record with it. However, the push for community titling comes with a number of assumptions: Firstly, it assumes that community titling can only have an impact if communities have some legal literacy, know how to secure their titles, and see an interest in strengthening their tenure security through communal titling. Secondly, it assumes that greater tenure security improves people's lives and livelihoods by encouraging investment, reducing poverty, and enhancing resilience to climate-related threats. These assumptions underlie the two projects that are currently being executed in Mozambique as part of the LAS-Moz programme.

But are these assumptions correct? Does legal tenure security provided through community titling change people's perceived and de facto tenure security? Security against which threats? And do improvements in people's tenure security positively impact their livelihoods? If we understand land tenure not in binary terms of secure/insecure, formal/informal, or de facto/de jure, but consider them instead as a continuum, it also means that the provision of formal titles may not automatically turn people's position from insecure to secure tenure. Other actors and factors may play a role in determining people's perceived and de facto tenure security. By focusing on the LAS-Moz projects, this report aims to explore: (1) the underlying dynamics that impact on tenure security as a continuum of land tenure; (2) assess to what extent raising legal awareness and promoting community land rights certification can contribute to improvements in tenure security; and (3) explore the impacts of tenure (in)security on rural people's livelihoods. In relation to this, we briefly reflect on the possible added value of combining LAS land support with other livelihood support

[1] https://projects.rvo.nl/programmes/nl-kvk-27378529-4000002531, viewed on 11.05.2025.
[2] https://projects.rvo.nl/projects/nl-kvk-27378529-las21mz1s, viewed on 11.05.2025.

interventions. We also explore other contextual factors that impact on people's tenure security and livelihoods, especially climate change and nature conservation. Finally, the report aims to analyse ways in which improved tenure security can contribute to better lives and livelihoods and to increased resilience against climate change.

The study was conducted in the district of Nhamatanda, which is an area of focus for both LAS-Moz's partners. The fact that part of Nhamatanda is covered by the Sustainable Livelihood Development Program in the Gorongosa National Park, supported by the Dutch Embassy made the district even more interesting to our study.

Our report ends with recommendations for policy and programming on land tenure security and on livelihoods in Mozambique in general, and more specifically in relation to the projects that are currently funded by RVO through its Land-at-Scale programme. We also briefly reflect on our findings in relation to the Gorongosa Restoration Project. Since large part of our empirical data was collected in the buffer zone of the Gorongosa National Park, our respondents often talked about their experience with the park, and the impact of wildlife on their livelihoods.

1.1 Research objective and questions

This research aims to get better insight in ways in which rural people in Nhamatanda district, in central Mozambique experience their tenure security, to what extent external factors impact on their tenure security, and how tenure security impacts on lives, livelihoods and resilience of people.

Main question:
Which actors and factors impact (positively and negatively) on Mozambicans' tenure security, and to what extent does tenure security impact on their everyday lives, livelihoods, and resilience?

Sub questions:

1. Which perceptions do people have of their tenure security, and how are these perceptions shaped?
2. To what extent do people have knowledge of de jure tenure security and attach value to land registration documents? And which are the differences towards communal and individual approaches to titling?
3. How is tenure security shaped in practice?
4. To what extent does tenure security impact on the decisions people take in terms of lives, livelihoods, and resilience (against climatic shocks, crop failure, mobility)? And how do these decisions, in turn, affect tenure security?

The next chapter provides a brief background on our theoretical understanding of tenure security, and the legal and lived realities of tenure security in the context of Mozambique. Chapter two provides more detail

on our research methodology and the various research sites that we visited. In chapter three we present the main results of our study: we introduce both LAS-Moz projects in further detail, and reflect on perceived, legal, and de facto tenure security.

2. Background

2.1 Theoretical reflections on tenure security

Land tenure is commonly defined as "the relationship, whether legally or customarily defined, among people, as individuals or groups, with respect to land" (FAO, 2002). Promoting land tenure security is a common policy objective of many land interventions, seen to provide security to both people and their livelihoods (Zevenbergen & Van Westen, 2023), but also as an objective that can contribute to other goals such as economic development, food security, climate resilience, gender equality, or conflict management. In general though, there is agreement that tenure security is complex and there is no unanimous position in the literature about the best way in which interventions can increase tenure security (Chamberlain, 2025; van Leeuwen et al., 2023; Zevenbergen & Van Westen, 2023).

To understand how tenure security can be strengthened, we first take a step back and explore what tenure security actually means in people's daily lives, and how it shapes livelihoods, development, and climate resilience. For this, the distinction between *legal* tenure security, *perceived* tenure security and *de facto* tenure security allow us to go beyond an active and passive idea of tenure security (van Gelder, 2010). *Legal tenure security* refers to 'the legal status of tenure and its protection backed up by state authority' (ibid, 451), meaning here that one's tenure is recognized and protected by state law. *Perceived tenure security* refers to the feeling of security that land holders have of their land tenure (ibid., 451): How do people experience their own situation? Finally, *de facto tenure security* refers to the 'actual control of property, regardless of the legal status in which it is held' (ibid., 451), meaning here the combination of factors on the ground that can be more or less conducive for one's tenure to be affected by others, and what really happens in practice, for instance when a third party wants to claim access to a plot of land.

This 'tripartite view' allows for a more grounded understanding of tenure security. For instance, a land holder in an informal settlement might have no legal tenure security –i.e., no legally recognized land right—but, due to a number of factors such as the size of the settlement, the cohesion of the community, and the risk of large-spread civil unrest, the risk of eviction may still be minor. Such land holders may have strong *de facto* tenure security. The same land holders might also have a strong perceived tenure security, despite lacking formally recognized rights, if they do not perceive any eminent threat to their tenure. But the opposite might also happen, for instance in a country with a weak rule of law environment, where the state institutions can cherry pick or ignore legal provisions and obligations and where access to courts is limited, legal tenure security might not automatically mean a strong de facto security.

In sum, we argue for a grounded understanding of tenure security, based on a tripartite view of tenure security. Focusing only on legal tenure security is too narrow and presumes that factors such as a strong rule of law environment, a functioning court system, and access to legal information and aid are guaranteed. Yet in many countries these conditions may not all be in place, and sometimes even be a far reality. For

many (informal) urban and rural dwellers, de facto and/or perceived tenure security may hence play a much larger role in how people relate to their land (Van Gelder, 2009). Nonetheless, looking at the recent history of policy interventions, it can be noted that in last decades, donor and policy makers' interventions in the land sector have been primarily focused on legal tenure security, more specifically on land mapping and titling, as discussed in the following section. It is therefore also important to consider the rationale behind such interventions and their impact in practice.

2.2 Mapping and registration of land titles

Land mapping and registration of land titles has been seen by many governments and donor agencies as the 'holy grail' of tenure security (Zevenbergen & Van Westen, 2023).[3] Land mapping and registration makes land rights more readable for states, and therefore allows them to have more control over their territories (Scott, 1998, p. 37). Hernando De Soto's ideas on strengthening tenure security through formalisation and registration were not new, but during the early 2000's he was particularly effective in promoting land mapping and registration of titles as 'the' solution for the problems of the Global South (De Soto, 2000). Such an approach was in line with evolutionary theories of land rights promoted during colonial ventures, which viewed individual and formalized land rights as a natural progression from communal rights,[4] enabling a supposedly more economically efficient use of land (Atwood, 1990, p. 659; Dekker, 2005, p. 167; Platteau, 1996).

While De Soto's arguments have significantly influenced many donor agencies and policymakers, a substantial body of academic literature has been much more critical about the assumptions under which individual registration is promoted, and the positive effects it may have (Bruce, 2012; Otto, 2009). Not only is titling a complex, and expensive process that is difficult to complete without major administrative support and investments Land registration can also have numerous negative effects, such as allowing wealthy elites to capture land (Benjaminsen et al., 2009), and exacerbating conflicts by ignoring overlapping claims, and multiple rights and uses (Peters, 2009). Those with secondary rights, such as women, are often excluded and negatively impacted by land registration (Kaarhus et al., 2005). Often land registration is also at odds with the flexibility and complexity of customary-based land tenure systems and seriously undermines the power of customary authorities that may effectively manage areas where the state does not have a strong presence (Alden Wily, 2018). Moreover, weak administrative and legal structures, for instance without mechanisms

[3] Expressions such as *mapping*, *titling*, *cadaster*, *registration*, *land registry*, *property registry*, *legalization* and *formalization* are often used with different meanings, interchangeably between them, or at times with unclear meaning (Almeida, 2022). While discussion of each of these terms is outside of the scope of this report, we use mapping and registration of land titles to refer to the process through which land parcels are delimited in an official map, and land rights over those parcels are registered in a property registry.

[4] We use the expression 'communal land rights' to refer to rights over land that is collectively claimed by a community, although under the umbrella of that claim individual rights to land might also exist, acknowledging that this and similar expressions are often used with various meanings and limitations (Almeida, 2022, p. 18; Dekker, 2005, p. 160).

for updating land records, often results in outdated and unreliable land registries (Almeida, 2021; Bruce et al., 1994, p. 261).

In the last two decades the progressive debunking of the advantages of promoting individual land rights, combined with a stronger push for taking local, indigenous and customary systems of tenure more seriously, pushed a growing number of countries to give (more) legal recognition of and stronger protection to communal land rights. This has led to more initiatives focused on the mapping and registration of communal land (Alden Wily, 2018; German, 2022). It is often less complex than registering individual land rights, while still aiming to strengthen the protection of individual rights within communities, particularly against third parties. Communal land registration also avoids some of the pitfalls of individual registration. There is for instance still space for local authorities to have a voice in the intra-communal division of land.

Communal land registration can also have a number of detrimental impacts on the lives and livelihoods of community members. It can for instance work out as a mechanism of exclusion: If some people within the community do not have a long history of origin within that community, they may risk being excluded and not seen as belonging, and hence as not entitled to take part in the participatory community mapping. It is therefore important to carefully consider intra-group dynamics. Even when land registration legislation regulations include important steps such as community consultation (e.g., Mozambique and Peru), practice shows that community consultations often do not meet the standards of representation (German, 2022).

