

Where Bottom-Up and Top-Down Meet: Challenges in Shaping Sustainable & Scalable Land Interventions

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SUMMARY

LAND-at-scale is a land governance support program for developing countries from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, which was launched in 2019. The aim of the program is to directly strengthen essential land governance components for men, women and youth that have the potential to contribute to structural, just, sustainable and inclusive change at scale in lower- and middle-income countries/regions/landscapes. The program is designed to scale successful land governance initiatives and to generate and disseminate lessons learned to facilitate further scaling. Since its launch, LAND-at-scale has invited Dutch embassies to submit ideas for scaling successful land governance initiatives. In total 63 ideas from 33 different countries have been submitted. From the 63 submitted ideas, land interventions are being developed in fourteen countries, namely in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Colombia, Egypt, Mali, Mozambique, Palestine Territories, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, Vietnam and Zimbabwe. The project ideas that were submitted to the program for consideration were highly diverse in geographical coverage, the issues to be address and the suggested approaches to address those issues. Despite this high level of diversity, similar challenges were observed across the board with regards to achieving or attaining scalability and sustainability. In essence, two types of scalability were observed: small-scale, community-level approaches that should be scaled across the country, and national-level, government-led approaches that should be rolled out and implemented across the country. . In LAND-at-scale's definition of sustainability, both aspects are essential, cumulative criteria for success: local buy-in, as well as national-level adoption. Therefore, the challenge posed in each formulation stage, and that we will discuss in this paper, is: how to make these bottom-up and top-down approaches meet in a way that can be sustained and further scaled?

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1. INTRODUCTION

LAND-at-scale is a land governance support program for developing countries from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, which was launched in 2019. The aim of the program is to directly strengthen essential land governance components for men, women and youth that have the potential to contribute to structural, just, sustainable and inclusive change at scale in lower- and middle-income countries/regions/landscapes. The program is designed to scale successful land governance initiatives and to generate and disseminate lessons learned to facilitate further scaling. The approach is programmatic with emphasis on contributing to structural, just, sustainable and inclusive change and an enabling environment for stakeholders to sustain and if needed further scale the results.

Since its launch, the LAND-at-scale has had two rounds in which Dutch embassies could submit ideas to scale successful land governance initiatives. This has resulted in 63 ideas from 33 different countries. The submitted ideas present a very rich sample of land governance interventions worldwide and reaffirmed the need for a platform such as LAND-at-scale, that provides successful land initiatives with the means to scale. From the 63 submitted ideas, land interventions are being developed in 14 countries, namely in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Colombia, Egypt, Mali, Mozambique, Palestine Territories, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, Vietnam and Zimbabwe. Throughout 2020, the focus has been to further transform the ideas to project plans.

The ideas that were submitted to the program for consideration were highly diverse, in geographical coverage, the issues to be address and in suggested approaches to address those issues. Despite this high level of diversity, similar challenges were observed across the board with regards to achieving or attaining scalability and sustainability. Many ideas emphasized the need for more bottom-up and inclusive approaches: how can land solutions be sustainable if local populations are not involved and endorsing the approach (sufficiently)? Successful initiatives of working with local communities at municipal or commune-level were pitched to be scaled across provinces, regions or at national level. On the other hand, LAND-at-scale also received ideas that focused on previous experiences at the national-level: previous land interventions where land reforms at the national-level were the main focus of investments, and the ideas submitted to LAND-at-scale suggested to implement those reforms locally and at scale: can the local populations be sensitized to embrace the by the government desired land reforms?

In essence, two types of scalability were observed: small-scale, community-level approaches that should be scaled across the country, and national-level, government-led approaches that should be rolled out and implemented across the country. While both types of project pitches are highly important and relevant for LAND-at-scale, the challenge encountered during the formulation phase of these projects, lay in the sustainability. In LAND-at-scale's definition of sustainability, both aspects are essential, cumulative criteria for success: local buy-in, as well as national-level adoption. Therefore, the challenge posed in each formulation stage, and that we will discuss in this paper, is: how to make these bottom-up and top-down approaches meet in a manner that can be sustained and further scaled?

