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BRIEF

An Overview of USAID's Land & Conflict Toolkit

DECEMBER 2023

This brief provides a summary of USAID's [Land and Conflict](#) toolkit, available on the [LandLinks](#) website. The full-length toolkit provides guidance on recommended development approaches to address the links between land and resource ownership, access, and use, and violent conflict.

Quick Links

The Context.....	2
Key Issues at the Intersection of Land and Conflict.....	3
Recommended Practices and Program Examples.....	4
Monitoring and Evaluation....	8
Rapid Appraisal Guide.....	10

The Context

Well-governed land provides individuals and communities with enhanced perceptions of security and reduced levels of corruption—key incentives to invest in and conserve land. Effective land systems have impartial and reliable processes for dispute resolution, reducing the need to resort to violence; in turn, conflict mitigation and peacebuilding increase opportunities to create effective land governance structures. Yet, historical injustices related to customary land tenure, colonialism, and economic transformations have profoundly shifted land ownership and resource use in much of the world, leading to long-term exclusion and grievances. Such discriminatory patterns often exacerbate resentment and increase perceptions of threats and insecurity.

Functional land systems maintain efficient and transparent procedures for registering land claims, for supporting land transactions, and for collecting taxes in support of public service delivery and enabling economic growth.

Land access and control is particularly important for marginalized groups, who are often barred from land governance and decision-making, including how land is used, managed, and developed. Two important ways that strong governance can further contribute to development goals are by supporting resource governance and management by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), and by creating a stronger enabling environment for investments in conservation and climate adaptation and mitigation. In India, for example, USAID [partnered with PepsiCo](#) to help local women access land for potato cultivation and to connect them to international supply chains. The public-private partnership empowered women and improved their livelihoods, while also encouraging more sustainable and climate-conscious farming practices.

Effective land governance provides a cost-effective way to mitigate the risk of climate-driven conflict and also to increase resilience, supporting several goals outlined in [USAID's Climate Strategy](#).

For example, strong governance promotes the proper management and careful restoration of land, resources, and ecosystems, which can help to reduce the impacts of climate change. Land governance programs can also address climate-related displacement and conflict at multiple scales, from boosting local community action plans to informing global migration frameworks. Additionally, investing in the recognition of land rights, responsible land management, inclusive land use planning, and natural climate solutions can help achieve climate mitigation goals. The implementation of [natural climate solutions](#), particularly in tropical forests, is one of the most important steps the world can take to address the root causes of climate change.

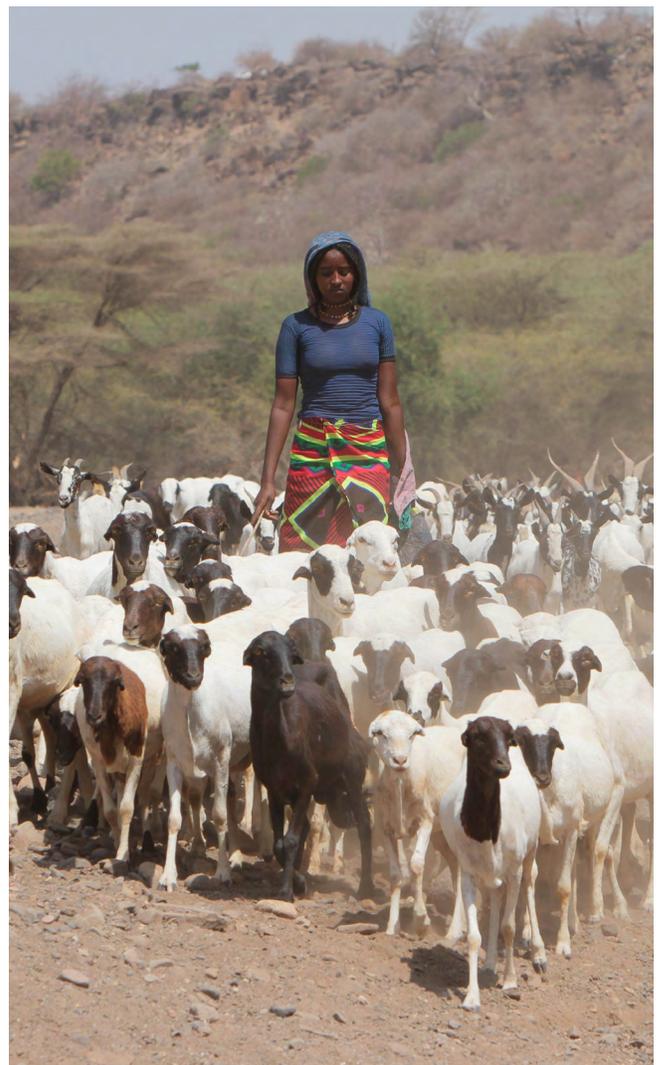


PHOTO BY ANTONIO FIORENTE

Key Issues at the Intersection of Land and Conflict

Land Tenure Insecurity

Control of land provides increased economic, political, and social opportunities. Without effective governance systems, disputes over land ownership can ignite conflict.