One of the main difficulties that communal land registration faces in many countries is the competition it generates with state claims, particularly when communal rights are recognized over large and resource-rich tracts of land. As vastly described in the literature, many countries coming out of colonial ventures relied on inherited colonial rules to become 'property monsters' (Benda-Beckmann, 2003, p. 189). The recognition of communal rights to land means a decrease of state land, which is often resisted by politicians and state officials (Almeida, 2022, p. 87; Lucas & Warren, 2013; Norfolk & Tanner, 2007, p. 33). Therefore, it is common that, when allowed, registration of communal land rights is paired with restrictions. For instance, communities are only allowed to claim land being used for housing and ongoing farming, while claims over forest land or natural parks are by law or de facto excluded (Baird & Wittayapak, 2025, p. 5; Bedner, 2016).[5] Other restrictions include the recognition of secondary rights instead of full ownership of the land (Alden Wily, 2018, p. 8; Baird and Wittayapak, 2025, p. 6). The lack of approval of implementing regulations on the mapping and registration of communal land also limits in practice the use of this legal tool (Unruh, 2012; Alden Wily, 2018, p. 8). There are also cases in which the restrictions imposed in mapping and registering communal land rights are in line with ethnic or cultural divisions, imposing burdens or restricting rights of some groups and favouring others (Baird & Wittayapak, 2025, p. 8).

[5] Specifically on Mozambique, see for instance the case described by Salomão (2020, p. 64).

The limits imposed to the areas that can be registered can be especially detrimental when legally or in practice it is established that land which is not registered belongs to the state. By registering land that would be undeniably communal land, but excluding other parts, the formalization can work in practice as a way of dispossessing communities of land that is claimed by them, and often vital for their livelihoods.

2.3 Land rights, land registration, and tenure security in Mozambique

Mozambique's national land policy and land legislation were developed in the aftermath of the civil war. There were two major challenges for the governance of land at that time: Firstly, challenges related to overlapping claims over land due to large-scale displacements (IDPs, returnees) and the return of colonial-era landowners. Secondly, there was a strong need to encourage development initiatives and large-scale investments to rebuild the country. The national land policy and the following 1997 Land Law were supposed to address these challenges; on the one hand by attributing a role to existing customary land governance practices, and on the other hand to ensure investors ways to obtain access to land, provided they conduct proper community consultations (Tanner, 2002; Da Conceição de Quadros, 2004; German, 2022)

In general, the Mozambican legislation is fairly protective of people's land rights, at least in comparison with other countries in the region, and elsewhere in the world (Alden Wily, 2018). In fact, the 1997 Land Law of Mozambique has often been lauded as an example of a law that gives a broad recognition of land rights to Mozambicans, recognizing land rights to individuals and communities, based on customary claims or long-term occupation (Tanner, 2002; Norfolk and Tanner, 2007; German, 2022). Moreover, the law explicitly states that no formal document is necessary to prove rights over land. Art. 12 of the law is key in this regard. It states that: "The right of land use and benefit is acquired by: a) occupancy by individual persons and by local communities, in accordance with customary norms and practices which do not contradict the Constitution; b) occupancy by individual national persons who have been using the land in good faith for at least ten years; c) authorisation of an application submitted by an individual or corporate person in the manner established by this Law." Moreover, the Technical Annex of the Land Law (Ministerial-Decree 29-A/2000) specifies that delimitation of communal land can be done by other service providers than the state (art. 6.2), allowing communities to not be dependent on state initiatives, and providing space for interventions such as the one of LAS-Moz.

Despite the relatively progressive provisions of the Land Law, practices on the ground are often less protective of individual and community rights to land. State- and investor-led forced displacement of communities which by law would have a right over land is broadly described in the literature as a common practice (Milgroom and Spierenburg, 2008; Norfolk et al., 2012; Salomão, 2020). A key factor impeding the effective protection of rights in practice is the lack of legal knowledge, both among the population and among state officials. For instance, the legal provisions that establish rights for individuals and collectives under customary law or through occupation in good faith were largely unknown to our respondents from

the general population. State officials, on the other hand, often candidly explain that, despite what the law provides, those without a DUAT title are not considered to have real rights over land (Almeida and Jacobs, 2022).[6] When the Land Law is referenced, whether by community members or state officials, it is mostly the provision that says that all land is property of the state. Moreover, practice thus far also shows that delimitation of communal land takes place either because there is an urgent push to do so as part of an investment initiative, or because civil society actors set up initiatives to strengthen and formalize the rights of communities. In Nhamatanda district, there are no large-scale state-led initiatives to promote the delimitation and registration of communal lands.

Rights over land are also affected by a common confusion about the difference between delimitation and demarcation. The distinction is purely technical: Delimitation is the: 'participatory process involving awareness creation, participatory mapping, and development of a sketch map with GPS coordinates, devolution of results to target and neighbouring communities, and registration of the same in the National Land Cadastre' (German, 2022:187; Technical Annex of the Land Law Regulations). The outcome of this process is the obtention of a certificate for the communities. Demarcation then, is the next step in the process, requiring a 'more rigorous survey process and resulting in the issue of a "definitive title" (ibid: 188). However, German describes how in practice delimitation is often seen as providing a right of use for a period of 50 years, whereas demarcation is seen to be indefinite. Delimitation is also: 'understood as conferring non-exclusive rights [...] to entire "communities" (ibid: 188), whereas demarcation is seen as providing exclusive rights to small parcels, either for individuals or for producer associations (ibid).

Land Law revision

In recent years, country-wide public consultations have been held to prepare for a revision of the Land Law. While it is positive that the process is highly consultative, opinions are divided regarding its transparency and the content of the draft law, which appears to create new opportunities for large-scale investments while also introducing provisions that may pose risks for smallholders.

Whether land is mapped and registered to provide a community title or whether it is for a new investor to obtain a title that allows for investment, community consultations are essential. The legal obligation to consult communities before a title can be issued, forces both the state and investors to take local rights into consideration (Tanner & Baleira, 2004) Although this was an important pinnacle of the 1997 Land Law, neither the Law, nor the Technical Annex provided much detail on how the consultations were supposed to be carried out. In part due to the lack of legal detail on how consultation processes should be conducted, their implementation in practice has been weak (Tanner & Baleira, 2004). To address a number of shortcomings, Ministerial-Decree 158/2011 established criteria such as that consultations should occur in at least two meetings with a period of 30 days in between these meetings, and that communities should get a copy of the minutes (Porsani and Lalander, 2018; German, 2022). Yet, without communities being fully aware of their rights, there remains a power imbalance in consultations and negotiations between communities

[6] DUAT stands for '*Direito de Uso e Aproveitamento da Terra*', meaning the 'right to use and benefit from the land'.

and investors or the state (German, 2022). There is some space for civil society actors (such as the LAS-partners) to play a role in increasing the legal awareness of community members.

3. Methodology and research setting

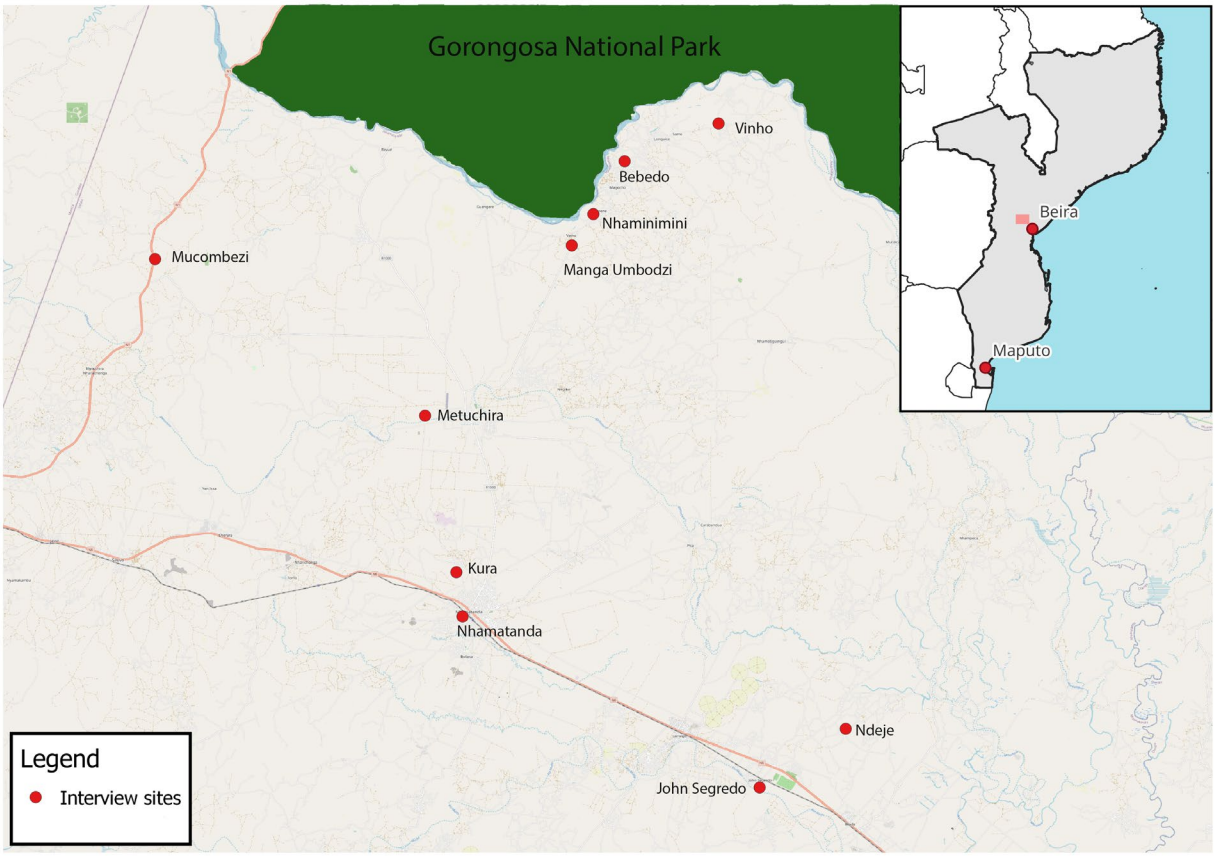
This research made use of qualitative and empirical methods of data collection, including open and semi-structured interviews, group interviews, and focus group discussions. The research team consisted of two researchers based at Leiden University and additional Mozambican brokers with good knowledge of the local context and relevant contacts in the communities. Respondents included members of communities targeted by the above-mentioned projects, in various stages, members of nearby communities not yet covered by these projects, but also project staff of Centro Terra Viva and Terra Firma and its local partner Terra Nossa, management of the Gorongosa National Park, and other development actors in the fields of land, livelihoods, climate responses.

