Land Expropriation: Lessons Learned to Date

To promote economic development and reduce poverty, the Government of Rwanda has used expropriation as a tool to implement land use master plans and build roads, dams, and other infrastructure. Since 2007, some 30,050 proprieties have been expropriated.

**Whose land has been expropriated?**

- **72%** male-headed households
- **28%** female-headed households

- Nearly 88% have a primary school education or less.
- Nearly 70% earn most of their income from farming.

**Surprisingly, most expropriations are in rural areas**

- Urban: 12.2%
- Rural / farm: 69.5%
- Rural / non-farm: 18.3%

**Expropriation is used mostly for infrastructure projects**

- Roads
- Dams
- Business facilities
- Water & electricity
- Public service buildings
- Airport/stadium
- Business facilities
- Other

**Most expropriations did not require households to relocate:**

- **54%** Landowner did not live on the property.
- **31%** Still lived on their land (only a portion of the holding was taken).
- **15%** Had to relocate.

Of the roughly 5,000 households that relocated:

- **49%** Moved to a different umudugudu or cell in the same sector.
- **44%** Stayed in the same village or umudugudu.
- **7%** Moved to a different sector, district, or province.

**In surveys and interviews, officials and expropriated families highlighted concerns:**

- Many say compensation takes too long.
  
  Since 2007, the average time from valuation to compensation was 16 months. But in 2014, the speed of payouts improved dramatically, to about 87 days—well under the 120-day period required by law.

- Unfair valuation was the most common complaint.
  
  More than 80% of expropriated households said their valuation was below market value, but many cannot afford a counter-valuation. Others fear losing an appeal.

- Roles, responsibilities and coordination are not clear.
  
  Expropriating entities were not sure when, where, how, and why to involve the public. Often, they expect local officials to communicate with landowners.

- Expropriated households have lost income.
  
  **77%** said their income dropped significantly, typically about one-third.

- Some cite abuse of the system.
  
  Some people said that private, for-profit projects get preferential treatment by being determined to be in the “public interest” or justified as a part of a master plan.

**What can we do to refine the process?**

Expropriation forced some farmers into cities, depriving them of their livelihood and plunging them into poverty. **FALSE**

According to the data, 71% of relocated rural/farm dwellers remained in rural areas and 25% moved to villages. Only 4% moved to urban areas.

**TRUE or FALSE?**
Many Rwandans—including some who have lost land—support expropriation as a means to further development and growth. However, changes to policy and practice can make the process more fair.

**Planning & valuation**
- Use independent valuers such as IRPV to assess compensation based on fair market value.
- Assess socioeconomic consequences of expropriation as part of the planning process.
- Clarify and follow project timelines, and share information with the public.
- Streamline payments and compensation procedures.
- Allocate sufficient budgets for expropriation before projects start.

**Notice procedures**
- Provide personalized notice planning process to expropriated households well in advance.
- Increase opportunities for public participation in expropriation decisions.
- Ensure all owners of jointly held property are involved in every stage.

**Transparency & accountability**
- Ensure households targeted for expropriation know their rights to appeal or seek counter valuations.
- Make studies on expropriation available for public review and comment.
- Build capacity of local authorities to support community interests in the expropriation process.

**Harm to expropriated households**
- Provide compensation for relocation expenses where applicable.
- Reduce unnecessary limitations on improvements to land scheduled for expropriation.
- Promote alternatives to expropriation.
- Empower local authorities to represent the best interests of their constituents; eliminate conflicts of interest.

**Legal reforms**
- Narrow the scope of expropriation in “public interest” to exclude private investments that support master plans.
- Compensate according to current market prices; support IRPV to produce an annual list of property values and prices.
- Repeal the provision allowing non-payment for small takings.
- Ensure road-widening projects include compensation for expropriated land.
- Clarify institutional roles and responsibilities in the law, including the need for a national coordinating body.