Capitalisation of Experience

Multistakeholder platforms for land governance – 10 years after: A collaborative capitalisation of experience

Lessons learned across four programmes working on land governance

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MRLG
MEKONG REGION
LAND GOVERNANCE

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Acknowledgments

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Cover image: Villagers participate in resource use mapping with the Wildlife Conservation Society team in Preah Vihear Province, Cambodia ©MRLG

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFD	Agence Française de Développement
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CSO	civil society organisation
CTFD	Comité Technique Foncier et Développement
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILC	International Land Coalition
MAP	multi-actor partnership
MRLG	Mekong Region Land Governance Project
MSP	multistakeholder platform
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NLC	National Land Coalition (Malawi)
PMAF-BF	Multi-Actor Platform on Rural Land Tenure (Plateforme nationale multi-acteurs sur le foncier rural) – Burkina Faso
PFMA-G	Multistakeholder Platform on Land Governance (Plateforme multi-acteurs sur le foncier) – Guinea
RAI	responsible agricultural investment
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
VGGT	Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of National Food Security
WHH	Welthungerhilfe

A farmer in Malawi ©Nikada

1. INTRODUCTION

Land governance has attracted much attention from the international community in the past two decades. On one hand, tenure security is seen as a major condition for agricultural investment and sustainable natural resource management. On the other hand, a lack of tenure security, especially for smallholder farmers and traditional and Indigenous communities, is a major cause of growing inequality, land grabbing, poverty and conflict.

The adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT)[1] by the Committee on World Food Security in 2012 has been a major landmark in this respect. The Guidelines recommend that governments recognise customary tenure of farmer communities and Indigenous peoples, even in the absence of legal documents or titles. They also recommend that land governance reforms to pursue this objective should be discussed and monitored by all relevant stakeholders through multistakeholder platforms (MSPs) in each country.[2] The VGGT also support greater participation of civil society in land governance policy processes. This has resulted in many international development programmes supporting MSPs and civil society networks.

1.1 A collaborative capitalisation exercise

In 2024, four of these programmes embarked on a reflection exercise to jointly review, compare and analyse their experiences of working with MSPs since adoption of the VGGT. The initiative began in 2023 with the Mekong Region Land Governance Project (MRLG) deciding to conduct a capitalisation of experience (Capex) focusing on the lessons learned from the MSP approach. After a benchmarking exercise, MRLG proposed a joint effort with other similar international programmes, and three programmes agreed to participate: the Comité Technique Foncier et Développement (CTFD), the International Land Coalition (ILC) and Land for Life – initiated by Welthungerhilfe (WHH).

This joint Capex involved three key steps:

- comparing the programmes using a shared framework;
- selecting one or two MSP case studies to document, again using a common framework; and
- sharing the findings from these case studies at a workshop in November 2024 with representatives from all four programmes and the MSPs themselves.

This document is the result of this international collaborative effort, analysing the combined experiences of the four programmes and five MSPs in Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Guinea, Lao PDR and Malawi. In essence, it is a 'capitalisation of capitalisations'.

1.2 The concept of multistakeholder platforms in land governance

The concept of MSPs has a long history, predating its role in land and natural resource governance. For the purpose of this Capex, we felt it was useful to first examine the broader historical development of the MSP concept before focusing on its specific application to land governance.

It has long been recognised that environmental issues often involve a diverse range of stakeholders with different interests and perspectives. Multistakeholder analyses were developed as a tool by environmental economists (Pearce et al., 1989) and management scientists to facilitate decision-making in complex environments. It has also been used by professional mediators to resolve legal conflicts (Susskind and Cruikshank, 1987).

In the 1990s, rural sociologists proposed creating human platforms to manage natural resources, combining conflict management theory and a knowledge systems approach. These platforms are designed to facilitate communication between different stakeholders, share knowledge, clarify conflicting interests and facilitate consensus-building (Röling, 1994). MSPs were first used in environmental programmes, such as Landcare

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1 For further information on the VGGT, see https://www.fao.org/tenure/voluntary-guidelines/en/.

2 "States are encouraged to set up multi-stakeholder platforms and frameworks at local, national and regional levels or use such existing platforms and frameworks to collaborate on the implementation of these Guidelines; to monitor and evaluate the implementation in their jurisdictions; and to evaluate the impact on improved governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests (…). This process should be inclusive, participatory, gender sensitive, implementable, cost effective and sustainable" (FAO, 2022).

in Australia (Campbell, 1994), river basin management in Oregon (William et al., 1994) and sustainable agriculture in the Netherlands, before becoming a core component of international integrated water resource management policies (OECD, 2015).

The MSP concept also became a feature of public consultations on key government policies. Over the last 30 years, citizen participation in policy processes has increased substantially, whether in the form of public consultations, participatory budget, or through structured debates. This trend has been observed particularly in Europe, Latin America and Africa. It came hand in hand with a modern version of democracy, beyond representative democracy, giving more importance to civil society and citizen engagement (Fung, 2015). MSPs can be seen as a specific form of structured consultation on a specific topic, bringing together various interests groups, including the private sector and academia.

It is therefore not surprising that the VGGT recommend creating MSPs for land governance reform. Land governance is not just a legal or technical issue but also societal, and requires open and informed dialogue among all stakeholders. The VGGT marked a turning point after two decades of conflict between advocates of land privatisation and those who defended the social nature of land tenure and the diversity of rights. It also came at a time where large-scale land grabbing by corporations and speculators had become a major concern. While the VGGT reaffirmed the importance of recognising local and customary rights, many issues continue to be controversial. Methods for recognising customary rights, the tension between customary rights and gender equality, and the conflict between local rights and environmental preservation all remain contentious issues.

All relevant stakeholders – including local communities, governments and the private sector – need to be involved in land reforms that are just, equitable and effective. MSPs can contribute to this end. It is important to highlight here that they can function in several different ways, ranging from inclusive, consensus-building bodies to purely consultative forums.

At one end of the spectrum, a platform acting as a conflict resolution mechanism aims to build consensus on the best way to manage natural resources. This is done by facilitating a deeper understanding of the respective interests of different stakeholders, sharing knowledge

on the natural resource and its response to various management strategies, and ultimately negotiating a compromise which satisfies the greatest number of interests. This model is rooted in an optimistic vision of democracy and 'communicative action' developed by the philosopher Habermas (1984) and works best for localised management issues that do not require a change in policy. However, even in a democratic environment, experience has shown that platforms may struggle with power imbalances between stakeholders to even reach a consensus, let alone get their proposals adopted. At the other end of the spectrum, purely consultative platforms are used by governments as a tool to gather knowledge and proposals from different stakeholders, but the final decision is made by governments alone behind closed doors. Falling midway on this spectrum, MSPs that function independently of government can proactively formulate proposals and even develop pilot projects to advocate for specific policy reforms.

In all cases, these platforms provide a space for greater participation of civil society in governance and policy. However, they cannot magically correct the power imbalance between certain interest groups, lobbies and marginalised groups, smallholder farmers and Indigenous peoples. They also run the risk of being politically manipulated by governments to neutralise opposition without ever adopting any of the platform's recommendations.

The MSPs studied here had different configurations along this continuum. It is important to keep this in mind, as some confusion may arise from the way different actors and experts interpret the MSP concept.

A farmer who invested in strawberry production in Luang Prabang province, Lao PDR ©MRLG

2. A REVIEW OF LAND GOVERNANCE PROGRAMMES

This section presents a benchmarking analysis of initiatives that use MSPs for land governance that fulfil the set inclusion criteria. This includes an overview of the four eligible programmes that agreed to participate in the capitalisation exercise. We highlight key features and commonalities across these programmes, examining their shared approaches and challenges.

2.1 Benchmarking

A document review was conducted on initiatives that foster collaboration between different stakeholders to improve land governance, promote land rights of local communities and share knowledge and best practices (see Annex 1).

Of the 11 international programmes identified, five were found to have a clear long-term focus on MSPs at the national level and were eligible for inclusion in the capitalisation exercise. Two are global in scope and three programmes are regional (see Table 1). Of the remaining six programmes that were not eligible for inclusion, two included civil society and private sector components but did not follow a specific MSP approach; two were global in their focus, primarily advocating with coalitions of international civil society organisations (CSOs), or focusing on research and documentation; and two were limited to a single country and have now been completed.

Table 1. Land governance programmes eligible for inclusion in the multistakeholder platform study

Inclusion criteria fulfilled		
Scope	**Programme**	**Support**
Global	International Land Coalition (ILC)	National Land Coalitions in 32 countries (formerly National Engagement Strategies)
	FAO	MSPs operating in at least 15 countries
Regional	Comité Technique Foncier et Développement (CTFD)	Eight national stakeholder networks in West Africa and Madagascar
	Land for Life	Four multi-actor partnerships working on land governance in Africa
	Mekong Region Land Governance (MRLG)	MSPs in four Mekong Region countries
Inclusion criteria not fulfilled		
Scope	**Programme**	**Support**
Global	Land Enhancing Governance for Economic Development (LEGEND) program	Civil society and private sector component but more a global funding basket with no MSP approach
	Global Programme Responsible Land Policy (GPRLP) by GIZ	The programme operates in 7 to 8 countries, with support to some MSP including civil society and private sector but MSP approach is not central .
	Land Rights	Oriented towards advocacy with international CSO coalitions
	Global Land Tool Network	Focus on research and documentation
Country level	Women Land Rights	CSO alliance in Kenya and now completed
	The People's Alliance for Right to Land (PARL)	Sri Lanka only and now completed

Following this initial analysis, it was proposed that the five eligible programmes join the capitalisation exercise. FAO, ILC, Land for Life and MRLG were already engaged in an exchange of experience called the Land Collaborative organised by ILC, and all but FAO agreed to join the capitalisation effort. CTFD also agreed to participate.