Human Mobility

Whatever the cause or reason, the movement of people can potentially create pressures on land and resources that lead to inequities and grievances.



Urbanization

Rapid and unplanned urbanization can lead to informal settlements and exacerbate housing inequalities. Development of cities often involves land expropriation or forced acquisition—highly conflictual processes.



Land Grabbing

Rising demand for land is leading to questionable land acquisitions and the displacement of marginalized groups with insecure tenure.



High-Value Natural Resources

Competition over minerals and other high-value natural resources can contribute to grievances, lead to bad governance and violence, and help finance and sustain conflict.



Marginalized Groups

In much of the world, women and girls, Indigenous Peoples, minorities, and youth face additional challenges accessing, controlling, and defending land and resources.



Increasing Environmental Degradation

The mismanagement and overuse of land and other natural resources often leads to competition and sometimes violent conflict.



Violent Extremism

Environmental defenders often face violence protecting their land; states sometimes direct violence against their opponents' land and property; land-related grievances can fuel extremism.



Post-Conflict Issues and Concerns

Post-conflict actors may target land governance systems and institutions to seize property and entrench exclusionary land holding patterns, leading to dramatic shifts in power dynamics.



To learn more about these key issues, access the relevant section in the *Land and Conflict* toolkit [here](#).

Recommended Practices and Program Examples



PHOTO BY RICHARD CAREY

Land conflicts may result from a diverse set of factors, such as weak institutional capacity, corruption, discriminatory social norms and practices, or competition over high-value natural resources. In many cases, conflict is the result of several underlying factors interacting and creating conditions that make violence more likely. Many “good practices” and programmatic examples are now available to help practitioners address the linkages between land and violent conflict. Three strategic recommended practices are presented below.

I. Prioritize Equitable and Inclusive Approaches to Strengthen Land Governance

Understanding the tenure claims of all stakeholders in a particular context and finding culturally appropriate ways to include them in program design, implementation, and monitoring contributes to more inclusive and equitable land governance.

In practice, secure land tenure helps reduce disputes related to parcel boundaries, land use, and land management. Ensuring that people have sufficiently strong land rights that they can exercise helps improve food security, boost economic development, and promote inclusive governance more generally.

Tanzania's legal framework, for example, provides clear land tenure protections for men and women alike, yet village-level and individual land rights are commonly insecure and are often susceptible to land grabs and exploitation. The [USAID Land Tenure Assistance \(LTA\) Activity](#) supported 54 villages across central Tanzania to conduct community-based, participatory land use planning and parcel mapping. The activity issued nearly 100,000 customary land certificates between 2015 and 2022. A subsequent [impact evaluation](#) found that LTA beneficiary households reported feeling more tenure secure and experienced a sharper decline in land disputes compared to other households.