2. DEFINING SCALING & SUSTAINABILITY

2.1 Defining scaling

Scaling is at the heart of both the name as well as the strategy of LAND-at-scale.¹ Scaling and scaling potential are key in the way the program was designed and the three pillars chosen to realise the aim of the program. The first of three pillars of the program aims to build on existing initiatives and projects that seemed to be successful on the ground. The second pillar, covering land governance innovations, focuses on new innovations with scaling potential. The third and final pillar of the program covers knowledge management with focus on gaining a deeper understanding on the conditions required to make scaling successful and adapt intervention strategies accordingly, disseminating lessons learned and strengthening knowledge platforms including south-south learning.

Scaling in the context of LAND-at-scale is defined as increasing the application of a successful strategy or innovation that has contributed to an improvement in land governance. Increasing application of strategies or interventions can be done in several ways: applying it in different geographies, contexts and/or with regards to other target groups or covering other (related) topics. Additionally both often require effort in creating an enabling social-economic and legal environment. Dutch embassies were asked to provide examples of successful land governance initiatives, that needed additional funding to be applied more widely in a national (or regional) context. LAND-at-scale was therefore designed to be the vehicle through which the impact of these initiatives could be considerably increased.

As the LAND-at-scale program document describes, the program explicitly aims to promote the application of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGTs).² Therefore, the program underscores the importance of human rights, women empowerment and the protection and transformation of vulnerable people. Assessing whether

¹ LAND-at-scale programme document: https://english.rvo.nl/sites/default/files/2019/04/LAND-at-scale-programme_0.pdf

² Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure.

a suggested initiative or innovation contributed to the improvement of land governance, is done based on VGGT principles.

2.2 Defining sustainability

Land governance links directly to human rights like an adequate standard of living, to continuous improvement in living conditions, to food, to housing, to participation, to property, to self-determination and the principle of equal rights for women and men. In order to enhance land governance, governments, businesses, financial institutions, NGOs and knowledge institutes have to assist each other in not only developing appropriate policies or adhering to international standards, but also improve the actual practices on the ground in a just, inclusive and sustainable manner.

Scaling a successful pilot should lead to a sustainable change in which the impact remains, or (preferably) increases, after the project end date.³ Ideally, this happens without any additional project or donor interventions and/or other parties take over further scaling. Sustainable impact is sought at environmental, social, economic and institutional levels. Additionally, sustainability can be ensured through alignment with ongoing processes in a country, such as running development projects. For LAND-at-scale, alignment to or links with (Dutch) policy and activities, is important.

Project results are much more relevant when they are sustainable and this is something to address at the beginning of a project, in a systematic manner with a clear strategy.⁴ This means that all LAND-at-scale projects include a sustainability or “exit” -strategy or development thereof in the project plan. Additionally, key, cross-cutting themes of the program, namely gender equality and climate, need to be addressed in each project. Regarding gender equality LAND-at-scale requires all activities to be gender sensitive and to undertake transformative measures whenever feasible. Regarding climate LAND at scale requires activities to consider the effects of climate change over time whenever applicable.

3. LAND-AT-SCALE PROCESS

The main objective of LAND-at-scale is to directly strengthen essential land governance components for men, women and youth that have the potential to contribute to structural, just, sustainable and inclusive change at scale in lower and middle income countries/regions/landscapes. Strengthening land governance, however, is a delicate and complex challenge that requires different approaches per country, region or even intervention.

For this reason, LAND-at-scale fosters a comprehensive, integrated and tailor- made approach to its interventions. LAND-at-scale uses a programmatic, demand driven approach for scaling

³ The Scaling Scan. [61173.pdf \(cimmyt.org\)](#)

⁴ Tewari, A., ” *Sustainability - key challenges in project implementation: Proof of pudding*”. 2009, IFAD Blogspot.

and innovation whereby all interventions should contribute clearly to the LAND-at-scale objectives and meet in principle criteria that are specific for the following five phases: 1) project identification, 2) project formulation, 3) project development, 4) project management and 5) monitoring and evaluation.



Figure 1: LAND-at-scale programme document

LAND-at-scale solicited project ideas from Dutch embassies in eligible countries for both scaling and innovation. As highlighted above, LAND-at-scale tries to seek alignment with ongoing processes whenever possible; the role of Dutch embassies in ‘feeding’ ideas to the program is to ensure such alignment with Dutch policy and other ongoing activities. Additionally, by putting Dutch embassies central to the process, the aim is to build on existing initiatives rather than initiating new initiatives, seek alignment with other ongoing and future initiatives, facilitate embedment in the larger donor community and to enhance awareness of land governance.