We focused especially on communities located in Nhamatanda district, in the central province of Sofala (Fig. 1). The district is an area of intervention for both project partners. Large part of the district is in the buffer zone of the Gorongosa National Park. Unfortunately, logistical challenges prevented us from visiting two of the project sites of Centro Terra Viva (Nhampoca and Macorococho), whereas in the third project site (Chirassicua) activities were still in a very early stage.

	Methods of data collection				
Location	**semi-structured individual interview**	**community meeting**	**focus group**	**group interview**	**observations**
Maputo	x				
Nhamatanda-sede	x				
Manga-Umbodzi	x	x			x
Nhaminimini	x	x			x
Bebedo	x			x	x
Vinho			x		x
John Segredo	x			x	x
Ndeje	x				x
Kura	x				
Metuchira	x				
Mucombezi			x		
Chirassicua				x	
online	x				
# of participants	**32**	**150**	**50**	**12**	

Interview respondents	men	women	total
project/programme professionals	9	3	12
state officials (district)	6		6
chiefs of locality	3	1	4
community leaders	9		9
community members	12	11	23
total	**39**	**15**	**54**

Fig 1 – Research sites[7]



[7] The surrounding part of the park is considered as a buffer zone. We did not include the buffer zone in the map because we could not find clear information about its borders.

4. Project descriptions: Terra Firma and Centro Terra Viva (CTV)

4.1 Terra Firma[8]

Terra Firma is a Mozambican consulting company which has been working on customary and formal land administration issues since its foundation in 2002. As part of the LAND-at-scale programme, Terra Firma executes a project titled 'Scaling Community Land Rights Certification in Municipal Areas in Mozambique. Implementation of the project started in February 2024 and will end in December 2026. It runs in four municipalities in three provinces: Nhamatanda in Sofala province, Gondola in Manica province and Quelimane and Mocuba in Zambezia province. Locally, Terra Firma partners with other civil society actors, rooted in the region, to execute its projects. In Nhamatanda, the responsible partner is Terra Nossa. This is the organization to which people in communities refer when asked about the project.

The aim of the project is to promote the mapping and registering of community, household, and individual land-use rights. This is done via the use of an online cadastral system that will be easy to access for community institutions and the relevant municipal authorities, enabling them to maintain and consult the records. This is supposed to improve the real and perceived land tenure security of municipal communities/neighbourhoods and their members.

The project has formulated four key outputs:

Output 1: Land tenure rights of communities/neighbourhoods and households living within municipal jurisdictions mapped and documented.

Output 2: All data generated as Output 1 held within a robust online maintenance platform (Sistema Digital de Cadastro - SiDiCa) that is securely hosted, efficiently managed, and easily accessible to users.

Output 3: Municipal staff, stakeholders, and rights holders from the selected municipalities trained in how to access, visualise, use, and request changes to the land rights data held in the SiDiCa.

Output 4: An agreed legal and technical process through which holders of DUAT rights registered in the SiDiCa can request that these be converted to DUAT titles or similar documentation issued by the municipal author.

During our visit to the communities, Terra Firma and its local partner Terra Nossa had been mostly working on the achievement of Output 1, whereas Terra Firma staff in Maputo was working on keeping track of all the data that were collected, preparing for Output 2. Thus far, the registration and mapping information

[8] The first paragraphs of this section are based on Terra Firma's project description, the RVO LAND-at-scale website, and landportal.org

that is stored by Terra Firma is not connected to governmental databases. The communities which we visited were part of Nhamatanda district, but outside of Nhamatanda municipality. Geographic focus hence was a bit beyond the initial project focus on the municipality.

Mapping and documenting land tenure rights of communities is a long process that can take up to a year between first meetings and the eventual obtention of a DUAT for a community. It is not simply about registering, but it is also about explaining people the reasons for registering the land and most of all about raising awareness among people about land tenure rights. Terra Firma is aware that it should not overburden communities with meetings and activities. It therefore consciously plans time between activities. Besides this, some communities are not accessible during (parts of) the rainy season.

One of the technicians of Terra Nossa estimated that they organise at least 10 community meetings to complete the whole process. During our visit, activities in most communities were at the stage of 'information and divulgation'. Delimitation will follow once these stages are completed. To get different viewpoints, meetings take place at different locations within the communities, and three to four maps indicating the limits and land use of community land are drawn with different segments of the community (youth, women, men) to finally compile one map. All different maps are documented and stored in the database of Terra Firma.[9] During the process Terra Firma also conducts a short survey on the communities' vulnerability and risks. Together, these data provide a good picture of land rights and practices in the different locations and are supposed to serve the development of local land use planning.

With an eye on preparing communities for keeping their rights updated and to promote community cohesion, an important part of the community activities consists of setting up associations or to support already existing committees which can defend the communities' rights, and which can ensure the sustainable management of the communal natural resources. These trained community members are then also supposed to take a role in keeping the records up to date, including of individual land transfers. Since project communities have not yet completed delimitation, this is not yet taking place.

A member of the communities visited clearly summarized the interventions carried out by Terra Firma and its local partner to date:

> *"In the first stage we sat together in a community meeting, electing [20 managing] members [of our association] and their roles, and we were taught on how an association works. Then, we discussed the history of the community, produced a map. We have finished this and are now awaiting delimitation. Technicians will inform us. We also still need more capacity for the functioning of the association, so every member knows what role they have."*
>
> *"It was easy to draw the map. We are all from here, so we know the place. Members are divided between the 4 neighbourhoods, each member knows the limits of its own neighbourhoods, knows the water sources, and one of us*

[9] https://sites.google.com/terrafirma.co.mz/cavateco-resultados/home viewed on 21.08.2025.

could always complement further. We still need to see the whole place with the map in our hands to confirm everything." (9.05.2025)

The community delimitation can eventually serve as a basis for the individual delimitation of plots, to increase tenure security not only at communal level but also at the level of individuals and households.

4.2 Centro Terra Viva (CTV)[10]

Centro Terra Viva- Estudos e Advocacia Ambiental (CTV) is a Mozambican non-governmental organization, which was set up in 2002, working in partnership with local organisations. It aims to 'promote and ensure the participation of civil society in environmental education and information, as well as in the adoption and application of legislation on this'. Research and advocacy are its main pillars of intervention. Its vison is that 'management of natural resources in the country is socially fair, environmentally sound, economically viable and institutionally responsible, based on scientific knowledge that guarantees sustainability and a fair and equitable sharing of benefits'.[11]

Within the framework of LAND-at-scale, CTV conducts the project 'Scaling Community Legal Literacy and Climate Resilience in Mozambique'. Its main objective is to increase community legal awareness and strengthen security of land tenure rights, creating capacity at local level – both within communities and state officials - to implement and leverage the progressive provisions of the Mozambican legal framework.

Specifically, the project aims to:

1. Scale interventions for community institutional preparedness and legal literacy for land and natural resources management across a wider geographical area.
2. Develop and implement tools and approaches that support the resilience of rural communities in the face of climate change and climate-induced resettlement.
3. Train district governments and local community associations on land management and administration and support the integration of community knowledge.
4. Sharing lessons with and inspiring government entities at all levels on the importance and urgency of innovative and participatory land management and administration approaches that will finally place local communities and their institutions, as well as local governments, at the centre of natural resources management as determined by the Constitution and the National Land Policy.

Four main outputs are foreseen, namely:

[10] The first paragraphs of this section are based on CTV's project description, the RVO LAND-at-scale website, and landportal.org

[11] https://www.ctv.org.mz/en/quem-somos, viewed on 7.8.2025

Output 1: Expanded community environmental awareness and legal empowerment through community training on land governance, climate change and sustainable socio-economic development issues (exercising rights, conflict resolution skills, facilitating dialogue, climate change resilience, gender and women's rights, sustainable community businesses).
Output 2: Trained local government and judicial officers on existing laws and procedures - including those pertaining to women's rights - for sustainable and participatory community land management (delimitation, certification and titling of community and household land rights, and maintenance of land records in the context of climate change).
Output 3: Rural districts and local communities with climate resilient land use plans and climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies that adopt a preventive approach to minimize social, environmental, and economic negative impacts.
Output 4: Institutionalized multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholders' dialogues consistently organized at the central and district level.

Whereas the Terra Firma project focuses on four municipalities in three provinces, CTV's project has a wider geographical coverage, focusing on three to four districts in each of the ten provinces in the country. Nhamatanda district is one of the districts which is targeted by both Terra Firma and CTV.

CTV's projects with LAS started in 2021/2022. At the time of our visit, CTV was preparing the second stage of its project. Formally, this stage had started in October 2024, but due to electoral violence and weather conditions, most activities were still in an early phase. In the different target districts in Sofala province, trainings were planned for May/June with state officials on land management and administration. Besides, plans were made to work with to local state administrations to write new district plans for land management and use. Such plans usually cover a period of ten years.

In Nhamatanda district, state officials were already preparing their work together with CTV. The current land use plan of the district formally ended in 2022 and therefore needs to be updated. When the current plan was developed (in 2012?), Nhamatanda town itself was not yet classified as municipality, which means that certain changes will be made to the categorization of the land in the district. At that time, climate change was also not talked about, and its impact was not much felt. A staff member of CTV Maputo explained to us that this will be a point of attention when the plans are renewed, and that they will make sure to pay specific attention to areas that are at high risk (CTV, 05.05.2025).

