



FOOD SECURITY BRIEFER

LAND POLICY FOR THE NEXT GENERATIONⁱ

African governments [increasingly recognize](#) the potential for land-based development to feed the rural poor and growing urban populations, and to promote equitable human development. Good land policy is central to productive land-based development across farm sizes and types. It enables inclusive, sustainable growth. Governance of, and access to, land is the most important policy choice facing Africa. This issue will determine whether Africa's growing rural economies follow a Latin America model dominated by large heavily capitalized farms existing side by side with marginal smallholders, or an Asian model dominated by smallholders who increased their prosperity and reduced rural poverty through increased agricultural productivity.

FARMLAND PATTERNS DETERMINE THE PATH TO PROSPERITY: Should Africa [favor larger-scale commercial production](#) or [the smallholder economy](#)? Are low yields and the slow pace of rural transformation attributable to smallholder performance, or to poor policy and investment choices? Recent [studies](#) provide nuanced evidence on farm-size, growth and productivity:ⁱⁱ

- Productivity by farm-size varies and evidence often shows higher productivity on smaller farms. Even very small farms (less than 1 or 2 ha) can be productive, commercial and mechanized – including in Africa.ⁱⁱⁱ Conversely, very large farm holdings can underutilize land. Mechanization at scale is most successful in places with extensive fertile land and very low population densities, and is not as suitable for many African countries, where population densities are high and land is not particularly fertile.
- Access to land, inputs, financial services, and markets matter to the pace of growth and how it reaches the poor. Experience in large-farm biased systems such as [Brazil's Cerrado and small-farm biased systems found in Thailand](#) illustrates the importance of broad access to these factors. Africa's sustainable growth agenda calls for the inclusive results experienced in Thailand.^{iv} Both cases offer insights into complementary policy needs e.g., finance and education.
- Smallholder commercial agriculture, scaled over time, can reduce poverty and create jobs. In China, Japan, Chile, Thailand, and the U.S., smallholder-led agricultural growth based on recognition of small farmers' land rights kick-started broader, more inclusive economic transformations. The land-related conflict and untenable social costs that preceded these transformations can be mitigated in Africa by learning from these countries' earlier histories.

EFFECTIVE LAND RIGHTS AND ACCESS MATTER: The logic and evidence of how land rights are relevant to growth and poverty reduction are summarized in recent literature reviews.^v

- **When tenure is secure, farmers invest more in their land.**^{vi} In Thailand, land titling increased investment, input use, and yields, especially when credit was available. In Ethiopia, land certification led to land productivity increases of 40-45% in the Tigray Region, and soil and water conservation investments rose by 30% in the Amhara Region. In Uganda, awareness of rights increased productivity by 20%. Tree planting increased with tenure security in Ghana's cocoa areas. In China,

the probability of investment increased by 76% with registration. In Rwanda, the change in farmers' soil conservation investment doubled.

- **Land conflicts reduce yields.**^{vii} In Uganda, when plot ownership/control is disputed, yields are 20% lower; with eviction risk, yields were 37% lower. In Burkina Faso, productivity dropped by 40% when households had concerns regarding land disputes.
- **Improving allocation and outcomes.**^{viii} In Mozambique, because of a complex and costly land transfer policy, land was not equitably allocated and so underutilized. In contrast, in South Africa, land access led to improved food security.
- **Women are improving production, nutrition, and income.**^{ix} In Ethiopia, women's caloric intake and body mass index improved in certified areas, and an increase in land allocated to women decreased household food insecurity by 36%.^x In Tanzania, women with strong land rights were 3 times more likely to work off-farm and more likely to have higher earnings.

INCREASING LAND-BASED INVESTMENT IN A WORLD OF POOR GOVERNANCE:^{xi}

There are good examples and unintended consequences of large-scale land-based investments. Taking time to get investments right can yield sustained, positive outcomes in food production and safeguard the property rights of local communities.^{xii}

Expropriation without due process or fair, prompt compensation, and the loss of access to vital resources for food security and livelihoods are real. Positive impacts are more likely when existing rights are respected, as evidenced by a vegetable oil project in Uganda where benefits are shared and tenure is more secure. A [National Geographic](#) article on land investments in Mozambique warns of similar risks.

Reputation, financial, timeline, and productivity risks associated with land tenure issues lead to higher start-up costs, higher ongoing costs, damage to crops and property, delay, and even collapse of projects that do not recognize local land rights. [The Munden Project \(2012\)](#) quantifies these costs to investors.