It is worth noting that FAO's strategy is distinct from the other four programmes. With the government as the entry point, FAO only supports MSPs that have government backing, which typically means a government official co-chairs the platform. Once a platform is established, FAO encourages the inclusion of civil society and provides primarily technical support – facilitating meetings and delivering training, especially on the VGGT. In some cases, FAO has been able to secure funding to support these platforms but this support appears to have dwindled in recent years. However, FAO cooperates with other programmes (especially ILC or CTFD) that can provide more direct support to CSO platforms without requiring government participation.

An important point to note is that MSPs can often be initiated by a particular programme and/or international institution and then receive support from other programmes, building on existing coalitions and experiences. New partners may join the MSP, while others may leave.

2.2 Presentation of four participat ing programmes

Each of the four participating programmes was then profiled in detail with the respective teams using a common framework that examined the funding, governance and operational elements of the MSP approach. The full profiles are available in Annex 2.

International Land Coalition

Founded in 2003, ILC is a global alliance of civil society and farmers' organisations, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and research institutes. With 320 organisations across 97 countries, members represent approximately 100 million land users worldwide, working to protect the rights of those who live on the land. Following the adoption of the VGGT in 2012, ILC began establishing MSPs at the national level in 2013. Financial support for these platforms was provided by several core ILC donors, including the European Union, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Netherlands, Sweden, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and Irish Aid. While the number of platforms has increased over time, donor support has dwindled in recent years. This has necessitated a shift in focus towards structural costs (facilitation, governance and data collection) and encouraging platforms to secure other co-funding for their activities.

A government official explains the land use plan of a village part of the pilot land registration project in forestland in Thakek, Khammouane province, Lao PDR
©Leonard Reyes/MRLG

Regional consultation on the National Land Policy in Mamou, Guinea ©ACORD Guinea

ILC supports national land coalitions (NLCs) in 32 countries – 15 in Africa, 8 in Asia, 6 in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 3 in Europe and the Middle East. Membership of these coalitions is not restricted to ILC members and most actively engage with other relevant and interested stakeholders after conducting a mapping exercise. Government participation is encouraged but not mandatory.

Typically, NLCs begin by choosing a capable host organisation. They then develop by-laws and establish governance bodies, such as steering committees, general assemblies of members, and dedicated committees. With support from the ILC team, each platform develops a costed country strategy.

ILC primarily supports structural costs, such as the secretariat within the host organisation and meetings for the steering committee and general assembly. Depending on available funds, support is also provided for other activities proposed in the country's strategy and action plan, which can include consultations, knowledge production and management, policy dialogue, advocacy and communication. Cash or in-kind contributions from other partners is encouraged. MSPs do not necessarily need to be institutionalised and, although some are considering the option, no ILC-supported platform has done so to date.

Mekong Region Land Governance Project

MRLG was established in 2014 by SDC, with co-funding from Germany and Luxembourg, and operates in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam. The project was launched during a period of significant tension in the region, largely as a result of governments pushing for large-scale agricultural concessions in the 2010s, which led to widespread conflicts and protests. MRLG was designed to mitigate these policies and restore dialogue between civil society and governments, with the primary objective of supporting land tenure security for smallholder farmers, especially women and ethnic minorities. The project is implemented by Land Equity International and GRET, with technical support from GIZ, and has been operational over three phases from 2014 to 2025.

In Phase 1 (2014–2018), MRLG adopted an open-ended, exploratory approach. This approach helped the project identify key stakeholders, build trust and establish platforms for dialogue. Customary tenure and responsible agricultural investment (RAI) were selected as thematic priorities, in alignment with the VGGT. However, the various funded initiatives lacked coherence, and the emphasis on civil society actors created political sensitivities that affected government engagement.

Learning from these challenges, MRLG reoriented its strategy in 2018 towards a more outcome-driven model. The project introduced national and regional thematic alliances – two per country and two regional – that brought together selected reform actors around customary tenure and RAI. The members of each alliance – typically 5 to 10 organisations – collaboratively developed a theory of change and strategies based on an initial political economy and stakeholder analysis. Through implementation of associated work plans, strategies were monitored and adjusted as needed with the support of national facilitators and the regional support team. Within each alliance, members are responsible for implementing specific activities and managing their own budget.

MRLG also prioritised state engagement and a stronger focus on government policy initiatives. In Lao PDR, the project supported government-led processes to pilot guidelines for community tenure recognition. In Cambodia and Myanmar, where direct government engagement remained constrained, the focus was on strengthening civil society capacity and preserving safe spaces for dialogue. Viet Nam adopted a hybrid model, blending partnerships with state and non-state actors to keep policy dialogue active and responsive. As a result of this design, MRLG staff is heavily involved in the formation and operation of these alliances.

Land for Life

Following adoption of the VGGT, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) approached WHH with a proposal to develop a programme to support MSPs in land governance. The programme, Land for Life, began in 2017 and is currently in its third phase and scheduled to conclude in 2026.

WHH developed the programme in collaboration with its long-standing partners in four countries: the Network Movement for Justice and Development in Sierra Leone; the Forum for Social Studies in Ethiopia; Rights & Rice Foundation in Liberia; and Confédération Paysanne du Faso in Burkina Faso. In both Liberia and Sierra Leone, the MSPs build upon or revitalise existing FAO platforms.

The primary objective of Land for Life is to develop multi-actor partnerships (MAPs). These partnerships aim to contribute to policies and practices on land tenure and RAI that align with international standards, particularly VGGT and the human right to adequate food.

MAPs take a different form in each country. The most typical governance model is a secretariat, which is hosted by a partner organisation or positioned in the independent partnership entity if it has been institutionalised. A steering committee or board comprising representatives from all sectors – civil society, government, the private sector and academia – oversees the secretariat and makes decisions on activity plans and budgets. Thematic working groups also bring together stakeholders with relevant competencies. Additionally, a general assembly of all MAP actors can serve as the highest-level decision-making body.

Strategies and action plans are developed using a four-phase 'dialogic change model' inspired by the Collective Leadership Institute.[3] The model allows for results-oriented, structured planning and implementation of stakeholder dialogue through a four-stage cycle: (i) exploring and engaging; (ii) building and formalising; (iii) implementing and monitoring; and (iv) sustaining and expanding impact.

WHH provides light technical support with a small international team but does not participate in the day-to-day facilitation. However, WHH does support a core team of three people in the partner organisation. In its final phase, Land for Life has encouraged the development of sustainability plans, including the option of institutionalising the platforms. This has been done in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia.

Comité Technique Foncier et Développement

The Comité Technique Foncier et Développement (CTFD) is a think tank network formed and co-chaired by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), with networking and research activities facilitated by GRET. Since 1996, its core mission has been to improve the recognition and security of land rights for communities.

As a network-based think tank, CTFD brings together a diverse range of professionals from academia, international development and civil society representing various fields, including agronomy, law, economics, sociology, anthropology and political science. Its objective is to support strategic land tenure actors in developing and implementing land policies. It promotes a vision based on the recognition of the multiplicity of rights and the need for multistakeholder dialogue on land tenure issues.

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3 For more information on the dialogic change model, see https://www.collectiveleadership.de/blog/article/the-dialogic-change-model/

Initially focused on knowledge production, CTFD began providing ad hoc support to reform actors and processes in specific countries in 2006. This work became more structured in 2015, with the launch of regular national-level dialogue on land reform in Ivory Coast and Senegal. By 2018, this process of multistakeholder dialogue was systematised to support coalitions of strategic actors in eight countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Madagascar, Niger and Senegal.

These coalitions of actors, which include CSOs, farmers' organisations, academia, experts and sometimes local and national authorities, are generally organised as informal platforms or as working groups and networks. The partnership between CTFD and these networks is formalised through agreements with the most legitimate partner(s) at the national level, often the organisations already responsible for facilitating the network. Where no formal network exists, CTFD can support several partners simultaneously and establish joint coordination and follow-up mechanisms.

The international secretariat, managed by GRET, plays an important role in the initial stages of these MSPs, sometimes mobilising national consultants to facilitate the formation of a network of national organisations active on land issues. Once the networks or lead organisations are established, they develop their own work programme. This programme is discussed with GRET, validated by the Committee Co-Chairs, and translated into specific partnership contracts for each country. CTFD also supports regional exchanges through webinars, thematic meetings and regional seminars. Its flexible and iterative planning process allows CTFD to respond quickly to emergencies or windows of opportunity when they arise.

2.3 Commonalities across programmes

These programmes, while distinct in their origins and operational models, share a number of key characteristics. We will present five common features across all the initiatives: the impetus to set up the programme, their long-term approach to land governance, a shared objective in supporting MSPs, their core methodology for developing and maintaining platforms, and their focus on knowledge production and sharing.

Link with VGGT

Three programmes were initiated in response to the international community's renewed interest in land reform following the adoption of the VGGT in 2012 – and its recommendation to establish multistakeholder land governance platforms to monitor and promote adoption at the national level. New initiatives and funding streams were established in the years immediately following 2012 to translate the VGGT principles into tangible action on the ground.

