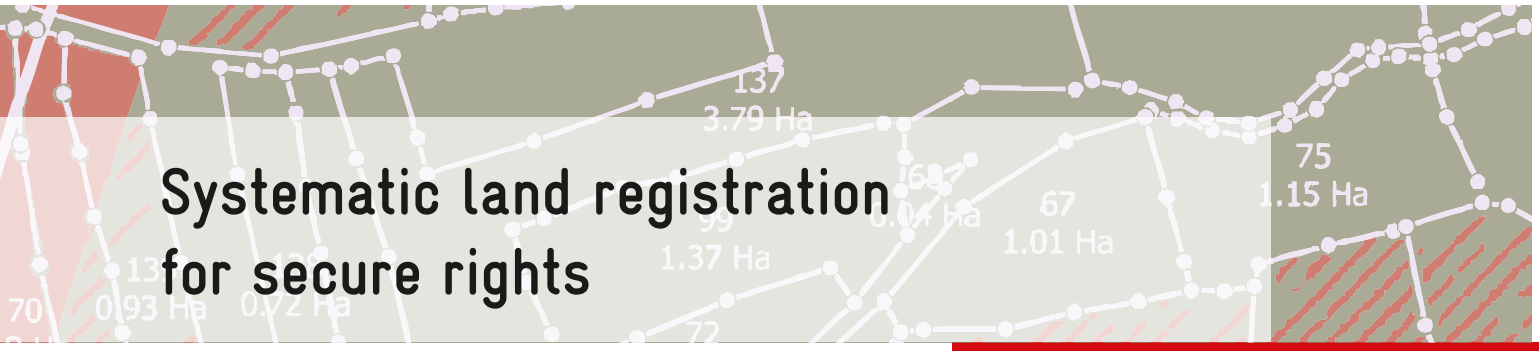


Systematic land registration for secure rights

Local administrations are systematically registering land rights with digital solutions to create legal certainty for the public.

Background

Land is a resource of immense economic, social and environmental importance. In many countries, unclear ownership structures, competing user claims, legally unrecognised property boundaries and informal settlements often lead to conflicts over land. The associated uncertainty reduces the willingness to invest in sustainable land management and makes it difficult for owners to use their land as collateral.

It is important that ownership and claims are clarified unequivocally. This is ensured by systematic land registration. In demarcated areas, all properties – settlement areas, fields, pastures and forests – are recorded, mapped and legally documented step by step. In this way, ownership and rights of use are officially recognised and clearly assigned.

This not only creates legal certainty but also enables better planning and administration of land use. Registration processes are often accompanied by awareness-raising campaigns, transparent dispute resolution mechanisms and the development of digital registers.

However, the introduction of systematic land registration also poses a number of challenges. In many countries, the legal basis for adequately recording and recognising informal or traditional land rights is lacking. In addition, there are technical hurdles such as a lack of high-quality geodesic reference systems, a lack of know-how in the administrations, and high costs relating to the comprehensive collection and digitisation of data. Social tensions, power asymmetries and a lack of trust in state institutions can also hinder access to land titles, especially for women and other disadvantaged groups.

Land registration must be designed in a participatory manner and sensitive data protected. Transparent and fair dispute settlement mechanisms ensure that the legitimacy of land titles is secured in the long term.

The importance of systematic land registration is reflected in numerous international agendas. Secure access to land plays a key role, especially in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Gender equality is promoted by giving women in particular formal land rights (SDG 5), while the official recognition of informal rights of disadvantaged groups reduces inequalities (SDG 10). In the context of systematic land registration, clearly documented land tenure supports structured and sustainable spatial planning and thus the development of sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). Furthermore, the transparent and legally secure recording of land rights strengthens peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).

With systematic land registration,
all existing land rights,
as far as possible,
are registered in a defined area.



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Solutions from development cooperation

Development cooperation can support its partner countries in establishing systematic land registration as part of sustainable land management. First, it is necessary to create or strengthen legal and institutional frameworks that enable inclusive, transparent and non-discriminatory land registration. This includes the development of modern – if possible digital – cadastral and land registry systems, in which the collected data is documented and managed in the long term. Development cooperation supports the use of participatory procedures in the establishment of these systems and thus the involvement of local communities. Digital cadastres enable effective, transparent and continuously updated storage of information on property boundaries, ownership and rights of use. By promoting digital land information systems, development cooperation thus helps to increase the efficiency of land administration, improve access to reliable information and increase transparency and legal certainty for all parties involved.

In addition, as part of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH's Global Programme Responsible Land Policy, development cooperation supports its partner countries in building land registration capacities through training, education and knowledge transfer in the administrations and raising awareness and creating public acceptance through information campaigns. A particular priority is considering the interests of disadvantaged groups and enabling them to acquire formal land rights.

Development cooperation
supports many of its partner countries
in **creating the legal**
and **institutional framework**
for systematic land registration.





Madagascar: Systematic parcel registration and land title allocation

In Madagascar, much of the rural population lacks formal proof of land tenure, which has implications for investment, conflict prevention and women's rights. To address this, GIZ's Global Programme Responsible Land Policy developed the Systematic and Stratified Plot Inventory (Inventaire Parcellaire Systématique et Stratifié, IPSS) in Boeny and the DIANA region, which was later adopted by the government. The IPSS records property status in each municipality, combining systematic land surveys with participatory decision-making, awareness-raising campaigns and local conflict resolution.