Although district land use plans are a responsibility of local governments, CTV takes the lead in the process. This was underlined by the words of a state official that we interviewed, who said:

> *"We work together with the local structures. The last meeting we had on this was two weeks ago. We are now waiting for a response of CTV for the next meeting because they are the partners. It is up to them to plan the meetings, to set up the schedule, etc. We don't know when it will be finalized."* (09.05.2025)

To set up the land use plans, a consultative process needs to take plan, considering actual land use practices at the lowest level. The same state official explained:

> *"To elaborate the land use plan, we must go to all communities and neighbourhoods and discuss the limits of the land, the usage. Our focal points are the local structures [local authorities]. They provide this information, and they can indicate what happens where."* (09.05.2025)

Training and working with local state officials are an important pillar of the approach of CTV. Another key pillar is the training of and collaboration with paralegals; lay people who are trained about the content of the law, and who can provide advice to their fellow community members on their rights. One of the paralegals explained to us about the activities he carries out:

> "*We raise awareness, we help committees to get legalization of documents and also help with other organizational things."* (15.05.2025)

Both CTV staff and this paralegal admitted that people often have limited interest in learning more about their rights, unless they feel their rights are being threatened. Yet, at such point, when awareness about rights is urgently needed, there may not be a lot of time to mobilise CTV trainers or paralegals to step in and provide support. At times when CTV had more funding available, they had the flexibility to attend communities immediately when they were informed about imminent conflicts. One of the staff members said that they would still be willing to do this but are not able to do this anymore whenever something comes up for lack of funding.

5. Land access and livelihoods in Nhamatanda district

Nhamatanda is a vast district, with Nhamatanda town as its economic and administrative centre. The district's population is growing rapidly. Although official data of the recent census are not yet available, a state official claimed that it has grown in the last 10 years from 100 000 to 400 000 inhabitants, mostly because of high birth rates.[12]

There are two administrative posts in the district: one in Nhamatanda, the other in Tica. Most communities in the district are primarily rural and economic opportunities are limited (despite the district being seen by some as a 'trading district', where people move a lot and are not as attached to their lands as in other regions of the country). In the rural communities, almost everybody lives on subsistence agriculture. Most people cultivate one or two agricultural fields of around 2 ha in total. Mais, millet, rice, cassava, (sweet) potatoes, chickpeas, and a range of vegetables are among the major crops that are grown. Some households have slightly larger areas, especially when their forefathers were among the first settlers in the community, when land was still available in abundance. Their offspring, usually mostly the male heirs, still benefit from this by inheriting relatively large plots of land. Whether or not people manage to cultivate all their land, depends primarily on the manual labour that is available within the household, as cultivation is only done manually.

Although almost everyone depends on subsistence agriculture, levels of wealth and poverty vary both between households and across communities. While we did not systematically map household assets, clear differences were visible: in some communities there were more small livestock, more motorbikes, more chairs rather than mats for sitting, more houses built with burnt bricks and cement (and thus more cyclone-resilient), as well as more market stalls offering a wider variety of products.

A few communities had hosted large (agricultural) companies in the past, but at present, there were no major economic activities involving community members as employees at larger scales, apart from the community of Chirassicua, where large part of the fields are in use to cultivate sugar for the sugar company of Mafambisse (Tongaat Hulett).[13] Parts of the fields are used directly by the company, but community members also cultivate sugar themselves and sell the harvest to the company.

[12] According to the last census available, in 2017 the district had 279.000 inhabitants.
[13] This company owns two large mills and cane estates in Mozambique since 1998 and claims to be the largest private sector employer in the country (https://www.tongaat.com/our-business/sugar/mozambique/, viewed on 16.06.2025).

5.1 Access to land in Nhamatanda district

In our research we found three main ways through which people in rural communities obtain access to land. The first, most common way is through inheritance. In central Mozambique, inheritance is primarily through the male family line, and marriage is patrilocal. Many of our (male) interviewees had received their land through inheritance. Secondly, land can be provided by community leaders (and occasionally by others with large plots of land available) to newcomers from outside the community at request. Our respondents described that while this practice used to be common when fertile land was abundant, it is now less frequent, though it still occurs. One community leader explained:

> *"Since [my] grandfather['s times], we have been giving land to people. Even in the time of Idai, people came, and we gave land. They didn't have to pay anything, and until now, they are staying here."* (community leader, 8.5.2025)

Contrastingly, in another community, someone told us:

> *"When there was still space, you could go to the neighbourhood secretary and ask for land, but at present there is no empty space anymore."* (community member, 12.5.2025)

A third option to obtain access to land is by buying it from individuals who have land that they are not in need of. This can be for instance because the owner is moving to another – often urban – area, or because the owner has become too old to cultivate and does not have children who are interested in taking over the land. "*If you have money, it is not difficult to find a field*", a community member told us. Yet, many of our respondents showed a strong reluctance in selling land, especially if the land is fertile, as this land can ensure the future of their children. Therefore, the land that is available for sale is often less attractive, for instance overgrown by bush, prone to flooding, or prone to drought and therefore abandoned. To complete a land transaction, buyer and seller generally visit the field together, in the presence of witnesses (owners of neighbouring fields and/or community leaders) and establish the limits of the land. About the transaction, our respondent exclaimed that "*everything is just talk, there's no contract*". However, in his account it is also possible to perceive some uncertainty regarding the conditions of the agreement and the extent to which it guarantees long-term access to the land.

If people can get access to land by simply requesting land from the community leader, it may be startling that there is also an interest in paying to get access to land. Why do these two modes of land access exist next to each other? An explanation for this can be found by looking at the different rights that are attached to the options and the tenure security they provide. Our respondents generally agree that obtaining land through a local chief comes with some constraints, for instance they can use the land, often for an undefined time and pass the land on to their children, but they cannot sell it to another party. Local chiefs can also ask the land back because one of their children need it. The new 'owner' is not allowed to either plant or to log trees on the land. Although there are clear ideas about the specifics of these arrangements, there seems to be some fluidity in the rights that are attached to them, and in general rights seem to progressively

consolidate into something more similar to ownership with the passing of time. Nevertheless, those who have obtained land in this way in recent times have rather precarious and insecure rights.

People who buy land from a previous owner obtain a more complete bundle of rights. In the absence of formal or informal documents that attest the transaction, the legal tenure security of these new owners is limited at first, as they cannot proof to be the occupant of land for more than ten years. Engaging and informing the customary leaders of the transaction however can be a way to ascertain ownership based on customary rights. Some of our respondents explained that they had involved customary leaders in the transaction, but this was not common practice for everybody. At one instance, a community leader was accompanying us during the day, and it was during our interview that he found out that one of his community members had bought a specific plot of land from somebody else.

Beyond these three community-based paths to accessing land, a fourth path is through participation in state-led resettlement initiatives. In Mozambique, such initiatives have been set up for various reasons; for the exploitation of natural resources, for nature conservation, for private investments, and in the context of extreme weather events (Jacobs & Almeida, 2021; Milgroom & Spierenburg, 2008b; Shannon et al., 2018; Wiegink, 2020). Nhamatanda district hosts several communities that have been created in the aftermath of natural disasters such as floods and cyclones. Space for these communities is created by the government in various ways, for instance by making use of land that has been abandoned by companies at the end of the colonial era, or by classifying land as 'vacant', and therefore available for resettling people.[14]

In resettlement sites, people are generally at minimum provided with a residential plot. Depending on the means available, they sometimes receive houses on these plots, or the material to construct houses themselves. In the aftermath of Idai, when international assistance was relatively abundant, many people in resettlement sites received houses, water tanks, electricity, and some basic infrastructure for their community, although it took a couple of years before all constructions were finalized. In the aftermath of other natural disasters with less international media exposure, assistance was more limited, and people had to find their own means to get housing. Residential plots in resettlement sites are registered but individual titling was not completed for most people, and they only have a small piece of paper with the number of their plot. The land rights people receive over these plots are conditional and limited; people are not allowed to sell the plots, nor the houses to other people. It is widely held that upon leaving, one must return the house to the state, which will then give it to another person who needs resettlement. We even came across one community in which several people had been resettled more than two decades ago but were recently asked by state officials to leave their plots to make way for a new wave of resettlement.

[14] The exact status of the land prior to the creation of the resettlement site was not always clear to us and would need further study.

Land for cultivation usually must be arranged by resettled people themselves, through arrangements with members of the host community or surrounding communities. A person in one of these surrounding communities did not envy resettled people, and tellingly explained:

> *"In comparison to the people in the resettlement, we have space, fields. People there have nice houses, but no fields. They come to us to get access to fields, to find fuel wood. We share everything we have with them."* (community leader, 13.5.2025)

With fertile land becoming scarcer, due to both population growth and climatic conditions, it is more difficult to obtain access to land through communal ways. At present however, intra-communal land disputes were not reported to be a problem in the communities which we visited, economic activities by large-scale investors were at present very limited, and people did not consider this to be a major threat to their tenure security or livelihoods. A staff member of Terra Firma explained that the level of intra- and intercommunal conflicts tends to increase at the moment there are rumours about investors coming to the area. In the communities which we visited many respondents actually expressed the desire and need to attract investors to their community under the assumption that this would help to create employment and other economic opportunities.

5.2 Constraining livelihoods in Nhamatanda district

In the communities we visited there were two major constraining factors for people's realization of land-based livelihoods: 1) the presence of wildlife in their communities, and 2) extreme conditions of drought in recent years.