ILC received strong donor support for its National Engagement Strategies, which were launched in 2013 and designed to implement the VGGT through MSPs at the country level. SDC adopted the MSP approach in setting up MRLG in 2014, following growing tensions resulting from the development of large-scale land concessions in the region. Similarly, Land for Life was initiated as result of BMZ interest in supporting multistakeholder partnerships in the same period. In contrast, CTFD chose to support national networks as a way to move beyond knowledge production at the international level, and to allow civil society to actively participate in national political dialogue on land governance.

Members of a Community Protected Area in Cambodia are patrolling their forest ©Eric Catala Contreras, RECOFTC

Figure 1 : Programme timelines

2013 ──────────────────────────────→ 2030

ILC: 2013–2030 (at least)

MRLG: 2014–2025

Land for Life: 2017–2026

CTFD: 2019–ongoing*
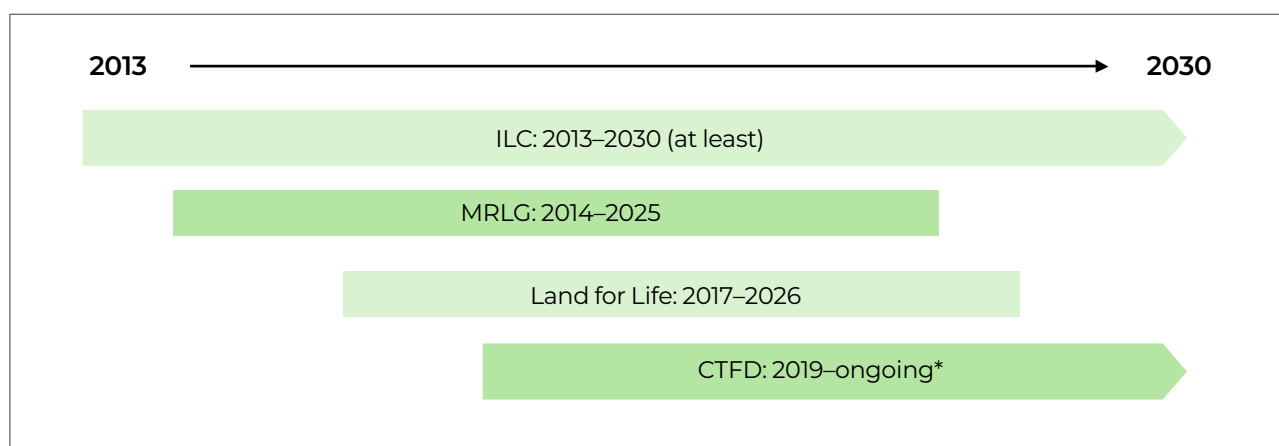
* CTFD has also been supporting expert networks to produce shared knowledge on land governance since 2006

Long-term investment

All are long-term programmes, with most project lifetimes spanning more than a decade (see Figure 1). MRLG and Land for Life have finite timelines, whereas ILC and CTFD have no fixed end date. Programme budgets range from EUR 6 million to EUR 35 million, with annual budgets of between EUR 50,000 and EUR 250,000 to support national platform/coalition activities.

Similar objective

All programmes share the same objective: to improve land governance for farmers and local communities by protecting their rights and responding to their needs in both policy and practice. This includes fostering national-level policy debates, engaging in dialogue with governments, monitoring policies, and providing training and awareness-raising for key stakeholders.

Methodology

All programmes generally follow a similar pathway. They begin by identifying strategic actors and defining who will be members of the platform, including the core working group. They then establish a governance structure, conduct a country-level assessment, and develop a theory of change or strategy, followed by an action plan. This plan is then implemented and monitored, often through various activities led by different individuals.

However, some programmes have added specific steps. MRLG conducts a political economy and stakeholders analysis at the outset to help identify critical entry points, potential allies and opponents, and where potential strategic gains may be achieved. Following the dialogic change model, Land for Life includes a fourth phase focused on sustainability and expanding partnerships – an approach also considered by MRLG in its final phase.

Knowledge production and sharing

Across all programmes, knowledge production by coalitions and platforms includes the documentation of thematic research, case studies, local consultations and the monitoring of policy implementation, among others. To share these knowledge products, platforms organise dialogue events – including workshops and participation in public consultations – and engage in communication and advocacy, which can involve the production of policy briefs. MRLG and CTFD also organise training and regional workshops and events. Activities supported may also include pilots to test policy implementation (MRLG),[4] the production of tools and guidelines for the private sector or governments,[5] and academic research focused on land governance.

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4   One example is MRLG support to government-led processes to pilot guidelines for community tenure recognition..

5   In May 2025, ILC launched a toolkit to support partnerships between government and CSOs in the land governance sector (see https://learn.landcoalition.org/en/resources/partnerships-for-people-centred-land-governance-toolkit/). Similarly, WHH launched a toolbox in June 2025 for building strong, inclusive partnerships in land governance.

3. SELECTED REGIONAL AND COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

The detailed case studies for respective MSPs[6] were prepared under a common framework and terms of reference. The studies were conducted mostly by external consultants[7] contracted by each organisation in cooperation with the secretariat of the relevant MSP. The consultants also received significant input from programme facilitators.

Each partner proposed a case study based on jointly approved criteria. The chosen cases had to involve intensive and diverse engagement of at least two years on a particular policy or topic. There also had to be clear, observable changes on the ground at the community level as a result of the MSP's strategy and activities. MRLG initially proposed three cases but decided to focus on just two. The selected cases and specific policy focus studied are listed in Table 2.

The five studies are based on documentation and interviews with key stakeholders, including platform members, government officials, target groups, experts on policies and political economy,

and programme support teams. Key topics covered include background to how the MSP was formed, the policy issue and its political economy, MSP membership and governance, the strategy developed, the policy engagement process, results and changes observed, conclusions and lessons learned.

The cases were first discussed with each MSP secretariat and support team before being presented and discussed during a workshop held in Paris in November 2024. This workshop included representatives from the four programmes, as well as several donors and technical support organisations. An editorial committee reviewed and finalised the studies. The committee consisted of experts on the processes being studied, the team in charge of the overarching capitalisation study, and representatives from the various programmes.

Table 2. Summary of selected case studies of multistakeholder platforms on land governance

Programme	Country	Platform	Policy focus
CTFD	Guinea	Multistakeholder Platform on Land Governance (PFMA-G)	Preparation of the National Land Policy and the Agricultural Land Policy
ILC	Malawi	National Land Coalition Malawi (NLC Malawi)	Development and implementation of the Customary Land Act (2016)
Land for Life	Burkina Faso	Multi-Actor Platform on Rural Land Tenure (PMAF-BF)	Revision of the Law on Real Estate Development (2023)
MRLG	Cambodia	Alliance for the Recognition of Customary Tenure (CT Alliance)	Community rights within protected areas, particularly in the Environment and Natural Resources Code and the Law on Protected Areas
	Lao PDR	Alliance on Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI Alliance)	Formulation and implementation of Instruction 0457 that sets out the obligations of investors entering into state land concessions and private lease agreements

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6   For the full case study reports, see Chibwana-Nkhata and Essimi Biloa (2025); Issifou and Nabé (2025); Ling and Bounphasouk (2025); Scurrah and Deligne (2025); and Tonguino, Bah and Camara (2025).

7   The Malawi case study was developed by the platform facilitator with contributions from ILC staff and the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development.

3.1 Burkina Faso: advocacy on the revision of the Real Estate Law

The Multi-Actor Platform on Rural Land Tenure (PMAF-BF) was created in 2019, with the support of WHH under the Land for Life programme. It comprises representatives from both government and CSOs, as well as farmers' organisations. The secretariat was initially hosted by the Confédération Paysanne du Faso, a national farmers' organisation and long-standing partner of WHH.

The platform began by advocating for improved implementation of the Rural Land Law (2009) at a time of increasing land-related conflicts. It analysed the causes for delayed implementation of the law and provided recommendations to government. The platform started training paralegals to work with village land commissions and organised a National Land Day involving all relevant stakeholders. PMAF-BF also actively campaigned against a new reform proposed by the World Bank that would have introduced a new rural land law, successfully redirecting the effort towards implementing existing legislation.

A major issue at that time was the large-scale land grabbing by private interests, facilitated by a separate law encouraging housing development (the Law on Real Estate). This law was used to acquire land in peri-urban and in rural areas, mostly for speculation, rather than for the promised housing developments, which failed to materialise. In 2021, the government decided to revise the law to address the abuses and limit the power of private developers. However, the new law was never passed because of strong lobbying from those involved in land speculation.

Following the coup in January 2022, the transitional government reactivated the revision of the Law on Real Estate. PMAF-BF was highly active in negotiating the content and advocating for the new law both with the new government and with farmer communities and traditional leaders. The platform drafted a memorandum for the government, organised various public meetings and press conferences and held working sessions with several ministries. As a result of these joint efforts, the new Law on Real Estate Development was passed in 2023, offering better protection for traditional landholders.

During this same period, PMAF-BF chose to institutionalise and established its own secretariate separate from the Confédération Paysanne du Faso. Although the Confederation remains a key member and chairs the platform, this formalisation allowed PMAF-BF to operate with greater autonomy.