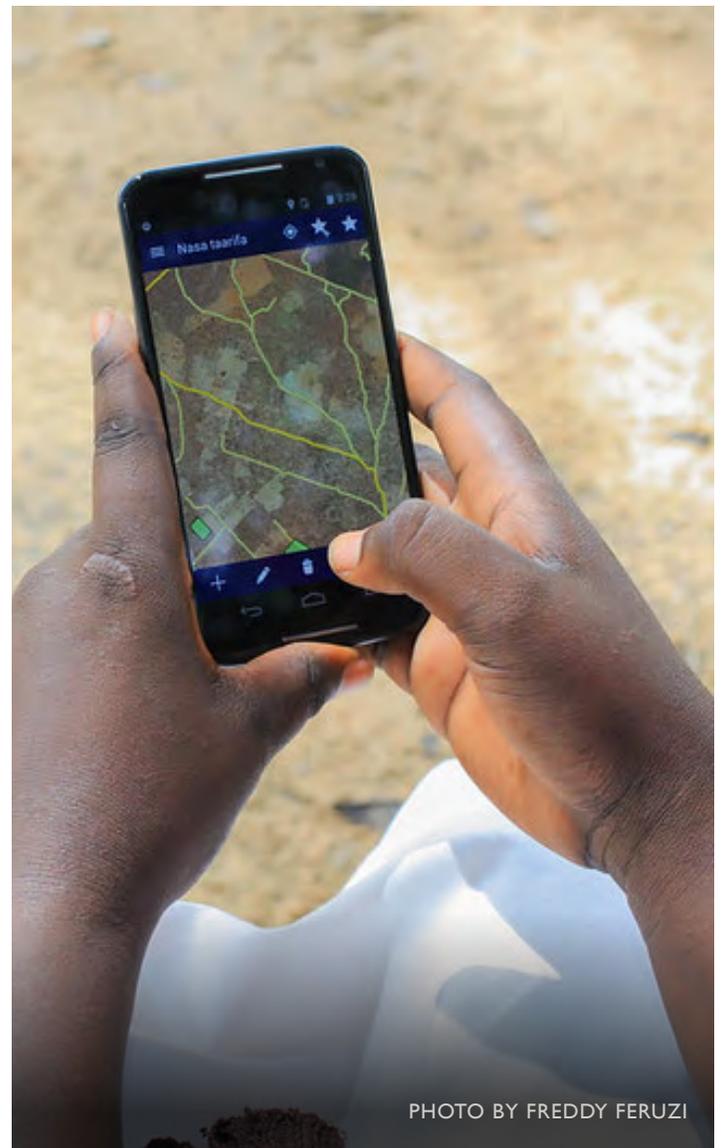


PHOTO BY FREDDY FERUZI

Key Resources

- [Mapping Approaches to Securing Tenure \(MAST\) Learning Platform](#)
- [Policy for Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(PRO-IP\)](#)





PHOTO BY USAID IN THE SAHEL

Key Resources

- [Local Capacity Strengthening Policy](#)
- [Thinking and Working Politically Through Applied Political Economy Analysis](#)
- [Learning Lab: Power Dynamics and Project Design](#)



II. Strengthen Local Capacities to Better Address Resource Conflicts

Effective land governance requires stakeholders to both deliver land administrative services and meaningfully participate in discussions, planning, and negotiations related to land use, management, and transfers. Strategies to strengthen local capacities for land governance and mitigate land-related conflict include:

- Providing opportunities for groups and communities, including women, to engage in participatory dialogue and conflict mediation;
- Finding ways to increase accountability and address corruption;
- Identifying beneficial approaches to work with the private sector;
- Managing common resources despite competing claims; and
- Assessing power relations between individuals and groups in both formal and informal land governance systems.

For instance, the [Keddo Diren Activity](#) worked in central Mali to help stabilize communities by supporting participatory and inclusive natural resource governance of dry season wetlands and rainy season upland pastures. By developing local conventions, such as land use plans and bylaws, Keddo Diren promoted participatory management and aimed to reduce conflicts between farmers and pastoralists within transhumance corridors.

III. Assist Displaced Populations with Durable Solutions

In post-disaster and post-conflict settings, it is critical to help displaced people identify and document abandoned and damaged property, promote effective integration into host communities and voluntary restitution, and support plans to reduce risks of long-term displacement. Inclusive approaches that provide tenure security and adequate livelihoods for both displaced persons and host communities are important to promote peace and sustainable development outcomes.

In Colombia, the lack of formal land rights contributes to illicit economies, adds to violence and social tensions, and helps enable land appropriation, especially in rural areas. The [Land for Prosperity \(LPA\) Activity](#) supports the Government of Colombia, which is working to improve rural livelihoods through legal and sustainable economic development. This includes supporting land restitution and land titling, and strengthening local government capacity to provide land administration services.



PHOTO BY AJDIN KAMBER

Key Resources

- [Guidelines on Compulsory Displacement and Resettlement in USAID Programming](#)
- [Guidance Note: Integrating Housing, Land and Property Issues into Key Humanitarian, Transitional and Development Planning Processes](#)



Monitoring and Evaluation



PHOTO BY SUBARNA MAITRA

Monitoring and evaluation are essential throughout the USAID Program Cycle, as land-related issues may need to be addressed at each phase. Depending on the context, it is possible that long-term Development Objectives in a Mission’s Country Development Cooperation Strategy are tied to land. Therefore, failing to address any underlying challenges with land governance at both the national and local levels can hinder the achievement of other development goals.



The table available [here](#) presents practical considerations for each phase of the USAID Program Cycle when undertaking conflict-sensitive land programming.

To achieve any land-related goals, USAID Missions and Operating Units should consider including “Intermediate Results” into long-term strategies. These results are monitored using standard indicators or customized indicators, to fit the unique conditions of a location. It may be useful to work with communities to co-design conflict-related indicators.



Examples of Intermediate Results for land-related activities are available in the toolkit [here](#).

Attention to any land-related Development Objectives and Intermediate Results should be reflected in monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), which will include a program-level theory of change and a logic model that graphically illustrates the theory.



Examples of theories of change related to land and conflict are available in the toolkit [here](#).