Through the IPSS, 21 land counters were set up in target communities, updated land use plans were introduced in six districts, and nearly 100,000 plots were recorded. Over 1,300 land deeds were issued, 20,000 people were informed of their rights, and 97 per cent of conflicts were resolved locally. Women gained particular benefits: they now own 30 per cent of the land, received legal advice, and traditional authorities were sensitised to gender equality.

The project emphasised transparency and participation through two-week campaigns with films, radio plays and puppet theatre, while local recognition committees oversaw registration and on-site conflict resolution. Digital tools such as QField supported data collection, and training built skills in surveying, legal advice and advocacy across government, civil society and the private sector.

The impact extends beyond Boeny and the DIANA region: the government made land rights a national priority, underscored by the President's presence at a land certificate ceremony. New procedures now reduce processing times and improve property tax collection, generating revenue for infrastructure and services. With almost 100,000 plots recorded, the IPSS has proven highly effective, especially in ensuring women's participation and accessible registration for illiterate people.



Cameroon: Adaptable and innovative instruments secure rural land tenure

In Cameroon, restrictive titling procedures and outdated legislation make it difficult to legally secure rural land. Customary land use, which often follows collective rather than individual ownership, is rarely documented or recognised. Smallholder farmers typically lack formal proof of land use, as registration is costly, complex, and requires either proof of use before 1974 (for residential, arable and pastureland) or a lengthy concession process (for unpopulated land). These hurdles create legal uncertainty, fuel conflicts, disadvantage marginalised groups and hinder sustainable development.

To address this, the Global Programme Responsible Land Policy developed two alternative instruments to document customary rights at low cost and reduce social conflicts. Both rely on local validation and community-based legitimacy.

- Certificate of Recognition of Customary Rights on Land (Attestation de Reconnaissance des Droits Fonciers Coutumiers, ARDFC): Confirms customary ownership based on testimonies from traditional authorities, neighbours and community representatives. It includes georeferencing, conflict review by a local commission, and archiving with municipal and traditional authorities. While not yet officially recognised by the Ministry of Land (MINDCAF), it is already seen locally as effective, including for investment security and compensation in cases of expropriation.

- Certificate on Peaceful Land Use (Attestation de Jouissance Paisible des Terres, AJPT): Confirms peaceful land use without transfer of ownership rights, securing investments such as buildings or plantations and offering special protection for women without property rights. It relies on georeferencing, traditional markings and witness reports, and provides important proof for export-oriented producers under the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR).

Both instruments were piloted in 2024–2025 with over 160 households in eight villages in Nanga-Eboko and Yoko. Their participatory and low-cost approach offers a legally comprehensible and socially accepted way to secure land rights for vulnerable groups. Although official recognition is pending, early results demonstrate strong potential.

Results of GIZ's Global Programme Responsible Land Policy (GPRLP) (2016–2026)

The global programme improved
40 land registration procedures
in the eleven partner countries.
Of these, **16 procedures**
have been institutionalised
on a long-term basis.

As part of these procedures,
650,775 households received
secured land rights. **64 per cent**
of households are headed by women.

In Madagascar, the IPSS has been very successful so far: through voluntary, transparent and free participation in the programme, almost **100,000 plots** have been recorded. Particularly noteworthy is the high participation of women and the low-threshold access for illiterate people, which were achieved through targeted information campaigns.

Key messages

1 Systematic land registration can only have a positive impact if its processes are inclusive, transparent and adapted to local conditions.

2 Technical solutions must go hand in hand with political commitment, legal reforms and continuous public relations.

3 Systematic land registration is intended to reduce power imbalances and create equitable solutions for all affected population groups.

Improved
public integration
into systems for registering land rights
leads to increased **social acceptance**
of the **distribution**
of rights.







Recommendations for development cooperation

1. Adapt the legal framework and strengthen the protection of disadvantaged groups: Development cooperation should devise or review the legal basis so that women, minorities and other vulnerable groups in particular are effectively protected from discrimination.

2. Introduce modern cadastral and land register systems: Digital land registration systems should be set up to create more transparency, enable participation and prevent corruption.

3. Build administrative capacity: A particular focus of development cooperation should be on strengthening national and local administrations so that procedures can be implemented efficiently and embedded in a sustainable manner.

4. Targeted involvement of vulnerable groups: It is important that disadvantaged groups are actively involved in all phases of land registration and are given equal access to land rights.

5. Carry out information and education campaigns: Large-scale awareness-raising activities can help to communicate the rights, procedures and benefits of land registration to the public.

6. Promote participatory and inclusive approaches: Practices based on dialogue, community decision-making and local responsibility should be supported.

7. Adapt international experiences to local contexts: Good practices from other countries can be taken up but need to be flexibly adapted to local circumstances and needs.

The **IPSS in Madagascar**
is regarded internationally
as a best practice example,
especially for regions where informal
or traditional land rights are widespread:
it creates **legal certainty**,
promotes participation and
can be **flexibly adapted**
to local conditions.





Learn more

FAO (2025): From Farmers to Government Officials – Everyone Benefits from a Digital Land Cadastre

FAO (2020): Legal Guide on Land Consolidation Based on Regulatory Practices in Europe

GIZ (2025): Manuel de mise en œuvre – Inventaire parcellaire systématique stratifié appliqué (IPSS) aux opérations de certification foncière massive (OCFM)

World Bank (2021): Lao Peoples Democratic Republic – Enhancing Systematic Land Registration Project

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