The ideas issued by the embassies are not proposals, but “project briefs” that explain the type of land governance assignment and whether the lead relates to scaling or to innovation. After an initial assessment by RVO, ideas are assessed by experts in the LAND-at-scale Committee.⁵ The assessment can either be “promising” or “not promising”. Ideas qualified as ‘promising’ were further explored by RVO and detailed into a formulation plans.

The formulation process from idea to project plan is a consultative process, gathering inputs not only from Dutch embassies, but also stakeholders in the respective countries (including governments, donors, research institutions, NGOs and others) as well as Dutch experts in roundtable settings. The rationale behind this consultative approach is multi-faceted: prevent duplication of efforts, finding synergy and collaboration opportunities, learning from other experiences (beyond the initiatives that were intended to be scaling), aligning and embedding LAND-at-scale interventions to ongoing processes. Another important reason for such a consultative approach is to ensure the land intervention would be designed in a way that the approach would be scalable, sustainable and have lasting results beyond project end dates. Even though LAND-at-scale focuses on scaling already existing and successful interventions, this last point proved to be a challenge in many cases.

The final formulation plan is developed by RVO in close cooperation with the consulted stakeholders. The formulation plan entails the context of the project, the problem to be solved, the proposed solution(s), required organizations, the to-be-achieved results, related indicators and the budget. Important aspects to be addressed in the intervention strategy, were the scaling potential as well as sustainability of the intervention. After receiving an advice from the LAND-at-scale committee, RVO will initiate the project development phase. Subsequent phases, as can be seen in Figure 1, are project management and closure. In this paper, we will focus on some of the challenges during the formulation phase.

4 SUSTAINABLE AND SCALABLE INTERVENTIONS During the identification phase of the program, LAND-at-scale received 63 ideas from 33 different countries to scale land interventions. Currently, land interventions in 14 countries are being formulated and implemented, namely in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Colombia, Egypt, Mali, Mozambique, Palestine Territories, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, Vietnam and Zimbabwe. All ideas submitted from these countries had good scaling potential as well as the potential to contribute to sustainable, positive change in the current land governance situation in the respective countries.

Even though the selected ideas were assessed to have good potential for scaling and sustainability, designing detailed intervention strategies that ensure this potential will in fact materialize, proved to be challenging. Particularly interesting was the fact that even though the selected ideas were highly varying in their context, problems to be addressed as well as

⁵ The LAND-at-scale Committee is an advisory committee consisting of experts (from the Dutch MoFA as well as external experts) who provide (unsolicited) advice to guarantee programmatic coherence and ensure a diverse yet coherent portfolio of country interventions.

suggested approaches, the challenges related to designing scalable and sustainable intervention strategies, were remarkably similar.

In this chapter, we will describe some of these common challenges that we observed across the portfolio without making specific reference to particular countries, as the intervention strategies for many of these countries are still being developed.

4.1 Aligning local successes with national cadasters

An advantage of new technologies and innovations is that anyone can create their own data and share it, at no or relatively low cost. Over the past decade an increase in the global offer of apps and software systems that allow local communities to map their own land delimitations has been observed. Particularly in developing economies, numerous NGOs have set up projects to assist communities to engage in such participatory mapping exercises, aiming to reduce inter-community conflict as well as empowering the local population: assisting in obtaining land data and agreeing among the community what the boundaries of the different farm plots in their village are, strengthens sense of land tenure security. Besides contributing to a sense of community empowerment, participatory mapping can be done at scale and at relatively low cost. Another important advantage is that this method guarantees community-level support to a land registration approach, which top-down methods sometimes lack. Therefore, it can be considered as a way to fill in the gap of missing or outdated data in national cadaster systems. Several LAND-at-scale ideas focus on scaling such successful initiatives. While the advantages of such technologies are evident, in designing land interventions that focus on scaling such local successes, there are elements relating to the sustainability and long-term effectiveness of such solutions that need to be taken into consideration.