Onion and bean producer group from Central-Plateau Region in Burkina Faso ©PMAF

LandNet members during a platform coordination meeting in 2018 in Malawi ©Kate Chibwana

3.2 Guinea: contribution to preparation of the National Land Policy and the Agricultural Land Policy

Since 2012, Guinea has undertaken several initiatives to reform its land legislation, as existing laws inherited from the colonial period are not suited to the current realities and challenges of land tenure in rural areas. However, reform efforts have been slow to advance, with different ministries working in silos, particularly the Ministry of Urban Planning, Housing and Regional Development (responsible for the preparation of the National Land Policy) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (responsible for the preparation of the Agricultural Land Policy).

Within this context, the national Multistakeholder Platform on Land Governance (Plateforme multi-acteurs sur le foncier en Guinée, PFMA-G) was created in 2018 with support from FAO, and subsequently from CTFD. This platform has been key in facilitating consultations for both the National Land Policy and the Agricultural Land Policy, bringing together stakeholders from different sectors. The platform is co-chaired on a rotational basis by the two ministries and the national farmers' organisation, CNOP-G. The secretariat is managed by ACORD Guinea – a CSO working for social justice and development since 2018. A technical committee comprises 17 members: five ministry representatives, three farmers' organisations, three CSOs, two representatives from sub-regions, two representatives from FAO and two technical assistants from AFD (which has been involved in supporting agricultural policy in Guinea since 2015).

In 2019, the platform organised a national workshop on land governance with the two ministries, received training from external specialists and the ministry staff on the legal framework for land tenure, and conducted participatory research in various regions to understand local land governance issues. These efforts, along with several national consultations, significantly contributed to the drafting of the Agricultural Land Policy. This new policy, which is currently pending adoption, proposes mechanisms to formally recognise and secure customary land tenure rights at the local (decentralised) level.

After the coup in September 2021, a transitional government was established and a window of opportunity opened to reactivate the process of formulating the National Land Policy, in particular holding the delayed National Land Forum (Etats Généraux du Foncier). The platform was instrumental in organising the event, which took place in November 2022. Recommendations from the forum emphasised the need for:

- the adoption of the Agricultural Land Policy;
- an inclusive reform of the Land and Public Domain Tenancy Code; and
- the designation of PFMA-G as the official body responsible for monitoring implementation of the 26 recommendations from the consultations.

These were major steps forward for the platform. However, the process still faces challenges. The Ministry of Urban Planning, Housing and Regional Development continues to show reluctance to collaborate with other ministries and to harmonise all matters relating to agricultural land with the Agricultural Land Policy. The platform is continuing to advocate on this issue.

3.3 Malawi: advocating for people-centred land governance in Malawi

In Malawi, the government has been working to reform its land governance system, led by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development. These reforms aim to provide legal recognition to customary land tenure holders, decentralise land management and establish clear processes for land transactions.

Civil society networks in the country have a long history of participating in land policy debates and became more actively involved in land reform efforts after 2006. This was in response to the rejection of a first attempt at a land bill due to a lack of consultation with CSOs and other actors. A new round of extensive consultations then took place to draft several land-related bills. However, CSO engagement was not coordinated, resulting in divergent and disjointed submissions. This lack of cohesion derailed progress towards tangible resolutions for presentation before Parliament in June 2013 and the bills were rejected once again.

The reforms were particularly contentious concerning customary land and how it is governed. Traditional leaders were concerned about losing their authority as custodians of customary rights, politicians spread misinformation to undermine the government, and private investors feared that formalising customary land rights would complicate land acquisition for development.

In response to these issues, a national multistakeholder platform on land governance was established in August 2014 under the ILC National Engagement Strategy framework. The platform (which would later become NLC Malawi) played a crucial role in mediating these conflicts and building consensus among various stakeholders, including traditional leaders and private investors. Through advocacy, consultations and sensitisation efforts, the platform helped dispel false narratives and contributed significantly to all ten land-related laws being passed between July 2016 and November 2016.

After the laws were enacted, the platform shifted its focus to implementation, prioritising a people-centred and gender-sensitive approach. The platform supported women and youth groups in patriarchal northern Malawi to demand their rights from local leaders; used evidence-based research to raise awareness of the impact of investments in local areas in Mangochi and Phalombe districts; supported engagement between the private sector and communities to forge collaborative relations; capacitated ministry personnel in effective communication; and raised awareness on land laws for over three million Malawians through national and community radio programmes and other mediums.

The platform has evolved from a space exclusively for CSOs to a multistakeholder platform that brings together 32 member organisations. These organisations represent academic and research institutions, media, government statutory bodies, ministries, development partners, farmer groups, youth organisations and national CSOs. Seven district CSO land networks also act as decentralised platforms in synergy with the national platform.

Villagers participate in a training on land laws in 2018 in Malawi ©NLC Malawi

NLC Malawi is now involved in implementation of the land laws in pilot districts, providing sensitisation and training in the field and facilitating conflict resolution. However, funding of decentralised land offices remains a major obstacle to the effective implementation of the legislation.

The platform has come up against some considerable challenges within its scope of work. These challenges include political interference (especially during election periods), insufficient resources to carry out its work, and balancing the varying capacities among platform members. Institutional structures essential for effective advocacy work – such as those related to nationally accredited data – are also either absent or inadequate.

3.4 Lao PDR: contribution to the formulation and implementation of Instruction 0457

Lao PDR is a socialist republic led by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. Policy decision-making process are controlled by State-led entities with little space for alternative actors and institutions. Economic liberalisation reforms initiated by the Party in the early 2000s encouraged foreign investors in the mining, hydropower and agroforestry sectors to seek large-scale land concessions and leases for their operations, effectively a process of 'turning land into capital'. By 2012, the total area under concessions and leases was estimated to be at least 1.1 million hectares, or 5 percent of the country's land area.

These concessions were approved by different ministries and levels of government with no proper consultation process or assessment of their impact. As a land registration system did not exist, many investments overlapped with village lands and dispossessed local people, predominantly in already poor upland areas that lacked formal tenure. Women and ethnic minorities were particularly affected because of their greater reliance upon land and natural resources for the food security of their families. Few mechanisms were in place for communities or CSOs to dispute the concessions and claim access to the land. However, local conflicts, international protests and unsatisfactory results of the concessions themselves led the government to establish a moratorium on new concessions in 2012, and to monitor existing concessions more closely.

Villagers participate in consultations for land registration in forestland, a government pilot supported by MRLG in Khammouane province, Lao PDR ©MRLG

Within this context, MRLG has been supporting reform through the Alliance on Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI Alliance). This flexible alliance is primarily composed of government partners, experts and donors, with the participation of a few targeted CSOs, and operates under two clusters. One is a government task force focused on developing RAI policy and supported by technical experts from GIZ and MRLG, and the other is a coalition of CSOs and private sector representatives that cooperates with government on a general approach to RAI.

In 2016, MRLG seized on a public debate about the negative environmental effects of Chinese-run banana plantations to help the Ministry of Planning and Investment bring in new regulations. Working with the task force, MRLG assisted in developing Instruction 0457, which provided guidelines for regulating these investments. This process included field trips both within Lao PDR and to neighbouring countries to study different approaches to responsible investment.

Implementation was the next challenge, as local administrations often lack the capacity or willingness to follow top-down instructions. The alliance began monitoring the new policy in a pilot region and provided recommendations for improving the Instruction to better suit local realities. This opened the door for further cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to develop guidelines on RAI and on the regulation of contract farming.

3.5 Cambodia: policy engagement for community rights within protected areas

The rapid expansion of protected areas in Cambodia has had a significant impact on the lives of forest-dependent populations. The customary rights to land and forests of Indigenous and local communities living in and near these protected areas have been severely limited because this expansion has occurred without any community consultation. At the same time, legal provisions to formalise community tenure and promote co-management of forests are based on the state granting rights to communities over limited areas and impose rules and conditions that are often incompatible with local tenure systems and resource management practices. As such, Indigenous and local communities have experienced limited gains in securing land tenure or viable livelihoods and are left with little incentive to manage forests sustainably. In response to these challenges, MRLG has supported civil society efforts to influence policy and practices aimed at strengthening community tenure rights within protected areas.

Over the last two decades, the space for dialogue and cooperation on public policies between the government, CSOs and donors has been narrowing. This became particularly acute after the 2018 election as Cambodia transitioned to a one-party state. The main opposition party was dissolved and there was a crackdown on civil society, land activists and journalists. This created substantial difficulties for MRLG to engage with government.

MRLG team discuss with the members of the Baray Kham Keut Community Protected Area in Preah Vihear Province, Cambodia ©MRLG

MRLG team assess the feasibility of collaborative management with villagers from Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary, Kompong Thom Province, Cambodia ©MRLG

MRLG established the Alliance for the Recognition of Customary Tenure in 2018. The alliance was based primarily on earlier successful collaborations and partnerships, as well as on members' alignment with and potential contributions to the goal of strengthening community land rights in protected areas and forest lands. It was composed of eight CSOs, an international conservation NGO, a national NGO forum, two regional programmes, an Indigenous peoples' organisation and various national CSOs. Government was not engaged directly in the platform but partnerships were pursued with various departments within the Ministry of Environment.

At that time, the alliance chose to focus on the public consultation on the Environmental and Natural Resources Code, which was intended to unify laws on environmental management, protected areas and wildlife management. This was happening when the Ministry of Environment was considerably extending protected areas to form 'biodiversity corridors'. With many forest-dependent communities and ethnic minorities including Indigenous people living in these areas and fighting to get their rights recognised, this was seen as an opportunity to introduce the recognition of customary tenure and local community rights within these laws. The goal was to make sure that local rights were recognised and integrated in the zoning and management of protected areas, that customary land and forests would remain under local community ownership and management, and that protected areas would be managed in partnership with local communities, under a co-management paradigm. At the same time, an alliance partner received support to pilot an on-the-ground mechanism for the recognition of customary rights within a protected area that they had been delegated to manage.