The Land and Resource Governance Division at USAID has experience in conducting rigorous program [impact evaluations](#), some of which include analysis on land-related conflict and resolution processes. In particular, the impact evaluation of the [Land Tenure Activity](#) in Tanzania included a module on land disputes, which may be adapted for use in other programmatic contexts.

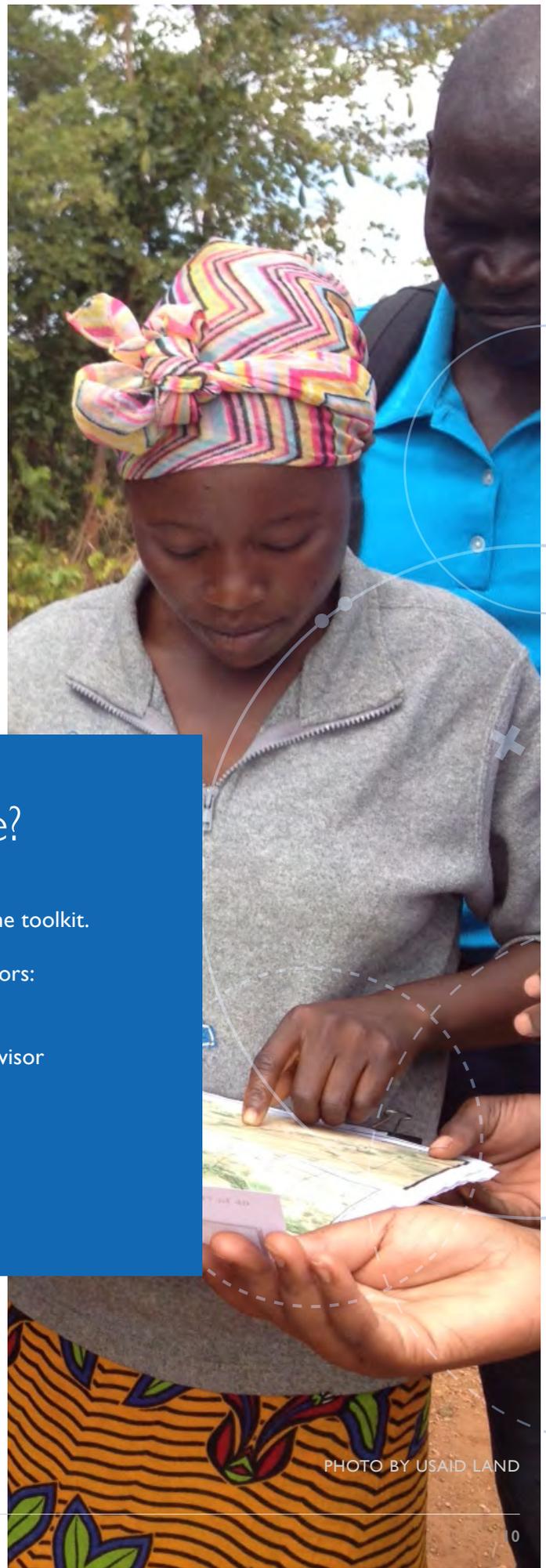
Staff and implementing partners may also refer to [several important tools](#) to support MEL, including USAID's [Evaluation Policy](#) and supporting toolkits on [monitoring, evaluation](#), and [collaboration, learning, and adapting](#).



PHOTO BY USAID LAND

Rapid Appraisal Guide

The toolkit's [Rapid Appraisal Guide](#) is designed to help USAID staff better understand which land issues are relevant to conflicts in a particular context and, in turn, which programmatic interventions may be useful to secure land, improve land and resource governance, build trust, and promote peacebuilding. The Guide can support Strategic Planning, as well as project and activity design and implementation. Questions are also adaptable for monitoring and evaluation.



Want to Learn More?

Additional resources are available in the “[Tools and Other Resources](#)” section of the toolkit.

Other questions? Contact the toolkit authors:

Karol Boudreaux

Senior Land and Resource Governance Advisor
kboudreaux@usaid.gov

Daniel Abrahams

Senior Climate Security Advisor
dabrahams@usaid.gov

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Integrated Natural Resource Management (INRM)

Sound governance and management of natural resources are central to long-term development and resilience. Faced with an urgent need to reduce environmental degradation while improving human well-being, solutions that effectively integrate investments in natural resource management with economic and social development are increasingly urgent. INRM promotes integrated programming across environment and non-environment sectors and across the Program Cycle. INRM supports USAID to amplify program impacts, strengthen gender equality and social inclusion, and identify best practices for integration.

For more information:

<https://land-links.org/project/integrated-natural-resource-management-inrm-activity/>

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U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20523
www.usaid.gov