With regards to the sustainability of such initiatives, it is important to ensure that both the results and the activities will sustain after the project end date. The results – the data gathered during the implementation of the project – should be stored and sustained in systems that will be available in the long-term. Therefore, it cannot rely on the involvement of NGOs or other systems: integration with a sustainable government system is very important. The activity of participatory mapping should also be continued after project funding has ended. Land registration cannot be done on a project-to-project basis and is something that should be continuously monitored and updated: it should not be donor-driven. To achieve success in the longer-term, a form of integration into the national system should be taken into consideration, since it is ultimately the mandate of the government of any country to perform land registration activities.

Another important aspect to consider is the long-term effectiveness of such initiatives. The aim is to achieve tenure security, but arguably, if the data collected is not integrated or harmonized with a national cadaster system, tenure rights become less secure. With parallel databases of land tenure data, that might overlap and even conflict in some cases, the risk is that different realities will exist, and the land tenure status of the land becomes ambiguous.

This ambiguousness is exacerbated by the fact that some of these community mapping initiatives follow customary practices, which often exist in parallel to formal tenure systems. Another risk in this context is the potential for misuse of such a public parallel-database and how the necessary (privacy) protections will be put in place.

In designing sustainable and scalable interventions, these aspects need to be addressed. It is not possible to ‘simply’ scale up the activities of, for example, a participatory mapping exercise with the use of an innovative app – it is paramount that such scaling efforts are done with a clear (sometimes long-term) vision on how this will be integrated into a national system and can be sustained well after the end of the project activities. In addition, such strategies need to embrace the multiple purposes land registration serves: formal land registration is not only a means for government services such as taxes, but can also be beneficial for private sector development purposes or the development of public infrastructure, for example.

4.2 Implementing land policies and systems at local level

In many countries, legal reforms to strengthen land governance have been observed. In some cases, these legal reforms are preceded by participatory processes that have been designed to ensure that legal frameworks are inclusive, incorporate or recognize customary systems (to varying degrees) and are based on on-the-ground experiences and challenges in achieving tenure security. Similarly, many countries have invested in strong national cadaster and land registry systems, with a strong and sophisticated data infrastructure, in an effort to make land administration activities less costly, more efficient and sustainable over time. This will increase the chances of the administration system to remain updated and maintained. Such efforts relating to legal reforms or setting up stronger systems at national level provide a necessary basis for improving land governance nationally.

However, the challenge often lies in the following up and building further on such a basis. Progressive and inclusive land laws, in many countries, lack a strong implementation on the ground. While many groups – local communities, women, indigenous peoples – have gained the rights to attain land titles or formalize their customary rights, this often has not resulted in the actual pursuit, attainment and or application of these formal rights. Often-cited challenges relate to lack of awareness of such legal frameworks, prevailing customary procedures, gender bias, mis-match with (traditional) inheritance practices and or (still) costly or cumbersome procedures to follow, but the reasons why implementation of such laws is lacking on the ground, are not always evident.

Similar challenges related to implementation are observed in relation to newly established or reformed cadaster systems. The migration of data from previous systems – that sometimes is still largely paper-based – to the new systems, along with the challenge of ensuring the data is updated at the same time, is an immense effort that, in many cases, takes a long while to

implement. Often there is a need for additional resources, more capacity among stakeholders as well as, very crucially, a connection to the on-the-ground authorities and people.

Several of the ideas submitted to LAND-at-scale were positioned in such a setting, where the national government of a particular country was in the process or had completed such a reform, and the ideas revolved around further implementing these processes across the country. The challenges related to sustainability and scalability observed with regards to such ideas were diverse. Sometimes, these challenges related to connecting these developments to on-the-ground realities. Legal reforms or national ICT-systems often seem far from the daily realities of local communities in a rural setting. For legal and ICT-systems to be effective though, it is critical that the people that these systems revolve around, are involved and engaged in these processes. For such ideas, it was important to LAND-at-scale to make sure these connections were made, and made in a sustainable way. This often requires a different approach from data collection towards data management and from ‘imposing’ a system upon people for tax collection, to developing a system to support sustainable livelihoods and private sector development.

Other challenges related to sustainability and scalability pertained to ensuring the business model of these systems (for example a new land information systems) was robust. Experiences from the past have shown the risk of such systems relying too much on donor-funding, or lacking organization and human resources capacity to maintain these systems once they’re set up.

