

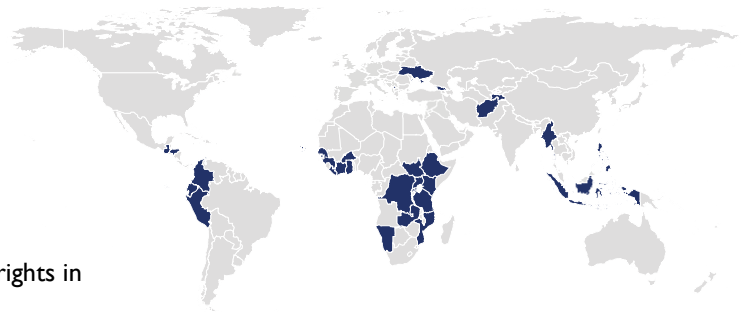
## PRIMER: LAND TENURE AND PROPERTY RIGHTS

### OVERVIEW

Land and the systems that govern land and property rights are central to food security, economic growth, and sustainable development. Secure land and property rights create incentives for investment and trade and contribute to job growth and global prosperity. Secure rights also create incentives for good stewardship of land and natural resources, which improves food security and agricultural productivity and limits the degradation and misuse of valuable resources. Insecure property rights and weak land governance systems often provoke conflict and instability, which can trap communities, countries, and entire regions in a cycle of poverty.

Governments, the private sector, donor agencies, and civil society are increasingly recognizing the critical importance of these issues and engaging in global coordination to improve land and resource governance systems. Increased media coverage of land issues, the G8 and G20's focus on land and property rights, the UN Committee on World Food Security's (CFS) adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (commonly referred to as the VGS) and the ongoing negotiations on the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI) all highlight a clear message: Land rights are a central and vitally important global development issue.

With 38 active programs in 30 countries, representing a commitment of over \$400 million, the United States Government is addressing these issues through programs that improve land governance systems and strengthen land tenure and resource rights for many of world's poorest people. Through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and the Feed the Future Initiative, the U.S. is taking a whole-of-government approach to addressing land tenure and property rights in support of key strategic objectives.



### KEY ISSUES

U.S. Government programs in land tenure and property rights address a wide variety of strategic development outcomes that are critical to U.S. domestic and foreign policy goals:

- **Expanding Economic Growth**  
*Clear, secure, and negotiable rights to land and resources are fundamental to long-term economic growth and development. Improved tenure security leads to higher incomes by increasing incentives to invest, which improves productivity. [Learn more.](#)*
- **Improving Food Security and Agricultural Productivity**  
*Effective land governance systems that provide improved access and rights to land resources are a necessary condition for achieving food security and better nutrition. [Learn more.](#)*
- **Limiting Conflict**  
*Competition over land and the resources found on land drives much conflict around the world. Understanding the role of land in conflicts can help policy makers develop strategies to ease tensions among groups and avoid violence. [Learn more.](#)*
- **Empowering Women**  
*Women's rights to land and property are rarely formally recognized in the developing world. Secure rights to land and resources better enable women to participate in household decision making, earn income, and access credit. [Learn more.](#)*
- **Addressing Global Climate Change**  
*Integration of property rights and resource governance considerations into policies and programs will increase resilience to the impacts of climate change. [Learn more.](#)*
- **Improving Natural Resource Management**  
*Secure land and resource rights are key drivers of biodiversity and sustainable natural resource management. Where these rights are poorly defined and/or poorly enforced, natural resources and ecosystems can be quickly degraded because incentives to protect resources are weak or absent. [Learn more.](#)*

## WORKING WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The United States is committed to working with the global community to develop and implement international guidelines and principles that strengthen land and resource governance systems as a strategy for improving food security, economic growth, and sustainable development. The U.S. chaired the negotiations on the VGs, which the CFS adopted in May 2012 and are an important international instrument that outlines principles and practices governments can refer to when making laws and administering rights to land, fisheries and forests. The U.S. is also participating actively in the CFS's development of the RAI, which will provide a framework to promote responsible investment in agriculture.

Under U.S. leadership in 2012, the G8 initiated support for the VGs and launched the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, which commits members to policy reforms intended to strengthen land governance and accelerate responsible agricultural investment. Building on progress achieved in 2012, the 2013 G8, under U.K. leadership, announced bold steps to improve transparency in land transactions, including a series of Land Partnerships. The United States is partnering with Burkina Faso to strengthen land governance and improve transparency in land transactions.

The U.S. also played a key role in the creation of the Global Donor Working Group on Land, launched in July 2013. The group is comprised of donors and development agencies committed to improving coordination around development programs that focus on land governance. USAID led one of the group's first initiatives, developing a comprehensive database of member organizations' land governance programs. As of March 2014, information has been collected on over 230 active programs, funded by 14 donors, being implemented in more than 100 countries, with a total value of over \$2 billion.

## ILLUSTRATIVE PROJECTS

### Land Administration to Nurture Development (LAND) Project, Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, USAID is building on the success of a series of programs that strengthened property rights of highland area farmers and expanding it to a traditionally vulnerable group: lowland area pastoralists. Since 2004, USAID-supported certification efforts have led to the issuance of more than 500,000 land certificates to over 230,000 households in six regions of Ethiopia. Under these programs, boundaries are clarified and validated by neighbors and community members prior to certification, reducing the likelihood of future disputes. The certificates give holders the right to use and profit from the land. This arrangement represents an important shift from the previous system, which was marked by frequent land seizures, redistribution, and declining agricultural productivity. USAID's LAND project will expand the certification programs and encourage pastoral regions to introduce certification of communal land use rights. The LAND project will also improve rural land governance and land administration and strengthen land tenure rights, thereby promoting faster economic growth, increased agricultural productivity, reduced conflict and resource degradation, and improvements in women's rights to control and manage assets.

[Learn more.](#)

*Expanding  
certification to  
5 pastoral  
communities*

### Property Rights and Artisanal Diamond Development II (PRADD) Project, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea

Building on the successes of its predecessor project, USAID's PRADD II Project works to clarify and strengthen the property rights of artisanal small-scale miners, and increase the benefits to mining communities through environmental rehabilitation, enhanced diamond traceability, and improved land and mining laws. During the final three years of the predecessor project in the Central African Republic, legal diamond production in areas of intervention increased 450% compared to 21% for the rest of the country and more than 650 mining sites were rehabilitated and converted to other economic uses. This project demonstrated the importance of incorporating economic development into artisanal mining programs, an achievement that was highlighted by the adoption of the Washington Declaration by the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme.

[Learn more.](#)

*Increasing legal  
diamond  
production,  
reducing conflict*

### Land and Rural Development Project, Colombia

Effectively resolving land-related issues is crucial to the success of broader efforts to create conditions for a sustainable, durable peace in Colombia. USAID's Land and Rural Development Project, in collaboration with key Government of Colombia institutions, and other actors supports the development of tools, systems, and skills to enable the Government to fulfill its mandate to resolve the land issues at the heart of the nation's long-running conflict. Colombia's decades-long conflict has resulted in one of the highest rates of internal displacement in the world; 3 million people have fled their land since 1985. This project works with the public and private sectors to build the capacity of institutions to implement programs to reconstitute land to victims of conflict, extend land titling and property formalization in prioritized rural areas, and promote comprehensive rural development that enables citizens to make productive and sustainable use of their land. [Learn more.](#)

*Resolving land  
issues at the  
heart of the  
nation's conflict*