After a promising first year of dialogue – informed by meetings, field trips, workshops and the results of the pilot – alliance comments and suggestions were submitted to the ministry in May 2019. From that point on, no further information was provided on the process, and ministry support for co-management of protected areas began to dwindle. It later emerged that the Code was not approved by the Council of Ministers and had entered a closed-door revision process without any more dialogue with civil society. The new version, finally approved in 2023, did not include any of the proposals put forward by the alliance concerning recognition of customary tenure or co-management of protected areas. Specific measures related to these issues were left to be clarified by decree or decided at the local level under the decentralisation process.

The alliance then decided to focus on specific sub-legislation related to guidelines on community protected areas and on the application of REDD+ principles. This opportunity arose through the appointment of an alliance member to a high-level position within the ministry, and another who had ties with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries. Despite these openings, progress has been slow.

The difficulties for the alliance to effectively engage with government and influence policies is strongly shaped by wider power dynamics linked to Cambodia's neo-patrimonial political-economic system. In such a system, relations between civil society and government and between donors and government are highly strained, and policy processes are unpredictable and non-transparent.

4. LESSONS LEARNED

In the complex field of land governance, platforms share a common goal of bringing diverse actors together. However, their structure, governance and operational models may vary across different programmes and national contexts. In this section, we present lessons learned from the five case studies, using selected examples and incorporating insights from the comparative study of the four programmes. We also draw on the MRLG Capex, which was conducted in parallel by an external team and based on an overall analysis of MRLG alliances in the four Mekong countries.[8]

4.1 Importance of the political environment

A striking observation from these case studies is the importance of the political environment and government openness to pro-poor reforms and engagement with civil society. This factor significantly shapes not only the strategies of reform-focused platforms but also their very composition and governance.

At one end of the spectrum is the case of Malawi, where the government is willing to implement pro-poor farmer reforms. As a major source of income for the majority of voters, agriculture is a national priority and periodic elections ensure that the voices of farmers are heard. While powerful groups may resist change, they can only slow it down, not stop it entirely. In this context, alliances between certain government sectors and civil society actors can strengthen reform efforts by mobilising public opinion, countering disinformation and facilitating negotiations.

At the other extreme is governments that are unwilling to reform their laws. These governments consider existing land tenure policies as supportive of economic growth and regime stability. In the case of Cambodia, national development strategies in the last three decades were initially based around timber exploitation and then around forest conversion for agro-industry, with little regard for human rights or the environment. The lack of formal democracy or effective rule of law severely limits the space for civil society coalitions, and the government refuses to participate in multistakeholder platforms. While minimal reforms may appear on paper to maintain international legitimacy, the scope for significant policy change remains limited to a hypothetical future change of regime.

Participants to the first National Land Symposium on steps towards implementation of the new land laws in 2016 ©NES/NLC Malawi

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8   See Luttrell, C., & Pellini, A. (2025). *Navigating land reform in the Mekong: lessons from a decade of adaptive policy engagement*. Capex Series #3. Vientiane: MRLG. https://www.mrlg.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Capex-Case-Study-Navigating-land-reform-in-the-Mekong-16092025_updated-1.pdf

Regional consultations on land management using the Terristories tool in Guinea ©ACORD Guinea

Other cases fall between these two extremes. In Lao PDR, strong opposition to large-scale land concessions, coupled with the poor performance of large-scale agribusinesses, prompted a policy revision. This initially involved a moratorium on new concessions and leases and was later formalised in Instruction 0457 on agricultural investments in 2018. In this context, the government opened up space for various partners to collaborate on policy revision. While priority was given to international technical and financial partners, CSOs were also invited to contribute, provided they demonstrated strong technical expertise, did not interfere in the political space and were not too vocal in their demands. This window of opportunity allowed for specific policy adjustments related to land rights and tenure security, without tackling broader national land policy.

The case of Viet Nam[9] could be described as 'enlightened authoritarianism', where the political window of opportunity is open but restricted. The government, under the guidance of the Communist Party, wants to maintain control of the policy process but welcomes feedback and

monitoring of policies from people's organisations, academics and local CSOs, provided they maintain political neutrality. Recognising that policies need to be adapted to local realities, the government is willing to discuss proposed policies to identify potential problems before official adoption. CSOs can advocate and even run pilot programmes for policies that improve local rights, such as forest allocation for Indigenous communities. However, success is not guaranteed and depends on how the government balances these rights against other interests.

Windows of opportunity can emerge during a major political shift, such as through elections or as a result of a coup, bringing a different agenda concerning land governance. In our sample of case studies, this political change was observed in Malawi in 1994, and more recently in Guinea and Burkina Faso, where transitional military governments began to take land reform seriously and showed a new openness to the participation of CSOs and farmers' organisations in law revision processes that had been stalled for many years.

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9   Although not finalised at the time of writing, the case study on Viet Nam merits discussion here given the specific nature of the relationship between government and civil society in the country.

4.2 Building and sustaining multistakeholder platforms

This section explores key aspects of building MSPs, including their structure, governance and operational management. It also describes levels of government participation and raises questions around inclusiveness and sustainability.

Identifying strong lead partners: a key for platform success

Programmes have sometimes experienced difficulties and delays in identifying legitimate and effective lead partners from among platform members to host the secretariat, particularly at their inception.[10] In some cases, a suitable lead organisation may emerge naturally. In other cases, several potential leaders have equal legitimacy for the position, and one practical solution has been to divide the work programmes into several subgroups so that each organisation has a share of the budget. It has also been noted that, while often adept at designing and coordinating programmes, international NGOs lack the legitimacy to lead a national platform. In such cases, national organisations require specific support to assume the leadership role effectively.

Composition of multistakeholder platforms

Platforms identify themselves in various ways, from multistakeholder platforms to alliances. ILC refers to their platforms as 'national land coalitions', and Land for Life uses the term 'multi-actor platforms'. Regardless of the designation, the composition differs significantly from one country to another and changes over time. Platform membership is constantly evolving as new members join and original members disengage. Strategic decisions within the MSP itself may seek to include representatives from local platforms in national-level platforms. In most cases, platform membership is composed of three or four layers, ranging from general membership to strategic and oversight bodies (see Figure 2).

MRLG alliances have a slightly different structure. The first layer was established at the start of the programme as national stakeholder consultations but were not systematically continued. The alliance itself, or second layer, is made up of a relatively small number of organisations that have agreed to work together on a particular topic in the medium term. The secretariat is shared in principle between a lead organisation, which conducts most activities, and MRLG facilitator staff. In practice, MRLG facilitators play a more central role.

Figure 2. Typical composition of multistakeholder platform

1.	**General members** This is the largest group and includes government representatives, academia, media and sometimes the private sector. Membership is often a result of involvement in the platform foundational event or subsequent national consultation rather than through a formal application process.
2.	**Steering committee or technical group** Comprising 6 to 16 members, this group is more actively involved in the platform's strategic direction, meeting regularly to discuss strategy and action plans.
3.	**Active members** These members are directly involved in specific activities from the action plan, sometimes with financial support from the platform.
4.	**Secretariat** This body plays an important role in planning, coordinating and executing most platform activities, often in close cooperation with the platform chair or co-chair, and in dialogue with the supporting international programme.

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10 In the case of ILC, the challenge is further complicated by the need to select coordinating partners who can comply with the financial requirements and mechanisms of development partners, including IFAD.

CTFD generally supports civil society networks rather than MSPs as such. Guinea is the only country with CTFD support to MSPs. GRET's scientific secretary provides light support to the networks to identify and follow up on priority activities and also supports publications.

Government participation in platforms

The extent of government involvement in platforms varies. While government representatives are typically invited to initial events and national consultations, their participation in other platform structures largely depends on the relationship with civil society.

In some cases in Africa, government represent-atives co-chair and actively participate in steering committees and strategic planning. In contrast, governments in Asia are more reluctant and generally not willing to discuss issues on equal terms with civil society. Some government officials may choose to participate as observers in formal presentations or take part in public consultations. To increase government participation, MRLG has invited governments to join alliance activities through their own initiatives or projects, but the relationship with the rest of the alliance is mediated by MRLG staff. In Lao PDR, most technical consultations and work for the RAI Alliance was conducted by an inter-ministerial task force with GIZ, but broader consultations and field activities involved CSOs and private sector representatives. In other cases, such as in Cambodia, the government is not part of the alliance at all.

The question of inclusiveness

Platforms also differ in terms of inclusiveness. While most aim to be inclusive and often invite marginalised groups such as women's and youth organisations, they do not always succeed in bringing all stakeholders on board. The inclusion of traditional authorities or customary leaders is seen as important in Africa, but they are often reluctant to join. Private sector participation is also difficult to secure – specific companies with a social and environmental responsibility profile might join concrete platform activities but they rarely agree to be full-time members.

However, not all platforms see inclusiveness as a priority. Some, mostly composed of CSOs, intentionally choose not to include government representatives as their goal is to join forces to confront government or build strong advocacy capacity. In other cases, such as with MRLG, platforms select only the most active organisations and those with strategic alignment to develop an efficient joint strategy and action plan. The risk in this case is that some partners feel excluded from these strategic discussions.