The impact of wildlife on community livelihoods is closely linked to the success of the Gorongosa National Park (GNP).[15] Its southern buffer zone covers the northern part of Nhamatanda district, home to an estimated 200,000 people.[16] The presence of the Park itself is not new to local residents, who have long adapted to restrictions on natural resource use within its boundaries, such as bans on hunting, logging, and charcoal production. Yet, due to the successful restoration of wildlife in the park, wild animals are increasingly roaming outside the borders of the park, causing havoc in the adjacent communities. Complaints about the destruction of crops, buildings and even lives caused by wildlife was a constant during our fieldwork. In Nhamatanda district, people mostly struggled with elephants (up to 100 in number

[15] In 1920, part of the area that today constitutes the park was established by the Portuguese authorities as a hunting reserve. The reserve was expanded first in 1935, and again in 1960 when it was formally declared a National Park. In 1966 its size was slightly reduced. During the civil war which lasted until 1992, wildlife in the park was greatly reduced. Restoration started from 1994 onwards, but was boosted much more from 2004 onwards, when the US-based Gorongosa Restoration Project started making investments in the park, restoring wildlife and rebuilding tourism. (www.gorongosa.org/timeline viewed on 07.08.2025).

[16] According to the Park's own estimations (https://gorongosa.org/sustainable-development/, viewed on 07.08.2025).

according to some), whereas we were told that in other parts of the buffer zone, buffalos constitute the major problem.

The park is experimenting with measures to keep the wildlife within the park, including fencing the borders with a combination of bee hives, hot pepper plants, and metal sheets, but community members generally indicated that the fencing was ineffective. A challenge here is that the southern boundary of the park consists of the Pungue river to which both people and animals need access. In addition, the GNP employs community inspectors tasked with controlling animal movements and preventing illegal hunting. Equipped with firecrackers, they chase away elephants and other wildlife that approach too closely to settlements and fields. Many respondents, however, noted that this method is now ineffective, as elephants have become accustomed to the sound and light. In the past, hunting served as an effective strategy to limit animal numbers and protect crops, but current restrictions have removed this option.

In 2022, two specific areas within the buffer zone of Nhamatanda have been gazetted as community conservation areas; one area located in the locality of Bebedo, the other in the locality of Nhampoca.[17] Park officials explained that, according to the regulatory ministerial decree, these areas were defined in close consultation with the communities concerned and managed in line with a participatory and inclusive plan. This plan is supposed to be executed by a Natural Resources Management Committee composed of community members. Yet, people in these communities did not appear fully aware of the existence of these special conservation areas or of the rights and obligations associated with them. It is hence unclear to what extent the community conservation areas will be managed in a way that is beneficial for people, for nature, including wildlife, or for all.

The second factor of concern for people's livelihoods is the prevalence of drought in recent years. Central Mozambique is often in the news for cyclones and the resulting floods, yet during our visit, many respondents highlighted the extreme droughts that have affected their agricultural production over the past three years, limiting some crops to a single annual harvest and increasing cases of crop failure. Thus far, most people have not significantly adjusted their modes of cultivation. Some interviewees indicated that they are cultivating a different combination of crops, for instance less corn, rice, or the cash crop sesame, and instead more millet, which is more drought resistant, but climate adaptation remains in general limited. We will expand on this more in under 7.2.1.

Clearly not all communities were equally affected by wildlife and drought, but in the communities located in the buffer zone, these were two factors of major concern that greatly impacted on their livelihood security. These concerns dominated our conversations with them much more than concerns about land tenure security.

[17] Ministerial-Decree 18/2022 and 19/2022, published on 8.2.2022.

6. Assessing intervention impacts on land tenure security

In this section we assess the impacts of LAS-Moz interventions on the land tenure security of our respondents. We first look into the issue of legal literacy, followed by the three types of land tenure security discussed above: legal; perceived; and de facto tenure security, where we also explore which threats to their land tenure people find on the ground. In the final subsection we bring together the issues of awareness raising, land registration and tenure security.

6.1 Legal literacy on land rights

In general, respondents had limited knowledge on the full content of the land law and the rights they have over their land. At the same time, intra- and intercommunal land disputes were also not common in the area. People may therefore not often be in need to make explicit claims over their land and spell out their rights. Within the socio-legal field, it is widely known that rights, norms, and rules become outspoken primarily at the moment they are contested.

We noted this limited knowledge not only among community members, but also among local state and non-state authorities. As highlighted in chapter 2.3, one of the key innovative aspects of the Mozambican Land Law is the simple and direct ways in which people can acquire rights over land without the need of any certification, both through customary practices, or good-faith use of land for more than 10 years. Yet, when our respondents referred to the Land Law, they mostly only raised the provision of the law which stipulates that 'all land belongs to the state', leaving the provisions that protect the rights to land of local residents unmentioned. While the term 'DUAT' is commonly used in land rights circles in the country, community members are generally unfamiliar with it and instead tend to speak of 'ownership,' despite the contradiction this poses with the state's ownership of land.

Those respondents from communities – including paralegals – who had some legal knowledge, such as what a 'DUAT' entails, usually did so because they had recently received training from civil society organizations like Terra Firma or CTV. Also, in conversations with state and park officials, it was not always clear whether their limited references to the Land Law reflected a genuine lack of knowledge beyond the provision that land belongs to the state, or whether it was simply more convenient for them to emphasize only this aspect of the law.

6.2 Legal tenure security

Strictly based on the law, most people in the areas of study enjoy legal tenure security even without a formal certificate, since their land rights are grounded in customary law and/or based on possession in good faith for more than ten years. Land registration is in this case a mechanism to make their claims stronger but, legally speaking, it is not necessary to obtain the right. However, as discussed above, this legal right is often ignored by state authorities if not registered.

In the communities in which Terra Firma already started their process, people generally had some understanding of the meaning of a DUAT and attached more importance to a formal title over their land. When asked to explain its importance, most of them would refer to the need to be able to make their children the legitimate heirs of the land upon their own deaths. Initially they mostly referred to the importance of having an individual ownership document and not the community title that Terra Firma is working towards. One community member for instance explained:

> *"We have our own houses, our own plots, but they are not legalized, we do not have any documents. Others can deceive us. If we don't have a DUAT, we have no defence. We are therefore asking to have individual titles. For instance, in my house, as father of the family, I may leave [pass away], and my children may stay, but they may not be able to show the limits of the plot. Therefore, we are asking for documents for our houses and for our fields."* (9.5.2025)

When specifically asked about the importance of a communal land title, people often described it as a means of making themselves visible to the GNP (more below), and of asserting their claims over land in relation to other communities, even though the reported level of disputes was very low. When asked about the importance of having a land document, one community member explained:

> *"We can better know and control the place, [which is] good for the community. It is also important to know the boundaries of our community in relation to other communities." (9.5.2025)*

6.3 Perceived tenure security

As detailed above, perceived tenure security is how individuals or households experience their own tenure situation, independently of the actual legal status (van Gelder, 2010). The perceived tenure security experienced by our respondents varied: for instance, the above-mentioned land holders who had been assigned a plot of land by the state in the aftermath of floods had legal tenure security, but did not feel secure. On the other hand, we also met people who felt perfectly safe about their rights to land, despite having recently acquired the land without formal documentation and therefore having a more limited legal path to claim legal rights over it. These differences on perceived tenure security underline two key conditions that have a major impact it: First, knowledge (or lack thereof) about the actual legal situation of one's tenure security may lead both to a higher or lower level of tenure security. Secondly, as long as people do not experience direct threats to their land, or see others around them facing disputes, they are unlikely to consider themselves at risk of losing land or becoming involved in a dispute in the near future. For people

living in the buffer zone of the national park, the presence of wildlife impacts both perceived and de facto tenure security, as we argue below.

Overall, people in Nhamatanda district seem to feel secure about their land tenure. This is confirmed by the baseline survey conducted by Terra Firma. Of all respondents in Sofala province (n=1361), 52 percent indicated feeling 'very secure', whereas another 43 percent indicate feeling 'secure' about their family lands. Asked about the security of their community lands, 37 percent indicated feeling 'very secure', and 42 percent felt 'secure'.[18] Although perceived tenure security of communal land was slightly lower than the perceived tenure security of family land, the overall tenure security can still be seen as very high.

6.4 De facto tenure security

As discussed above, de facto tenure security refers to the actual control that people have over their land, independently of legal rights or perceived tenure security. From our research we conclude that whereas in principle most people have strong legal and perceived tenure security, there are a number of threats that can put their de facto tenure security at risk.

The general stance taken by the state may lead to a considerable threat to people's tenure security, especially – but not necessarily only – for those without registered land. Emphasizing that all land belongs to the state, state officials argue that they can take land from communities when needed, for instance for the resettlement of people affected by disasters, or for the protection of nature. A state official, working as field technician, for instance argued:

> "*Documents are always needed. People are quickly removed [by the government and by other interested parties] if they don't have them. With the DUAT, they are much more protected. [In providing compensation], those with a DUAT receive special treatment. Priority is always given to them. […] No matter what the law says, the document is proof*." (13.05.2025)

Most respondents, with limited legal knowledge, also assume that the legal norm saying that all land belongs to the state allows state officials to ask people to abandon their land whenever they want. It makes people willing to give up land requested by the state, even without compensation, for instance in case of disaster-related resettlement. In one of the communities we visited, some people had been provided a plot of land after floods in the early 2000s. Even though they had been using their plots for more than ten years now, they still felt that the state could come to reclaim these plots, despite having legal tenure security. At the same time, the fields which they had abandoned, got occupied by a state-initiated resettlement site in the aftermath of cyclone Idai. A community leader explained:

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[18] https://sites.google.com/terrafirma.co.mz/cavateco-resultados/indicadores/seguran%C3%A7a-de-posse-de-terra?authuser=0, viewed on 11.08.2025.