4.3 Enabling environment

An often-seen challenge relates to the scope of a project. Project plans or ideas for interventions are structured in a way that describes a concrete issue or problem for a specific target group or with regards to a particular theme or context and suggests strategies to address these issues. For LAND-at-scale, these ideas needed to revolve around either a successful pilot or an innovation to address a certain issue, with a proven potential to scale this solution. This approach to yielding ideas resulted in solid, concrete possibilities for land interventions, with clear (assumed) demarcations on where the issues were, and results could be made. However, considering land governance is an extremely complex issue that has many aspects to it – legal frameworks, customary systems, ICT systems, gender, social identity, tax revenues, etc. etc. It is a very long list with all extremely important and essential aspects for land governance. These aspects may play a smaller role in a small-scale pilot project with a concrete issue in a particular context or setting. When faced with the question of upscaling such a successful pilot to a different and/or larger context, these aspects inevitably start to play a bigger role. In project design, assumptions are made about the role of such aspects and how to address them; these assumptions need to be tested and re-evaluated throughout the project lifecycle and approaches must be adapted based on new insights or changing contexts.

Besides a clear need to have effective **legal, institutional and technical frameworks** in place for land governance, it is equally essential that there is an intrinsic urge and **political will** of locally-mandated actors to carefully and adequately address land governance problems. This raises the question of legitimacy of governmental and/or traditional stakeholders and leaders. The specific roles of CSOs, NGOs, financial institutions, businesses, and knowledge institutions in advocating for political will and urging local and/or national governments to take action in favor of just, sustainable and inclusive development are therefore all very important.

Another issue that arose in this context is the **(political) instability** in many of the countries of the LAND-at-scale portfolio. Besides land often being a cause of conflict in a country, conflicts in turn cause issues for land as well: it causes massive loss of workforce (also in agricultural context), vital livestock and loss of land. Millions of people are displaced on a yearly basis, which puts pressure on land and available resources for hosting communities as well.⁶ Widespread migration and housing returnees also adds pressure on legal systems and (legal) institutions involving in dispute resolution. Achieving positive and sustainable results in such a fragile and sometimes unpredictable context, is not possible if these issues are not taken into consideration when designing an intervention strategy.

These aspects mentioned above all revolve around the political environment in a country. **Climate change** on the other hand, is a different type of global issue that cannot be ignored when thinking about sustainable approaches. Changing climatic conditions can change how land and natural resources are accessed and used as geographical shifts in resource productivity, resource scarcity, and therefore land use patterns occur.⁷ Recognizing that changing climatic conditions are occurring everywhere and play a role in every project (directly or indirectly), climate change was identified a cross-cutting issue for the LAND-at-scale program. Thus far, land use planning and land value capture seem to be very relevant to climate change. All projects will need to address these issues, even if the project is not directly aimed at environmental effects.

These are but a few examples of components that make up an enabling environment that is necessary to make land governance interventions successful and sustainable. Therefore, developing the strategy to scale up a small-scale pilot project to a larger context, taking this enabling environment into consideration is vital. The drawback is that this often makes the project set up much larger in scope than originally intended. A delicate balance needs to be sought between the scope of the original pilot and achieving effective and immediate impacts in scaling that up, as well as keeping an eye on the horizon and address what can and needs to be addressed to facilitate this enabling environment for land governance in the long-term. While directly contributing to all aspects of this enabling environment is often not part of the

⁶ FAO. No Date. "FAO in Emergencies: Conflicts. Available at: <http://landportal.info/library/resources/fao-emergencies-conflicts>

⁷ Quan, J. with N. Dyer. 2008. Climate change and land tenure. The implications of climate change for land tenure and land policy. Rome: FAO.

scope of a LAND-at-scale program, an important aim of its projects is to align with and contribute to the broader picture of land governance improvements ongoing in the country.

4.4 Inclusiveness and gender equality

Land has a profound meaning to all people. It can represent home and cultural values, political power and participation in decision making processes, it can provide services for living such as food production and clean water and shelter and it can be used as an economic asset for income generation, as collateral for credit and as a means of holding savings for the future. In the urban and peri-urban setting, land and property rights can also be a requisite for access to public services. Though women represent half of the world population there is a sincere gender gap in especially developing countries. Bridging this gap and working towards gender equality has tremendous potential for more and more sustainable food production and nutrition security, private sector and sustainable development and stable regions. Marginalized groups - such as youth, returnees, migrants, amongst others - often face similar challenges in prevailing customary regimes that are often based on a patriarchal society.