Ultimately, a balance must be struck between the ideal of total inclusion and the practical need for effectiveness. In the real word, a group of aligned stakeholders may lead to a more efficient strategy to influence policy.

In summary, MSPs typically pursue one of two distinct purposes: broad inclusiveness or focused coalitions. Platform models that prioritise bringing all different voices and interests to the

The Prey Lang Community Network documents deforestation through land concessions inside a wildlife sanctuary in Kampong Thom Province, Cambodia in 2013. This group was excluded from local consultation by local authorities for the protected area zoning ©Sebastian Strangio

PMAF members meet with the Advisor to the Minister of Urban Planning, Land Affairs, and Housing about the real estate promotion law in Burkina Faso ©PMAF

table to build consensus, like those in Malawi, are well suited to democratic environments where the voices of citizens and civil society hold weight with the government. This model aligns with the theory of communicative action. Platform models that limit their inclusiveness to select partners that share common goals are more effective for developing an efficient policy influence strategy in politically constrained environments, such as Lao PDR. Intermediate models can also exist and, even within a single MSP, different subgroups may form based on a stronger alignment of interests.

Governance of platforms

Differences between the four programmes are also seen in the level of formalisation of the rules of governance. MRLG, for example, requires a clear definition of alliance members and their responsibilities, along with a very precise and detailed theory of change and work plan. However, the overall governance of the alliance remains relatively flexible.

In contrast, ILC places more importance on the governance of the coalition, including the designation of a steering committee. Similarly, Land for Life establishes a governance system and memorandums of understanding, although in practice much of the responsibility is left to the partner organisation in charge of the action plan.

CTFD takes a different approach, where governance rules are defined by the networks themselves and remain informal. Priority is given to defining a joint strategy and collective plan of action, as well as facilitating network activities such as internal meetings and events. CTFD supports the organisations responsible for network facilitation to implement a jointly

defined programme of activities. This support is formalised through a partnership agreement with set deliverables and robust quality control, ensured in part by CTFD membership at the global level.

The role of the secretariat

The platform secretariat plays a crucial role in its success. This role is usually assumed by staff employed in one of the CSO members of the platform. The staff of the secretariat should ideally have two essential qualities – they should be effective facilitators to bring members together and align their efforts, and should also be recognised experts. This expertise not only gives them a deep understanding of the subject but also provides credibility with government and other stakeholders.

While the responsibility for strategy and action plans officially lies with the steering committee, the secretariat (or external facilitator) often plays a leading role in both aligning members and developing the strategy. The personal capacities of the facilitator or secretary are essential in this respect.

In the cases observed, the organisations hosting the secretariat are highly competent and experienced in analysing land governance issues. As these organisations manage international funds, they also need to be well structured and reputable organisations.

However, a strong lead organisation can pose a risk. It might take the credit for the platform's achievements and use the human and financial resources to advance its own broader agenda. In this case, the steering committee's ability to act as a check on power becomes critical.

External facilitation

The four programmes differ significantly in the role played by support staff in providing technical assistance and facilitation. In the case of Land for Life, WHH does not facilitate the formation or governance of MSPs and instead relies on its long-standing partners in each country to lead the process. WHH provides light follow-up and advisory support, and monitors budgets and outputs. There is no in-country or regional WHH team, but the organisation supports a three-person team within each partner organisation to manage the programme.

MRLG has its own dedicated staff in each country plus support at the regional level. The team plays a major role in establishing alliances and developing a theory of change and associated action plans. Team members also monitor results and activities and are present during the sharing of results as well as at national and regional workshops organised with the government. This helps overcome initial difficulties in identifying a strong leader and aligning positions, but raises questions about the emergence of a strong alliance secretariat.

ILC assumes a light facilitation role, with a regional facilitator in each region who can help launch NLCs and provide in-person support on average twice a year. ILC relies mostly on in-country members to develop and implement annual action plans. Similarly, CTFD provides light support to countries. While the secretariat helps launch platforms through initial stakeholder interviews and a national consultation workshop, it can contract one of its members to facilitate the development of strategies and action plans if needed. CTFD demands a high quality of output and all deliverables are reviewed by the secretariat before contracts are finalised and paid. CTFD supports a single lead organisation within the network to coordinate activities and produce reports. Agreements can subsequently be signed with other organisations to either support the network or conduct separate activities within the agreed-upon work programme.

Budget and operational management

While a platform's budget can, in principle, be distributed among various members based on their capacity and interest in specific activities, the secretariat typically manages most of the funds.

For platforms supported by MRLG – and to some extent by CTFD – the support team plays a significant role in developing action plans and drawing up subcontracts with the different organisations responsible for implementing activities. This includes government departments in charge of specific pilots, as seen in Lao PDR.

Disagreements or conflicts over the plan of action are rare and are usually resolved internally without much external impact. However, when the secretariat is suspected of mismanaging funds, using funds for its own interest, or simply failing to report properly, complaints often reach the international programme. This may result in a change of secretariat, as was the case in Malawi. Another risk is when the lead organisation uses secretariat staff for its own agenda, reducing the time available for platform activities and affecting the platform's public image. This was the case in

PMAF steering committee meeting in 2021 in Burkina Faso ©PMAF

Burkina Faso with the Confédération Paysanne du Faso, which led the platform to create its own separate structure. This process, which must be consensual and appropriately negotiated, can take one or two years and significantly affects the effectiveness of the platform during that period.

Formalisation and sustainability

The approach to sustainability of the platforms differs across the four programmes. CTFD[11] and ILC are less concerned with institutionalising platforms as both have a long-term perspective and will continue to work with reform actors in their respective countries. In contrast, Land for Life and MRLG have a sustainability component built in because they are time-limited projects.

Land for Life left it open for partners to choose how they envision sustainability. Two chose to institutionalise by creating new entities. Although this created administrative complications for WHH in the transfer of partnership agreements and ensuring administrative requirements for the transfer of funds were met, the new entities have successfully been established.

MRLG has focused on this topic for the past two years. After considering various levels of formalisation, the alliances decided to operate through a single host organisation. The central challenge remains securing sustained funding to ensure continuity of alliance activities.

Institutionalisation carries a number of risks. Over time, the original spirit of the platform could get lost and the platform risks becoming just another CSO, where original members lose influence and must compete with others for funding.[12] To avoid this, the statutes of the new entity should reflect the original platform governance. When PMAF-BF was established as a Burkinabe association in 2022, the aim was to clearly separate secretariat management from Confédération Paysanne du Faso, which had a tendency to consider platform members as part of their organisation and assign tasks not directly linked to platform priorities. The statutes formalise who are members of PMAF-BF, who meet in general assembly once a year and elect a steering committee.

With most platforms retaining informal structures with no legal statute or by-laws, they cannot have their own bank account and hold contracts directly with funding agencies. However, this does not prevent them from successfully mobilising funds from diverse sources. NLC Malawi has secured funding from FAO, Oxfam and DanChurchAid, with the funds being managed by the host organisation. It also does not prevent platforms from receiving government recognition. In practice, platform representatives are invited to public consultations or to take on official roles in monitoring land reform legislation. In Guinea, PFMA-G was given the responsibility of following up on the recommendations issued from the National Land Forum. However, this designation was not formalised in a government decree, which limits the capacity of PFMA-G to effectively play this role.

A multi-stakeholder coordination meeting in Lao PDR ©MRLG

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11 To limit dependence on its funding, CTFD encourages the development of synergies with other international partners and programmes – such as ILC, FAO and bilateral technical assistance.

12 This has already been observed in Land for Life Ethiopia, and previously in cases such as LandNet in Malawi or the Land Core Group in Myanmar.

4.3 Developing a platform strategy

Creating a platform strategy involves a number of key elements that combine technical expertise, strategic partnerships and an understanding of the dynamic nature of the national and international environment.

Aligning platform members

Platforms have an important function in aligning their members around a common agenda, especially in the initial stages. This alignment helps prevent duplication and conflicting policy messages, thereby strengthening advocacy and increasing a platform's credibility with the government. This process requires a significant internal effort and can take a considerable amount of time before everyone agrees on a common approach.

Initial platform activities often involve gathering and sharing information among members. In Burkina Faso and Guinea, the platforms commissioned experts to take stock of existing legislation and share findings with members for discussion. This contributed to building the capacity of all members.

By ensuring members are well aligned, platforms can streamline and prioritise messages. A key achievement of the platforms studied has been their ability to find common ground among CSOs that had different priorities and messages, such as on farmers' rights, gender or the environment. For example, in Cambodia, the MSP successfully brought environmental organisations and Indigenous groups closer together, even though they had initially viewed each other as 'competitors'.

Developing a concerted strategy

Developing a unified strategy for a platform can take a long time – sometimes several years – especially if the methodological standards are quite high.[13] Delays can also occur when various potential partners struggle to align their goals. To address these challenges, flexibility in both budget and support is crucial. This often means beginning initial activities before a formal strategy is finalised.[14]

MRLG team study the management of the Baray Kham Keut Community Protected Area in Preah Vihear Province, Cambodia ©MRLG

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13 For ILC, the process from the formation stage is less than 12 months. A formulation grant is signed for a maximum of 6 months, followed by the implementation grant.

14 CTFD has chosen to start with short initial contracts (12 to 18 months) to allow partners to start with priority activities, and then align their planning to the evolving policy context.