> *"The fields which we left behind are now occupied by the resettlement site of […]. It is at a very low location. They [the state] just asked us to give away the land for them and we just did."* (12.05.2025)

Exposure to investors can be another threat to tenure security. In the area where we conducted our research, there were very few cases of large-scale land acquisitions, and communities therefore had little direct experience with investors. The only case in which we saw this happened, was in a community where an investor had - during a community meeting - made promises about providing a school, a hospital, and some road infrastructure in exchange of being allowed to take sand along the river. The sand was meanwhile gone, resulting in heavy erosion of the riverbank, whereas only a small part of the road was constructed, and no further compensation had been paid. Most respondents actually expressed interest in welcoming investors, as they hoped this would create employment opportunities or improve local infrastructure and living conditions. For instance, they noted that the road along the sugar plantation was wider and better maintained than other feeder roads in the district. Hardly anyone, however, mentioned the potential risks associated with external investments, risks that are well-documented in land-related conflicts between communities and investors across Mozambique (Salomão, 2020).

For the communities located in the buffer zone, the major threat to their tenure security was the presence of the GNP, both because roaming elephants invaded their fields, and because of persistent fears that the park will expand further in the future. "*We are being oppressed by the park, by the human-animal conflicts. The animals are invading us already and we are already oppressed by them",* explained one community leader to us (14.05.2025).

Fears were fed by a lack of direct communication lines between most community members and staff members of the park. For instance, many people indicated that in case of damage to their fields by the wild animals, they report this to their community leader, who then reports to the chief of the 'localidade'[19], who are then supposed to get in touch with the park, but not everybody was confident that this indeed worked out: *"that stuff ends up in the offices",* as a community elder explained. Distrust and a sense of insecurity was further fed in one of the communities by the park's placing of a cement pole in a field close to the community. People did not have information about the pole but feared it marked the future boundaries of the park, which would eventually force some of them to relocate. Regardless of the accuracy of such rumours, the possibility of a park expansion is perceived as a threat by local residents. This perception not only diminishes their perceived tenure security but, in combination with unresolved problems caused by elephants also affects their de facto tenure security as residents consider abandoning the area.

The following section explores how awareness raising on land rights, as well as processes of land demarcation and registration, can affect the lives of residents in Nhamatanda District.

[19] Sub-division of the district administration. The 'localidade' is the lowest level state representation. A locality usually consists of several communities.

6.5 Awareness raising, registration, and tenure security

We were not able to talk to beneficiaries of CTVs interventions aimed at raising community legal awareness about their rights. Yet the conversations we had with community leaders, community members, state officials, and civil society actors made it abundantly clear that legal knowledge is often limited. As a result of this, some people perceive their tenure security to be high, whereas in fact they are vulnerable, while others perceive their tenure security to be low, whereas in fact their rights are legally protected. It is hence fair to assume that raising legal awareness will at least contribute to a reduction in the gap between perceived and legal tenure security.

Communities that were targeted by Terra Firma's project were currently in a process in which they had obtained more knowledge about their rights. For instance, they understood the meaning and value of a DUAT. Most communities were currently engaged in the mapping stage. A female member of a community said:

> *"We were very happy to see the technicians giving explanations about the land. Their training opened our eyes; we now see that land should be valorised."* (10.5.2025)

Generally, people indicated that they all knew the boundaries of their community, as well as its internal boundaries before as well, but the meetings with Terra Firma had made them aware that they could use the map in case of disputes with neighbouring communities. Such disputes however did not seem to be common. Community members also pointed out the importance of having a map in case investors would come, but this usually seemed to be mostly a hypothetical idea and primed by the training provided by the staff members of Terra Firma.

Since communities have not yet received their DUATs, they are currently in a stage in which they are actually feeling less secure about their tenure than before any project interventions. They have been told it is important to have a DUAT, but are still waiting to get one. Many of our respondents expressed concerns about not having legal documents for their lands. Terra Firma is aware that the process may create anxieties. Yet, feels that it is not necessarily negative, as knowledge about the existing threats may make people more careful.

In one of the communities that was in the process of obtaining a communal DUAT, a member of the natural resource management committee compared the obtainment of a DUAT to an ID card for the land (14.05.2025). In another community, during a meeting, one participant noted that they had not realized the land belonged to them until Terra Nossa [Terra Firma] became involved (08.05.2025). Several other members of the community expressed that they were eager to receive the formal documents, as these would help them demonstrate to others that the land is theirs. A community leader explained:

> *"The DUAT is very important. It makes us safer [towards other communities]. It makes clear that this land is ours. In the past, no one knew its [communal] boundaries. The DUAT helps with delimitation. We knew the boundaries ourselves, but now we can show to outsiders that we are leading here. And we can show this to our children."* (14.05.2025)

Whereas community members were generally positive about the value of obtaining a communal DUAT, Terra Firma's meetings had also made them aware of the added value of having their own individual title documents. During a community meeting an elderly man explained:

> *"Having documents is a defence for my children when I die." (08.05. 2025)*

In the buffer zone, the appeal of obtaining a DUAT for communities was not only to secure tenure vis-à-vis other communities but also to protect their rights against the GNP and the damage caused by elephants. One community elder explained:

> *"[With the DUAT], we can tell the park that this belongs to the community. If we have a DUAT, we can tell that [the land] is ours, and that it is damaged, and demand that they take responsibility. Without a DUAT, they can say it belongs to the park. The DUAT is very important."* (08.05.2025).

The members of these communities also claimed the need to be involved in any new plans, both in plans of the park and of other investors. Some argued that the park would have to offer them an alternative location to live and to get access to land in case of expansion. Others were more outspoken about wanting to defend their rights, and not wanting to leave. One community leader for instance explained firmly:

> *"The park has its limits since its creation. To expand, the competent government should consult communities to ask whether we agree on expanding, and we as natives, should show where we are. We will not accept the park to grow. It is not possible; we do not want it. We are from here, we cannot leave."* (14.05.2025)

For one of the community leaders we met, delimitation of the community was also an important way to strengthen his own position as authority:

> *"If delimitation is done, we are more secure about the land. People are leaving because of the elephants. We are asking for help with community delimitation, we are not safe with our land. To be a leader, I need people to serve, but if people flee because of the animals, who am I as a leader?"* (10.05.2025)

Whereas people in local communities generally expect their tenure security to improve once their communities have formal titles, it remains to be seen to what extent de facto tenure security will change, and results might be mixed. For instance, the specific community which had experience with the investor that took the sand was, at that time, in the process of obtaining a DUAT as part of a project intervention by Terra Firma. Community members indicated that having their community mapped, helped them in the negotiations with the investors, but they nevertheless had lost out in the enforcement of the agreement that

resulted from these negotiations. They are convinced that without a map, they would not have been consulted at all. The mapping and delimitation process had at least contributed to them being more aware of potential threats and of having more power to negotiate, and this experience made them more aware of how to negotiate with investors in the future. It is imaginable that also in other cases of potential investments, communities will be better able to negotiate access to their resources when they are trained and/or have formal ownership documents. The presence of well-trained paralegals within the community, together with more regular contacts with civil society actors, could help strengthen communities' negotiation power with potential investors, by raising awareness and mobilising support when needed.

7. Further impacts of awareness raising and land registration

In the previous chapters we have presented general ways in which people obtain access to land, and the livelihood strategies in which they engage. We then proceeded to look further into tenure security and the way in which tenure security is impacted by project interventions aimed at raising legal awareness and/or mapping and registering community lands. In this chapter, we look into the extent at which improved (legal/perceived/real) tenure security and more awareness about one's rights contributes to improved livelihoods of the communities, to more climate resilience, and possible other effects.

7.1 Awareness raising, registration and livelihoods

As mentioned, there are two major threats to people's livelihoods in the studied area: the presence of the national park, and climatic conditions. The park's successful restoration of wildlife leads to an increasing number of animals roaming outside the park's boundaries. It also raises fears (and rumours) about the possible expansion of the park.

In recent years, the park has been working to improve the lives and livelihoods of people in its buffer zones by supporting projects such as the construction of schools, health centres, and infrastructure, as well as initiatives like pisciculture projects, and tree nurseries. Part of these interventions have been set up with financial support of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Mozambique. Despite these efforts, the opinions about the park were predominantly negative. "*People feel they gain, but then in the end they lose more than they gain*", as a project officer of Terra Firma argued.

There was a widespread feeling in all communities in the buffer zone that 'the park values animals more than people'. Several people narrated firsthand experiences of losing crops due to animals, with little or no compensation. People felt their complaints were not heard by the park, and felt that the measures taken to reduce human-animal conflicts (fencing with wires, beehives and peppers, inspectors with firecrackers) were inadequate. They recalled the times before the war, when hunting was still permitted occasionally. A roaming elephant that damaged their fields would be hunted, deterring other elephants from entering the same area for a while. It helped to maintain a balance between people and wildlife. A community member – whose previous night had been disturbed by elephants – explained:

> "*Long time ago, if animals would come here, the park would send two inspectors to kill the animals. We got the meat to eat. This was important for us. Today: Zero! If I have animals on my field and kill them, I will be sent to prison. The elephant is valued more*." (10.05.2025)

Today, people are aware that hunting wildlife is not allowed. Many therefore thought an electric fence would be a better solution to prevent animals from leaving the park.

As described above, people were confident that the mapping and registration of their community would be beneficial to strengthen their land rights and to better defend their communities against the park and its animals. Their interactions with Terra Firma officers made them more aware of their rights and more confident that they would be able to negotiate a good outcome. In this sense, an increase in perceived tenure security contributes to them having a more positive outlook about their livelihoods. When we asked them how a paper document would reduce their problems with roaming animals, a community member explained:

> *"It is well possible that animals indeed cannot read [the title document], but their owners can. It is like children who have a fight together. The parents may not have witnessed the fight but will acknowledge what happened and will agree about compensation that needs to be paid for the damage that is done."* (10.05.2025)

It remains to be seen whether obtaining a DUAT will effectively help people protect their land from trespassing animals leaving the park, and whether enhanced tenure security will indirectly contribute to more stable livelihoods by reducing crop destruction. Another potential way to safeguard livelihoods could be through the resettlement of people from the buffer zone to areas where their agricultural activities would not be disturbed. However, this does not seem to be a serious consideration for any of the parties, not for the government, not for the affected communities and not for the park. Nonetheless, people hoped that the government would intervene to support them and defend their interests: "*We have told the government as well that they will need us. During the next elections, we are the ones voting for them. Elephants don't vote, so they better make sure that we do not die,*", as one community elder exclaimed.