There is ample evidence of previous development efforts failing, or at least not achieving their maximum potential, because of the lack of attention to inequality and marginalized groups. Karin Arts highlights several different evaluations of global and country-level performance on achieving the Millennium Development Goals and other relevant assessments, that clearly substantiate the importance of confronting inequality (e.g. based on gender, age, ethnicity, poverty, etc.).⁸ Inclusiveness, therefore, is a critical spearpoint for the LAND-at-scale program. Including women's rights and gender equality in all the phases of interventions related to land governance enhances the sustainability as well as the development impact at local and regional level. It is program policy that all activities under the program are either gender aware, or gender transformative when feasible, and that none of them are gender blind.

While many LAND-at-scale ideas already had a specific focus on women, indigenous peoples or other (marginalized) groups, all intervention strategies are assessed with a gender lens and adjusted to become more gender aware, or transformative where possible.

5 LESSONS LEARNED

While all individual aspects highlighted in the chapter above warrant their individual study and paper, the overview provides a good insight into the great variety of considerations that were taken into account in developing the four-pager project ideas, into robust and scalable intervention strategies. Each strategy was developed specifically to address the circumstances and challenges of the particular project, but overall we can extract some overarching key lessons on how we addressed the scalability and sustainability challenges highlighted above.

⁸ Arts, Karin. *Inclusive sustainable development: a human rights perspective*, February 2017. Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability 2017, 24:58–62

5.1 Conducting a thorough context study

Projects in different countries across the world may share common challenges related to achieving sustainable results from land governance interventions, but the local context is always unique. The underlying causes and issues of the challenges highlighted above, need to be clear before a project strategy can be formulated. If local initiatives were not aligned to central cadaster systems, they likely were not for good reasons; such reasons need to be understood and be given thoughtful consideration. If a large-scale land reform was implemented by a national government, but effects on the ground are not visible, the bottlenecks need to be identified – are procedures too bureaucratic, too costly at the local level? Or were there other factors in play that hampered implementation of the reform? Without a deep understanding of the underlying reasons why certain problems exist, working on the solution is impossible. Similarly, in order to promote and foster an enabling environment for land governance in a country, the factors that hamper good land governance need to be known and understood.

It is crucially important therefore to conduct a thorough context analysis and develop a (scaling) strategy based on the particulars of the specific context. It is vital to understand that, in project design, there is not one fit for purpose solution. If local customs and religions play a role in the de facto governance of land, these need to be respected and incorporated. At the same time, however, if local customs or religions should not be followed blindly in case they are discriminatory against certain groups, such as women or people of certain ethnicities. In those cases, the intervention must acknowledge such marginalization practices and address them. Interventions cannot be scaled from one context to the next: they need to be adapted to the specific context. Adapting approaches also means that the success of the intervention strategy that is being scaled, is not guaranteed. Risk analysis and management, as well as project monitoring, are important tools to include in project strategy.

In LAND-at-scale, these aspects were incorporated in the formulation phase of a project, through wide stakeholder consultations, desk review as well as commissioned research (if needed) to ensure that deep understanding of the local context in each of the fourteen countries of the portfolio. It remains a challenge that not all identified issues can be addressed or required results accomplished. This is why LAND-at-scale uses a programmatic approach and often makes use of an inception phase in project design, to be able to address changing circumstances. Another challenge relating to this, is if the context study reveals opposing groups, ideas or perceptions of an ideal reality. Finding the middle ground and bringing all stakeholders together, remains an enormous challenge – even with good knowledge of the local context.

5.2 Embedding multi-stakeholder approaches

Land governance is a topic that touches many different stakeholders. While land administration is usually the mandate of the (national) government, it is often still related to

traditional or customary institutions and methods. One of the main aims of land administration is to achieve tenure security for local populations. A land governance intervention cannot target only one of the several groups involved. For a land intervention to be successful and reach its objectives, it is vital that all stakeholders – from national government to traditional authorities to local population and all stakeholders in between - support the objectives of the project. Similarly, for the effects of the intervention to last beyond project end dates, it is important to link the project to ongoing processes in the country and embed it in multi-stakeholder platforms. A strong country presence is an important factor to achieve sustainability.