Strategic planning and political economy analysis

Most platforms formalise their strategy using a theory of change – with the exception of PFMA-G, which adopts a more flexible planning approach focused on activities linked to ongoing land policy processes. Aside from MRLG, which links the theory of change to a political economy and stakeholder analysis, many strategies remain fairly generic, formulating broad objectives for better land governance, without direct reference to ongoing policy processes.[15] This does not mean that policy processes are not taken into consideration in platform activities. Platforms are constantly adapting to the evolving environment and opportunities and formal strategies are often broad descriptions of what platforms can do rather than a precise roadmap of what they actually are doing.

Political economy and stakeholder analyses conducted by MRLG aimed to gain a deeper understanding of potential allies and opponents in the policy change process. They looked at both organisations and other stakeholder groups, and if possible, identified 'champions' or influential individuals within the system. This exercise, conducted with external consultants, sought to analyse who wins and who loses from a given policy change and to assess their influence on the decision-making process. One of the goals of this analysis was to clarify the likelihood of achieving various policy objectives and to adapt strategies accordingly, at least by avoiding 'putting all eggs in one basket' when change is unlikely.

However, this proved to be very challenging, even with the help of high-level consultants. In the South-East Asian context, many decisions are made informally or behind closed doors. Governments traditionally keep internal disagreements or debates private until an official decision has been made by the highest authority. Gaining insight into what happens within government circles requires building trust with high-level officials, who themselves are closely controlled and monitored through the government surveillance system. Another issue with the analyses is that understanding a challenge, particularly those related to a political regime, does not always lead to an effective strategy for overcoming it. Some issues, such as patronage and corruption within ministries, simply remain intractable.

Similarly, in relation to the private sector, it has been difficult to analyse the interests of different types of businesses, especially those that prefer to remain discreet, such as international or state-owned companies investing in large-scale agro-industrial concessions. To understand these interests better would require an 'economic intelligence' approach with informants, which is beyond the capacity of these platforms.

While political economy and stakeholder analyses are an interesting tool, they are not a magic bullet. The strategies adopted by other platforms indicate that priorities and allies are chosen based on their own intuitive analysis. This process remains implicit and is informed by informal conversations between platform members and partners rather than a formal exercise.

Finding champions and influential allies

The identification of champions within the government, academia or influential donor partners who support policy reform can influence a platform's strategy. In some cases, these allies are easy to determine, as an entire government department or ministry may officially support pro-people land governance reforms. In other cases, influential decision makers must be found through personal networks. A platform must be able to mobilise its members' networks and knowledge. This can be challenging and requires a high level of trust among members, who need to be confident that their contacts are not going to be mobilised for other organisations' interests.

The champion should be in a position of sufficient authority to be able to engage with the platform. In Lao PDR, the Deputy Director General of the Investment Promotion Department was open to acknowledging the drawbacks of the national policy on agricultural investment and was therefore identified as a key partner in revising the investment policy as a result of the concerns raised over banana plantations. It was much easier to develop cooperation with his department than with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, which was officially in charge of land policy. Although the focus was not strictly on land tenure, it was still a strategic choice, as regulating investment included rules to protect local and customary land rights and prevent problematic land leases and concessions.

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15 PMAF-BF, for example, builds its strategy on four generic pillars: capacity strengthening; producing and sharing knowledge; communication and media; and lobbying and advocacy.

Members of the Rak Lalai Indigenous Community share their view on the community protected area management with MRLG team in Rattanakiri, Cambodia ©MRLG

When the champion is a political figure, such as the Minister of Environment in the case of Cambodia, there are two factors to consider. First, a minister's tenure is not guaranteed, and a change in leadership can lead to a drastic shift in policy. Second, their stated intentions should not be taken at face value, as they may have ulterior motives for supporting a particular policy. In Cambodia, this was further complicated by the fact that the champion could not be met personally, and the alliance had to work with proxies or messengers, each with their own agenda. Shifts in the balance of power between competing ministries can also weaken a chosen champion over time.

Platforms also rely on insider information from within the government, often from allies or politicians who can discreetly provide information on internal processes. There is often a certain porosity between platform members and government staff. These links can be used to obtain insider information or to advocate for proposed reforms.

This type of information can be very useful for understanding the political landscape and identifying which groups and lobbies are opposing reform. However, this is also risky. Informants could also be 'double agents' who feed information back to those same groups or provide false information. It all depends on where their loyalty lies. There is no perfect method for making the right choices. The best approach is to obtain information and viewpoints from multiple sources, including opponents, while maintaining a healthy scepticism

about the various interpretations of reality. Authoritarian governments that keep a strong control on information, especially on internal debates within the ruling party or regime, make it very difficult to figure out what is really going on.

The go-betweens

Platforms can often play a role in building the capacity of qualified professionals, researchers or experts, who may later be appointed to important government positions. In Cambodia, an expert involved in conflict resolution between Indigenous peoples and rubber companies was nominated as sub-secretary in the Ministry of Justice. Similarly, a former director of the Wildlife Conservation Society involved in the Customary Tenure Alliance took up a position in the Ministry of Environment. Other recent cases include the appointment of a member of the Senegalese platform in the newly elected government. In Guinea, an active member of the platform has also recently been designated a national leadership role within a ministry. The potential benefits of this progression from platform members to decision-making roles in government are clear. If a government implements a reform long advocated for by a platform, it can draw on the platform's accumulated expertise and networks.

However, this is not without risks. Platforms may lose the expertise of key members, or their own political neutrality could be jeopardised. The platform also risks losing credibility if the appointed individual is not able or willing to implement the proposed policy.

Strategic alignment with the policy cycle

A platform's strategy is directly tied to where a land governance issue stands within the policy cycle – from formulation to evaluation. Platforms typically engage with decision makers at each stage in the cycle and employ specific strategies to influence both policy and practice (see Figure 3). If the issue is not yet recognised or is not a government priority, the focus will be raising awareness to get the issue onto the policy agenda. If the policy is already under formulation or adoption, the platform's efforts are aimed at influencing the content of the proposed legislation and lobbying decision makers. Once a law has been passed, the strategy shifts to ensuring effective implementation on the ground and monitoring its results. An additional component of a platform's strategy concerns a rights-based approach to the strengthening of civil society itself, which occurs throughout the whole policy cycle.

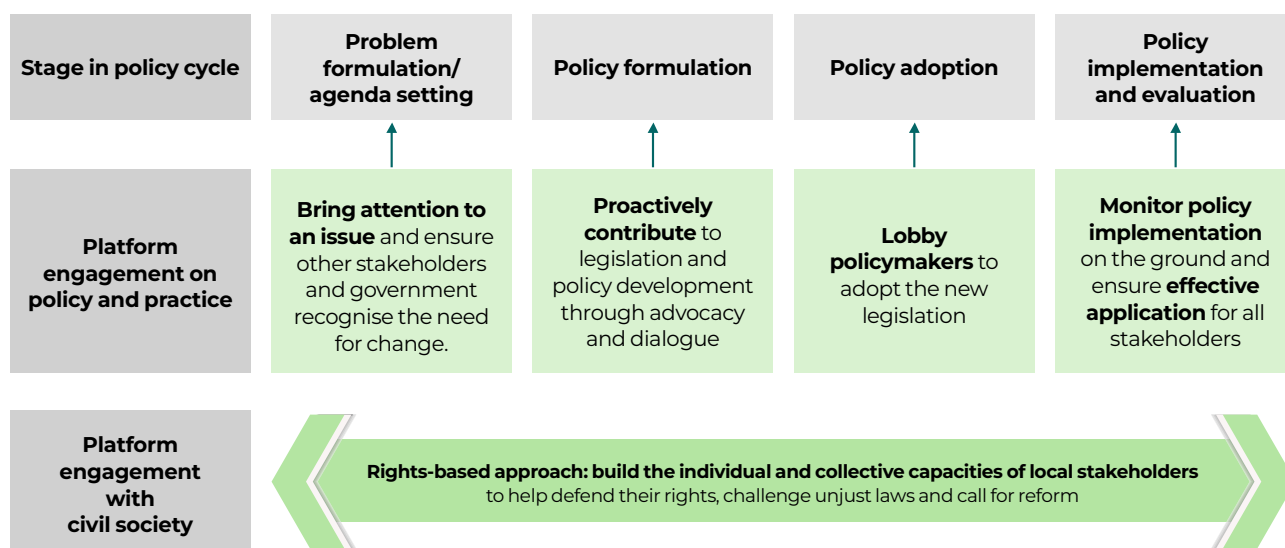### Engagement beyond the policy framework: policy implementation

In most cases studied, platforms prioritised changing the legal policy framework (refer to Table 2 in Section 3 for the respective legislation). However, changing a law is only one part of ensuring effective land tenure security for smallholders. Without proper implementation mechanisms, budgets and public awareness, a law risks remaining largely theoretical or being exploited by different interest groups who find weaknesses and loopholes. The case studies show how platforms adapted strategies and action plans to influence policy implementation.

The Rural Land Law in Burkina Faso, passed in 2009, includes progressive measures to protect customary tenure. However, the local councils responsible for land management have not been fully established, or exist in only a few locations. The law is therefore not being respected. This was one of the major protestations of PMAF-BF until 2021, when priority shifted to the Real Estate Law.