The designation of community conservation areas in two parts of the buffer zone should -according to park representatives- contribute to tourism-based, income-generating activities for the communities involved and thus better livelihoods. "People should start to see elephants as a solution for their livelihood problems", as a GNP staff member put it. With formal documents, it may be easier for people to claim a share of the benefits generated in these conservation areas, although the economic viability of such an approach remains questionable. A stronger focus on protecting communities' crops from the animals would more directly address communities' primary needs.

Regarding the broader connection between land registration and livelihoods -beyond the issues related to the animals and the park- since land registration had not yet been finalized in the communities we visited, it is difficult to make definitive claims. However, in these communities people live at a subsistence level and simply do not have the resources to make greater investments in their land. We found no evidence that a lack of tenure security was preventing them from improving their livelihoods. Therefore, at least in the cases we studied, the assumption that greater tenure security will automatically incentivize people to invest more in their land and improve their livelihoods appears questionable and is not supported by our findings.

The demarcation and registration of communal land and the appointment of well-trained natural resource management committees can have a positive contribution to the governance of communal natural resources. We visited several of these committees and talked with them about their role and they were all very clear about 'being ready to conserve nature', the phrase that is also widely used by staff members of GNP. They had often already taken initiatives, - mostly with support by the park- to grow seedlings, to replant trees, or to prevent logging. Moreover, the delimitation and registration of land can also facilitate better management of resources between neighbouring communities. As a community leader explained:

> *"Sometimes we have problems with people on the [other] side; they don't accept our borders. They come here to get bamboo, firewood, and charcoal. Our own people can get this in our own area, but outsiders can't. Demarcation is very important."* (16.05.2025)

While difficult to extrapolate from our data, the potential improvement in natural resource management is also relevant to the climate-related responses at community level that are discussed in the following section.

7.2 Awareness raising, registration, and climate change responses

> "*Each year has its own story. This year is a story of suffering because of the lack of rain*." (Community member, 9.5.2025)

Climate change was unmistakably part of reality for people in Nhamatanda district. Many people referred to climate change as a cause of the more extreme weather conditions and events they are experiencing since some years. It raises two main questions in relation to land registration and awareness raising, which we explore in this section: First, to what extent can more awareness about rights and land registration support people in finding solutions to better adapt to climate change? Land tenure arrangements and security of land tenure are widely seen as of relevance for the decisions people take about their land, but the land tenure-climate response nexus is not well understood (Sliuzas et al., 2024). Based on an extensive review of recent literature on the importance of land tenure for farmers' responses to climate change, Murken and Gornott (2022) conclude that preliminary research reveals linkages between climate change and land tenure security, but understanding of the way in which these linkages work is lacking.

Secondly, this section explores the following question: To what extent do state-led interventions regarding climate change impact on people's land rights, and to what extent can land registration and more awareness about land rights strengthen or compromise the outcomes of those interventions?

7.2.1 Community responses to climate change

Many people expressed concerns about the prolonged droughts over the past three years, along with less predictable rainfall patterns. They often attribute this to climate change and set out that it makes it harder

to decide when to sow seeds and is reducing plants' resilience to pests. All respondents expressed their concerns about this year's bad harvest, making living conditions precarious, and not allowing them any additional expenses. Sesame, for instance is a typical cash crop that 'helped to send our children to school, to buy clothes, pay hospital bills, but expenses to grow it are high and it is no longer producing well', as a community member explained (8.5.2025). Another person in the same community explained that he had sew sesame for three times without having a proper harvest. He therefore decided to no longer grow it, especially given the relatively high investment for buying the seeds.

An increase in economic power could help people adapt to climate change, although deciding on the best strategies can be challenging. For instance, while recent years have been drier than average, the district has also experienced extreme floods, such as those following Cyclone Idai in 2019, when the Pungue river flooded large parts of the area. The solution against one problem might be inadequate to other. Potential responses include investing in drought-resistant seeds, but this did not seem to be a serious consideration for most households, as it requires financial means. Although most people rely on subsistence farming, vulnerability levels vary between households and communities. Those with access to both low-lying and high-lying fields are better able to diversify their livelihoods and spread risks. Low-lying fields, and fields close to riverbeds are prone to flooding in wet years, but in years of drought they may still provide some harvest. Higher fields are more prone to drought but may not get flooded. However, much of Nhamatanda district is relatively flat, and not all households have access to different types of fields for many households; in more mountainous areas, access to different field types may be easier to realise.

As argued above, people generally feel tenure secure, and this does not seem to be a determining factor for their livelihoods, nor for their climate adaptation responses. It was more a lack of equipment and capital that prevented people from changing their agricultural practices. Most people were also reluctant to move a different area because of the social and economic costs of moving, and the uncertainty of indeed obtaining access to greener pastures. Would they not find the same problems elsewhere? In addition, the increased unpredictability of weather patterns also made it difficult for people to decide which adaptation strategies to implement.

One way in which the project interventions could possibly contribute to more sustainable resource use is through the community plans for management of natural resources that are supposed to be set up. For instance, in the community that was affected by erosion of the riverbank because of the sand depletion, a plan was made to prevent further erosion by planting elephant grass. People indicated that this was working for some time, but the persistent drought in recent years has pushed people to cultivate closer to the river again and to replace elephant grass for staple crops such as sweet potatoes.

7.2.2 State-led responses to climate change

Mozambique is a country that is at high risk of extreme weather events, and such events are becoming more frequent and more intense because of climate change(Artur, 2011; Jacobs & Almeida, 2020). One of the ways

in which the government tries to reduce disaster risks, is by relocating people from high-risk areas to safer places, either in the aftermath of a specific disaster or as a preventive measure. This happened for instance at large scale in the aftermath of cyclone Idai, when around 80 000 people initially fled to temporary emergency shelters, and from there many were resettled to new locations (Almeida and Jacobs, 2022).

Nhamatanda district has been the target of disaster-related resettlement as well; there are both places from where people have been removed, and communities to which people have been relocated. This obviously raises questions about land rights and the tenure security of people in high-risk areas and in safer areas. To facilitate resettlement, the state needs to convince people that it is in their own interest to leave high-risk areas and to accept a new place of living. The state also needs to convince the land users in the resettlement site to provide space for newcomers. The widespread idea that all land belongs to the state is helpful for the state in this regard, as most people feel they have no choice but to give up their land at the state's request, even if they are supposed to have legal tenure security on the basis of occupation in good faith for more than ten years, or on the basis of customary rights (Almeida and Jacobs, 2022).

People who get resettled benefit in varying degrees from support to rebuild their lives. A disaster like Idai got a lot of international attention, and with that also financial support. In most resettlement sites it took a couple of years until all support materialized. Generally, in Idai resettlement sites, most projects are completed or close to completion. People have usually received residential plots, houses with one or two bedrooms, depending on the size of the family, electricity, and water taps are constructed at several spots in the communities. For other disasters, which drew less attention, financial means have often been more limited, leading to more basic levels of support for the resettlement communities. Moreover, as described above, most often host communities give their land away without any compensation for the loss of land.

What applies to all resettlement sites is that people receive residential plots, which becomes 'theirs'. In most cases, this is proven by a small piece of paper, providing the number of the plot. In other cases, people obtain a more formal DUAT. Yet, the bundle of rights that people get in resettlement sites is not a complete bundle: they are not allowed to sell the plots for instance. If they decide they want to leave, the house and the plot are supposed to be returned to the state, which will then provide it to another household in need.

At present, there seems to be unclarity about ways in which areas are classified as risk areas. The actualization of land use plans that Centro Terra Viva is preparing, and the risk mapping which Terra Firma executes as part of the community mapping can both contribute to greater awareness about risk areas and safe areas, and the possibilities and impossibilities in terms of land use and land rights. In many cases, when previous land use plans were made at district levels, climate change was not a prominent issue. It is getting more attention in recent years. During a recent address for instance, Mozambican president Daniel Chapo called upon the National Disaster Management Institute (INGD) to make sure 'that territorial planning takes

into account the climate risks resulting from climate change'.[20] The mapping provides an opportunity to also raise further awareness among community members and state officials about the rights to land which people have, and hence to protect their tenure security.

7.3 Other impacts of LAS interventions

In our research, we also considered other potential impacts of the LAS-Moz intervention beyond strengthening tenure security and enhancing climate resilience, identifying at least three areas where positive effects could be expected: improved access to land for investors, more efficient state administration, and more sustainable natural resource management.

In Mozambique, most land delimitation processes are initiated by an investor's interest in a given area since delimitation and community consultation are legal requirements. State-led delimitations occur only for specific purposes, while those initiated by civil society organizations, in close collaboration with local communities, such as the one conducted by Terra Firma remain relatively rare. Among our respondents - both community members and state officials- there was a hope that delimitation will incentivize investors to come to the region: Without registration it is more difficult for outsiders to read the local environment and to engage with local communities. Community members are often hopeful that investors will come once their community is mapped and a DUAT is provided and contribute to improvements of their livelihoods. We noted that this idea is partly based on explanations of Terra Firma's technicians on the importance of obtaining a DUAT. Yet, whether investors will eventually turn up will probably, to a large extent, depend on investment opportunities being available. Nevertheless, registrations carried out independently of investor pressures, and guided by principles such as those applied by Terra Firma, are likely to result in more transparent and participatory processes, suggesting that delimitation and registration outside investment-driven initiatives may yield better outcomes.