SOME VIABLE INTERVENTIONS WITHIN FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMMING:

- **Assess and monitor risks relating to land rights and access:** [USAID](#), [the World Bank](#), and others offer tools for assessing land tenure risks in different contexts.
- **Allocate land to women:**^{xiii} Gender-sensitive allocation of [micro-gardens in India](#) increased use of credit and inputs, like fertilizer. USAID Senegal's [land reclamation](#) by women is helping nourish their families. Opportunity expands when women can farm plots, both in their own right and together with a spouse (e.g., [MCA-Mali](#), [MCA-Burkina Faso](#)).
- **Educate women and men on women's land rights:**^{xiv} In Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, [grassroots legal aid](#) promotes awareness. USAID Zambia's [PROFIT](#) educates farmers on gender and land rights – an approach also supported in USAID Ghana's ADVANCE II gender strategy.
- **Opt for smallholder-centric and local community-friendly investment models:**^{xv} In Ghana, VegPro (a firm) collaborated with donor-funded service providers and their beneficiaries to reduce land-related harms and create mutual benefits. See USAID's forthcoming operational guidelines for commercial agricultural investors for more information.
- **Take measures to improve consultation, information, negotiation, and contracts:**^{xvi} In Ghana, land experts helped Weinco Ghana Ltd. set "working principles" for engaging smallholders and shaping their investment in line with the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of

Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests and forthcoming Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI) principles. Template agreements enabled recording of local tenancies in pilots in Ghana and Benin.

- **Make information available to all investors and local community stakeholders^{xvii}:** For example, the Ghana Commercial Agriculture Project plans to match interested investors with informed communities by providing quality information about land that communities identify for investment, its physical attributes, and how to access it through a land information bank.
- **Strengthen the rights of existing land users^{xviii}:** Register parcels using low-cost and participatory practices, e.g., [the Ethiopia Land Administration Program](#). In Liberia, Mozambique, and Uganda, [securing rights at the level of the community](#) helps safeguard vulnerable people at low cost. Para-professionals (legal, surveying) were engaged to improve participation and transparency and reduce costs in a Gates Foundation-funded pilot in Ghana.
- **Use good practice in irrigation schemes^{xix}:** Define clear resettlement standards, transparent land [allocation procedures](#) and secure beneficiary rights, e.g., [MCA-Mali](#).
- **Adopt appropriate technologies and use an evidence-based approach.** Rigorously evaluated pilots are especially helpful. In Ethiopia, USAID is helping the government to recognize pastoral communities' rights for the first time. In Tanzania, USAID is testing a low-cost, participatory, and potentially scalable approach using cell phones to register land rights. Both projects include independent impact evaluations to help USAID and other stakeholders learn from these pilots.

ⁱ Bibliography available at the USAID Land Tenure and Property Rights Portal.

ⁱⁱ Jayne, et. al. (2014); Heady and Jayne (2014); Lele and Agarwal (1989) Deininger and Squire (1997); Songwe and Deininger (2009); Holden and Otsuka (2014); DFID (2014); Atwood (2014); Collier and Dercon (2013); de Soto (2000) Collier (2008); Byerlee and deJanvry (2009)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ali and Deininger (2014); Holden and Otsuka (2014)

^{iv} World Bank (2009)

^v Bodnar (2014); DFID (2014); Byamugisha (2013); Holden and Otsuka (2014); Besley and Ghatak (2010); World Bank (2009); [Deininger \(2003\)](#); Feder and Nishio (1999)

^{vi} Thailand -Feder (1995); Ethiopia - Holden and Otsuka (2014); Ethiopia - Deininger et al (2008); Uganda - [Deininger, et al \(2006\)](#); Ghana - Besley (1995); China - [Landesa \(2011\)](#); Rwanda - [Ali et. al. \(2011\)](#)

^{vii} Uganda - Mwesigye and Motsumoto (2014); Burkina Faso - [Linkow \(2011\)](#)

^{viii} Mozambique- Bruce (2007); S. Africa- Kaswell and Carter (2010)

^{ix} Ethiopia and Tanzania - Espinosa (2014); Ethiopia - Kumar and Quisimbung (2012) ([Landesa Interactive Infographic](#))

^x A caveat: Across the outcome categories, results vary by context and sometimes tenure is already secure; sometimes the intervention or research approach is off.

^{xi} deWit and Norfolk (2014); Fenner et. al., (2014); Terra Firma (2010) and (2011, a; b); Speller (2014); Schoneveld (2014); Hermann et. al. (2014); Jonckheere et. al. (2014); DFID (2014); Munden Project (2012); Boche and Anseeuw (2013); Vaeth and Kirk (2012); Norfolk and Hanlon (2012)

^{xii} An IFAD-supported Vegetable Oil Development Project in Uganda had positive impacts on the livelihoods and tenure of both men and women (Jonckhere et. al. (2014)); and, a biofuel investment in Malawi had positive impacts including on local smallholder food production (Hermann et. al. (2014)).

^{xiii} India - [Santos, F. et. al. \(2013\)](#) ; Mali - Rolfes and Seitz (2013); Uganda - Jonckhere et. al. 2014;

^{xiv} Uganda, Tanzania - Berhman et. al. (2013); Mali - Rolfes and Niono (2012); Zambia - Akamandisa and Jones (2014)

^{xv} VegPro and others - Fenner et. al. (2014);

^{xvi} Weince - de Wit and Norfolk (2014); Benin - Valleta (2012)

^{xvii} Ghana - Kakraba and Pollack (2014)

^{xviii} Liberia, Mozambique, Uganda - Knight et. al. (2013); Ghana - Kakraba and Pollack (2014)

^{xix} Allocation procedures in Mali - Rolfes and Niono (2012)