This inclusive approach to a project is made possible by the idea-based approach of the LAND-at-scale program. In traditional development projects, a project proposal is submitted by a particular organization; if approved, this organization will be the project implementer by default. Since LAND-at-scale works based on ideas submitted by Dutch embassies, there is more flexibility to set criteria to find the 'right' implementers and ensure a multi-stakeholder approach. In several LAND-at-scale projects this is organized by identifying several different organizations (e.g. government, NGOs/grassroots organizations, independent experts) that implement their own component, while working together closely to ensure alignment within the overall project. In addition, the programmatic approach LAND-at-scale uses ensures that there are no fixed pathways at the time of project design: if contexts change or approaches prove to be inefficient, approaches can and should be adapted.

The idea-based approach not only promotes sustainability through multi-stakeholder engagement, but also allows for there to be (local) ownership of the project and continuous consultation and evaluation at the local level. A strong local mandate in executing a project increases the likelihood of a continuation after project funding ends. The project descriptions as well as implementation contracts also stipulate the need for continuous exchange among different stakeholders as well as consultative progress monitoring.

5.3 Setting realistic and meaningful goals

An important point to consider is that attaining a land title should not be a goal in and of itself: (perceived) security of tenure is a means to achieve several different goals: food security, gender equality, poverty reduction and increased economic activity, climate change mitigation, and more. To successfully scale land interventions and achieve a sustainable result, it is important to incorporate this holistic view of land governance. Activities and goals should be designed in a way that acknowledges that the linkages to these goals are not automatically achieved after land titles have been issued. In all LAND-at-scale projects, these “impact-level” goals are not just part of a Theory of Change that shows the theoretical connection between tenure security and those goals, but also incorporated in the activities. Since it is not within the scope of LAND-at-scale to directly address aspects relating to private sector development or climate change mitigation, alignment and collaboration is sought with other projects (from the Dutch government or otherwise) that do have a mandate

to focus on these issues. The advantages of this approach are multiple: not only does this allow for LAND-at-scale to have an impact beyond its own mandate and expertise, this also ensures that land and tenure security are incorporated in other projects.

Building on that, project outputs and outcomes need to be realistic. While aspects relating to the enabling environment require serious consideration and should be included in intervention strategies, it is equally important to be realistic about the sphere of influence of a project. Trying to achieve too much, can have the opposite effect. In addition, project goals need to be meaningful. Incorporating gender in project goals through quota⁹ is a good first step, but LAND-at-scale aim to be gender-transformative whenever possible. This means that goals should be formulated in such a way that the transformative nature of activities can be measured and monitored. This also applies to other themes, such as access to justice for instance. Quantitative goals that measure a number of adjudicated cases may be a good starting point, but goals should also reflect that the aim is to facilitate sustainable access to justice, for everyone. Recognizing that such ‘meaningful’ goals are often complex to measure, the LAND-at-scale knowledge management pillar plays an important role in analyzing the results of project activities against these indicators.

Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning

Setting realistic goals is easier said than done of course. Even with LAND-at-scale’s demand-driven approach, coupled with extensive context-studies and widespread consultations, it can still be difficult to determine what goals are realistic and foresee all possible effects of a particular activity. In ever-changing contexts, it is important to be able to adapt to new situations and change approach. Each LAND-at-scale project is designed in an adaptive way that allows to be responsive to changing contexts, changing needs and/or reverse unintended, undesirable effects of a project activity. This implies close monitoring of activities and its effects, which is mandatory for each LAND-at-scale project in the so-called 6-monthly ‘learning loop’, executed in collaboration with knowledge management partners.

Finally, it is important to realize that even when incorporating all factors mentioned above in the project design, this still does not ensure sustainability. This is why in each project, a sustainability or ‘exit’-strategy is included. It is important that activities are aimed at developing a sustainable system that can further develop itself over time; that stakeholders are aware of their roles and claim ownership over certain activities; that processes need to be effective and affordable and not contingent on project funding to be followed. If further scaling is envisioned, this should be included in the strategy from the beginning.