Apart from the investment possibility, there is also an administrative advantage for the state in having communities mapped and delimited: It makes administration easier when boundaries are clear and widely agreed upon, and reduces the risk of power abuse by local leaders. Conflicts between and within communities are easier to solve for authorities if they can refer to a widely agreed upon map of the area which indicates which land belongs to whom. An official explained that in earlier times most of the boundaries between communities were natural and clearly visible in the landscape: a river, mountain, or specific trees for instance. With time passing however, some of the rivers have eroded and the flow of the river has shifted, making it unclear whether the boundary remained or moved with the move of the river. As pointed out by a Terra Firma staff member, *"for state officials it is a relief what we do. Otherwise, it would be*

[20] Club of Mozambique, 13.08.2025. 'President calls for swift humanitarian response for IDPs', https://clubofmozambique.com/news/mozambique-president-calls-for-swift-humanitarian-response-for-idps-289422/, viewed on 14.08.2025.

an activity for the state to do, but they are doing a lot of things, would not manage to get this work done" (19.05.2025). This might be one of the reasons why, contrary to what is common to find in the literature about other countries (above), we found state officials at district level and below quite favourable to land registration of communal land.

Finally, by mapping community areas, including its natural resources, and by organizing committees or associations to manage these natural resources, conversations are also started about the best ways in which resources can be governed, and awareness increases about the importance of these resources. A state technician indicated that he noticed a difference between communities which had been targeted by Terra Firma and other communities, and explained:

> *"When people understand the Land Law, they can prepare for the future and safeguard their land. For example, in [community], people do not farm along the riverbank, according to the community rules."* (12.05.2025)

In conclusion, even if delimitation does not necessarily lead to more investments and better livelihood opportunities on the short term, it can lead to more sustainable management of natural resources, and it may have a positive impact on people's resilience and reduce their vulnerability.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

This research aims to get better insight in ways in which rural people in Nhamatanda district, in central Mozambique experience their tenure security, to what extent external factors impact on their tenure security, and how tenure security impacts on lives, livelihoods and resilience of people. The findings of this report aim at contributing to a better understanding on how the interventions promoted by LAS-Moz can better contribute to improve land tenure security in Mozambique.

Our study shows that without any interventions people have limited awareness of the rules that regulate land tenure and of their land rights. For instance, few respondents were aware that legally their land tenure is secure, as they usually occupy their lands either based on customary arrangements, or in good faith for more than ten years. Both modes of land occupation are recognized in the land law and suffice to have legal tenure security, despite not having their land delimited and registered.

Realities and perceptions about tenure security however are often different. There are cases in which people perceive their tenure as secure despite weak legal rights, and situations where despite a possible legal right people still feel insecure. People who have been involved in project interventions of civil society actors have more awareness about the Land Law, but both community members and state officials widely assume that tenure security is only guaranteed with formal registration, either at the communal or individual level. There is less recognition of the fact that most people have legal tenure security regardless of a DUAT. More knowledge on this would help people to defend their rights.

During our visit, Terra Firma had initiated the process of registration in many communities, and people had increased their knowledge about the law, but it actually made them feel less secure about their land tenure, as they felt they were in need of a DUAT.[21] It is likely that their perceived tenure security will increase again once they have obtained these documents. Many people however expressed mostly to need an individual ownership document, as it would enable them also to securely pass on their land to their children. As part of the current project, Terra Firma aims primarily at communal delimitation and the expectations about individual registration may not be met. This requires clear explanation to the community members to underline that their rights in principle are already protected even without registration.

In practice, threats to tenure security in the region are rather limited. There is not a lot of pressure on the land, and there are no major investors who have an interest in setting up their businesses in the district. As a result of this, people who have not been targeted by any land rights project generally feel secure about their land tenure; they do not have a formal document, but without anybody asking them about this, or

[21] In some of the communities, a process of delimitation had been started in the past by other actors but was never completed. This led to more unrest as people became aware that they were lacking formal documents. They now felt to need such documents but were not provided with them.

without anybody trying to take away their land, there is no need to feel insecure. An exception to this is when people talk about the GNP, as they fear a possible expansion of the park may threaten their lands and lives in the future.

Investments are generally not seen by the local population as a potential threat to tenure security. People mostly emphasize that they would welcome investors, in the hope that investors will bring employment opportunities or development. There is a risk that being keen to receive investors makes people also vulnerable for exploitation without proper guidance on how to best negotiate their resources. It may also lead to intra-communal or inter-communal tensions between the ones who will benefit from investments and the ones who will not. Whether or not there will indeed be more investments remains to be seen in the future.

The bigger threat for people living in the district's buffer zone surrounding the national park is related to the presence of the park. Livelihoods are threatened by the presence of wildlife, and people fear that in the future the park may need more space and expand again, possibly in their direction, forcing them to leave their lands. We found a general sentiment of distrust and animosity toward the park among community members, despite its numerous interventions in the buffer zone. Unless future efforts prioritize quicker and more effective protection of livelihoods, such as through stronger fencing systems, and communication between all stakeholders is improved, this climate of suspicion is likely to persist.

A second threat to livelihoods is posed by extreme weather events such as droughts and floods which, as a consequence of climate change, are becoming increasingly severe. From our research we conclude that (lack of) tenure security is not an impediment to people's implementation of climate-related measures. However, land tenure security is quite problematic when considering state-led interventions. With the state relocating people from high-risk areas to safer places, it may also become more important for people to be well aware of their land rights. If they are simply dispossessed by the state in the interest of resettlement, they are in fact the ones paying large part of the costs of resettlement of others. It is already a step forward that in drafting an updated land use plan for the district, CTV will ensure that attention is paid to mapping of risk areas as well. Yet, as also pointed out by Terra Firma staff, ideally the mapping at district level, is preceded by mapping at communal level to ensure that actual land use is well captured. Therefore, the participation of CTV in the elaboration of district land use plans represents an opportunity for promoting bottom-up mapping of risk, and coordination with the delimitation of communal land. Nevertheless, communities with their land rights formalized, and with enough knowledge on how to use those rights will be in a better position to negotiate with the state in cases of resettlement of other communities in their land.

Finally, our research also reflected on other possible impacts of the LAS-Moz intervention, beyond strengthening tenure security and enhancing climate resilience. First, demarcated and registered land becomes more visible and accessible to investors. This can be a double-edged sword: while we observed strong interest among communities in attracting external investors, the literature often shows that such interactions leave communities at a disadvantage. However, stronger knowledge of their rights, combined

with the fact that demarcation and delimitation are conducted independently of investors, may help minimize these risks. Second, the delimitation and registration of communal land help establish clear administrative boundaries, facilitating state administration in matters such as resource disputes. Finally, the participatory nature of this process, combined with the creation or reactivation of local natural resource management committees, appears to foster stronger dialogue and more coordinated action within communities around sustainable resource management.

8.1 Recommendations

- **Training on land rights is essential** to deconstruct legal myths and to raise awareness about the rights which people have, regardless of a formal title document. For instance, deconstructing the ongoing assumption that, because all land belongs to the state communities can be displaced, without compensation, at any time should be tackled. Such training should be well-tailored to the capacity of communities and avoid technical jargon when targeting community members and paralegals. It is preferred to provide training in local languages and not in Portuguese to increase accessibility for all.

- **Training cannot be a one-off event**. For training and awareness raising to be effective activities should take place with some regularity. As indicated by some respondents, trainings should also be paired with materials like short leaflets that can provide more information and refresh their minds about the content of the training. This could be helpful as well as a source to look up when the state, investors, or other land claimants turn up.

- **Pay attention to inclusivity.** In the process of raising awareness, training, mapping, and registration, it is important to pay attention to the diversity of perspectives and experiences within a community; to consider the rights and needs of newcomers and of women for instance, as their tenure security may be weaker and based on secondary rights. They may be at risk of losing out when incentives are provided to register land individually. Although we have the impression that trainers at present pay attention to this diversity, it remains a continuous point of attention throughout the process to ensure inclusive participation.

- **Link land use planning with climate risks.** When developing land use plans at communal and district level, it is important to pay attention to areas that are at risk of negative impacts of climate change: Where are these areas located? Who is using them? What can be done to reduce risks? And who is responsible for this? Ideally, communal land delimitation and communal plans are developed prior to the district plans and serve as a basis for these district plans.

- **Prioritize communal over individual registration.** In areas like Nhamatanda, where customary land rights are complex, land-related disputes low, and pressure from investors and state projects remains small, priority should be given to registering communal land, leaving individual registration

for a later stage. As discussed above, the rights and obligations regarding land within communities vary significantly depending on factors such as how land was accessed and for how long. Individual registration risks disempowering some members (e.g., newcomers) in favour of others (e.g., customary leaders), without providing clear benefits. Moreover, given the unexpected support of state entities for communal land registration, it makes sense to focus available resources on enabling more communities to secure their land rights. Finally, it should be clear to communities whether the delimitation of individual parcels is to be expected in the process in which they are involved, while the value of communal delimitation in protecting both their collective and individual rights should be further emphasized.

- **Update registered land.** In areas where individual registration is done, a snapshot of existing land rights is taken. To keep their relevance, it is important that mapping leads to registration and that once the initial registration is completed, a system is put in place to ensure that updates are made once changes in land rights take place. Such a system should be easy to operate, also by trained and designated representatives of the communities. Outdated registration will lose its relevance and reliability over time, and risks creating overlapping claims to land.

- **Capitalize on existing data.** In the process of mapping and registering communal lands substantial amounts of valuable data are collected by Terra Firma and made available in an online database. These data are little explored and could be capitalized more in the future, both by government actors, investors, and civil society actors, including stakeholders like CTV and the GNP, to develop tailored interventions and to provide support where it is needed. Moreover, this dataset also deserves further academic enquiry.

- **Strengthening State Ownership of Community Land Registration**. While the Mozambican model of civil society–led communal land registration offers many advantages, the literature on land registration in other countries shows a latent risk that its results may later be rejected by state officials and/or politicians. It is therefore important to explore opportunities to further engage and secure the commitment of state officials and politicians to the final outcomes of the land registration process.
- **Manage expectations around investors.** Communities seem to view land registration as a pathway to attracting investors and, through them, improving their livelihoods, often without full awareness of the potential risks of outside interventions. Training in land rights, as well as land registration processes, should provide a more realistic perspective on the possible downsides of such engagements and the mechanisms available to manage them. In addition, livelihood interventions should explore -together with communities - alternative paths for developing their livelihoods in a more independent and sustainable manner.

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