5.4 Collaborative and transparent approaches

In the process of project formulation, LAND-at-scale has benefited from having a collaborative and transparent way of working. Recognizing that not all challenges related to

⁹ For example: # of titles granted to a woman; % age of women participating in workshops.

land tenure can be addressed in one project and wanting to build on existing processes in a country, LAND-at-scale has very actively sought out collaboration with other funding partners and stakeholders in the country to ensure alignment to ongoing processes wherever possible, and aim for maximum impact of LAND-at-scale projects. An important complementary factor to this collaborative approach is being transparent about assumptions and challenges. As a program, LAND-at-scale encourages feedback and constructive criticism and, in turn, provides this to partners as well. This collaborative approach is not only part of the project formulation phase, but several LAND-at-scale projects have attempted to institutionalize collaborations with, for example, knowledge institutes.

6 CONCLUSION

LAND-at-scale was designed to scale successful initiatives and support innovative initiatives with scaling potential. In two rounds, over 60 ideas from 33 different countries were submitted for consideration. Ultimately, fourteen of these project ideas have been selected for further development. During the formulation phase, RVO facilitated a consultative process to develop the four-pager project ideas into fully-fledged project plans. Important aspects to address in these project plans, were achieving scalability and sustainability. Even though the fourteen selected ideas were highly diverse – geographically, topically as well as in terms of suggested approaches – similar challenges were observed in being able to achieve scalability and sustainability.

Project ideas are often submitted from a particular standpoint: bottom up or top down. One of the principles of LAND-at-scale is that sustainability can only be achieved if it is an inclusive process: bottom up and top down approaches need to meet in order to achieve lasting results. This proved to be a challenge in many of the ideas in the current portfolio. Another challenge was ensuring an enabling environment wherein effects of land governance interventions can last. Elements related to technical, legal and institutional framework need to be addressed, but aspects such as political will, organization, political stability as well as climate change are equally important. Finally, LAND-at-scale projects all need to aspire to be gender aware and transformative when feasible and promote inclusive approaches whenever this is possible; no activities may be gender-blind.

Incorporating these aspects into project strategies, led to interesting lessons learned. In all cases, a **deep understanding of the context** and root causes of identified issues is vital. This means that scaling a successful pilot can never be a simple geographical scaling of an approach but needs to be recognized that all approaches need to be tailor-made to the specific context and address underlying issues. Another important lesson learned is **that multi-stakeholder approaches** need to be followed in each and every project to embed the project in local processes as well as to ensure local ownership. The idea-based approach of LAND-at-scale ensures the flexibility to set criteria to find the 'right' implementers and ensure this multi-stakeholder approach. With support, commitment and ownership from all relevant stakeholders, project activities are much more likely to have lasting results and be carried out

beyond project end dates. Moreover, it is important to **set realistic and meaningful goals** for the project. Recognizing that land is a holistic issue and should be considered a means to achieve other goals rather than an end in itself, is important and should be reflected in project goals. Finally, LAND-at-scale believes that a **collaborative and transparent approach** to project design and implementation is essential to ensure alignment with ongoing processes and thus for reaching maximum impact of projects.

Knowledge management plays a key role in LAND-at-scale to fully understand effects of activities and to analyze the conditions under which scalability and sustainability can be achieved. A crucial aspect of the knowledge management strategy of LAND-at-scale is that it is an open and continuous learning process. If a project has adverse effects, project strategies should be changed. Similarly, if a project has identified a successful approach to address a certain issue, other projects should be adaptable to incorporate that successful approach in their own project activities. Knowledge management is an important link in the chain to achieve sustainability and scalability.

Continuous learning is an important thread across all LAND-at-scale activities. During the formulation phase, a lot of consideration was given to possible challenges relating to sustainability and scalability. Now, in 2021, LAND-at-scale projects are starting their activities. Monitoring, learning and adapting will be high on the agenda for all involved stakeholders involved with LAND-at-scale. *RVO looks forward to sharing experiences from implemented projects at the FIG working week next year.*

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Disclaimer: This paper reflects preliminary findings by LAND-at-scale. Information is to be used for discussion with RVO LAND-at-scale at the FIG2021 conference only.

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