Another example is the Customary Land Act in Malawi adopted in 2016 – and passed only after a protracted process and campaigning from NLC Malawi. The Act requires that customary estates be mapped and recognised by the district offices under the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, and management transferred to democratically elected customary land committees and tribunals. This has happened in only 9 out of 300 districts to date, with the government citing a lack of funds. The coalition therefore shifted its efforts towards the co-implementation of the law, working with the ministry to plan for decentralisation and devolution down to the district level and Traditional Land Management Committees. NLC Malawi is providing training to CSOs and raising awareness among local stakeholders (especially youth and women) through its district-level CSO networks. It also monitors implementation of the law at the district level and reports back to the ministry.

In Lao PDR, after the adoption of Instruction 0457, the RAI Alliance supported pilots to monitor its application at the provincial level. It was found that implementation was inconsistent, partly because the relevant offices lacked the necessary training and resources to monitor investments.

Figure 3. Platform engagement at each stage in the policy cycle

Stage in policy cycle	Problem formulation/ agenda setting	Policy formulation	Policy adoption	Policy implementation and evaluation
Platform engagement on policy and practice	**Bring attention to an issue** and ensure other stakeholders and government recognise the need for change.	**Proactively contribute** to legislation and policy development through advocacy and dialogue	**Lobby policymakers** to adopt the new legislation	**Monitor policy implementation** on the ground and ensure **effective application** for all stakeholders

Platform engagement with civil society	**Rights-based approach: build the individual and collective capacities of local stakeholders** to help defend their rights, challenge unjust laws and call for reform

Another issue was that the Department of Agriculture was not involved in the initial drafting of the Instruction, which was undertaken by a separate ministry. As a result, the department and provincial agricultural offices did not receive clear instructions from their own ministry. The Instruction also needed to be adapted to different type of crops. Both ministries agreed to conduct a joint review of the Instruction to have a more realistic and applicable instrument.

Rights-based approaches and support for civil society and local communities

Supporting civil society and local communities to defend their rights has been a priority for many platforms. In Burkina Faso, the initiative of training paralegal agents in one commune is now being extended to other communes. Since 2024, PMAF-BF has also been coordinating a programme funded by World Bank to train the newly formed Village Land Committees in 51 communes. In Lao PDR, CSOs organised training sessions for communities on RAI and the concept of free, prior, and informed consent, which was a relatively new approach to negotiating with the private sector. In Malawi, the platform helped mediate between the government and internally displaced communities on new land that they had been promised but had not obtained.

A more radical approach involves strengthening civil society's capacity to challenge current policies, either by organising people affected to claim their rights in court or by 'naming and shaming' companies that have deprived local populations of their rights. This can even extend to seeking remedy through international justice mechanisms.

Platforms generally avoid such strategies, as this can jeopardise their relationship with the government and put them at risk – especially in authoritarian states – and results are not guaranteed. Some international NGOs have used this approach in politically hostile environments with varied results. When focusing on international companies and funding, these strategies have been effective in putting pressure on international finance institutions such as the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank. It can also have a significant impact if conducted within the context of an international initiative such as REDD+ or the European Union Deforestation Regulation, where access to funds or markets is contingent on respecting certain standards. In Cambodia, the alliance decided to join the discussion on the REDD+ mechanism to reintroduce the issue of customary tenure recognition after the disappointing outcome with the Environmental and Natural Resources Code.

With external observers and technical and financial partners often focusing on legal reform as the single or primary measure of success, it is important to recognise the value of the complementary forms of engagement. Engaging in policy implementation is essential to transform laws into practice on the ground. Supporting capacity-building at all levels, especially at the community level, could be more effective in some cases, even if the impact is more difficult to measure.

Aligning with the international agenda

Whenever possible, it is desirable to align strategies and action plans with the international agenda, mobilising regional platforms and international guidelines. International guidelines provide legitimacy in the policy debate, and governments are generally more receptive of proposed reforms if they help countries meet international or subregional-level commitments.

The VGGT serve as a reference in all the land programmes and platforms studied. However, a government's commitment to the VGGT depends on many factors. As the guidelines are voluntary, there is no binding obligation for governments to adopt recommendations. The lack of opportunities to discuss or monitor progress at the regional level can reduce interest in the topic. The same applies to the strategic framework and guidelines on land tenure policies developed in Africa by the African Union, the African Development Bank, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

If a government is already involved in multi-country initiatives, it can be advantageous to propose national-level activities that feed into this international dialogue. Dialogue on the ASEAN RAI Guidelines encouraged the Lao government to develop its own strategy and to engage in the RAI Alliance. Both national and regional-level engagement reinforced each other.

Alignment with international initiatives such as REDD+ or the European Union Deforestation Regulation gives governments a strong economic incentive to participate. In Cambodia, alliance engagement with these initiatives was due to the lack of other national-level options.

A representative from the Lao Farmers Network shares his perspective at the 2023 Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Responsible Agricultural Investment in Lao PDR ©MRLG

The role of donor partners

Although not always explicit, platforms are often linked to international technical and financial partners who are interested in land governance and natural resource management. This is especially the case when these partners are operating projects with the relevant ministries. Examples include the World Bank and the European Union in Malawi, FAO in Burkina Faso, AFD in Guinea and GIZ and World Bank in Lao PDR.

While these partners may not always formally join the platforms – unless the platforms are co-chaired by ministries – they maintain active communication channels and often provide financial support. When their projects align with a platform's objectives, a strong synergy can emerge. For instance, the Technical Assistant from AFD in Guinea played a crucial role by providing a unique channel of influence between the government and the platform.

In some cases, a platform may not even exist or gain government acceptance without donor support and funding. This is likely the case for the RAI Alliance on Lao PDR. In Cambodia, diplomatic tensions between donors and the government following the 2018 elections limited the ability of MRLG and the alliance to engage effectively with government.

In cases where a platform and donors do not align, both of their efforts could be undermined.

This lack of coordination can result from different visions or priorities.[16] A case in point was the World Bank proposal to revise the Rural Land Law in Burkina Faso, which was rejected by PMAF-BF in 2019. The platform drafted a memorandum and wrote to the President to challenge the proposed revision. At that time, PMAF-BF had sufficient influence – presumably also with the support of other ministries and critical donors – to compel the World Bank to change its approach. The Bank then launched a new programme focused on the effective implementation of the existing Rural Land Law at the communal level, targeting 71 communes out of 351 until 2027.

Different interpretations of the VGGT among donors have led to different approaches. Donors often hold differing views on the formalisation process and the priority of investments over customary rights. Communication between donors and platforms can also be limited. Both could be far more effective with better, more regular communication and this often requires building personal relationships and trust.

Flexibility and adaptation

An important factor in a platform's success is the ability to be flexible and adapt quickly to new windows of opportunity, which often requires a revision of strategies and action plans. In Burkina Faso, although the initial focus for PMAF-BF in 2019 was implementation of the 2009 Rural Land Law, the platform quickly shifted its strategy in

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16   In these cases, the divergences are often not explicit. Formal consultations can be conducted but without real space for discussion about the different visions of policy reform promoted. Conclusions are often rigged towards the models promoted by the donors.

2021 when the government decided to address the 2008 Real Estate Law. The proposed law was later abandoned but another opportunity emerged in early 2022 when the new transitional government prioritised the revision as a result of advocacy by PMAF-BF. Similarly, the Customary Tenure Alliance in Cambodia had to revise its strategy several times. After disappointing results of efforts to influence the development of the Environmental and Natural Resources Code, the alliance redirected its efforts towards sub-decrees and REDD+ negotiations.

Responding to windows of opportunity often requires not only adjusting the strategy but also mobilising additional funds quickly, which can be challenging depending on the funding source. Successful platforms are often able to secure funds from various donors, providing them with additional flexibility when needed.

Adaptation, on the other hand, is a more subtle process of gradually adjusting a strategy based on initial results – both successes and failures – and in response to other stakeholders, particularly the government. In Lao PDR, the initial objective to propose measures to regulate and control large-scale land acquisitions through agro-business concessions appeared politically sensitive, and was seen as an attack on government policy. The alliance therefore shifted its focus and messaging to the more positive concept of promoting RAI, a strategy also supported by some private sector partners. The next step was to choose a sector where this could be applied. An opportunity arose when researchers from the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute raised concerns in the local press about the negative environmental impacts of commercial banana plantations in northern Lao PDR. This led the government to ask the Department of Investment to regulate the sector, opening a crucial avenue for cooperation with alliance members.

Donor flexibility is also essential to be able to respond quickly to opportunities or emergencies. For example, after the Government of Madagascar suddenly proposed a new land law without any consultation, CTFD was able to provide emergency financial support to Malagasy farmers' organisations to organise a national consultation workshop within a few days. The proposed new law went against all the progress in land reform adopted 15 years prior. As a result of this mobilisation and other objections, the law was ultimately abandoned.

4.4 Platform legitimacy and credibility

A platform's capacity to influence policies largely depends on its legitimacy in the national context. This legitimacy can come in many forms, including representation, credibility gained from technical or scientific recognition, and access to funding.

Key sources of legitimacy

A platform's legitimacy often stems from one of two sources. The first is its convening power – its ability to bring together a wide range of voices and be inclusive. The second is its capacity to provide technical and legal expertise. This type of legitimacy relies on recognised expertise and does not require broad inclusivity. These two types of legitimacy can be competing. If governments are reluctant to engage with civil society, they will favour more restricted technical alliances over broad platforms, as was the case in Lao PDR.

In other cases, a platform's legitimacy and political influence come from a combination of both inclusivity and technical expertise. Such platforms bring together influential pro-reform organisations (such as national farmers' organisations), respected experts and academics, donors and technical assistance.

Representation and inclusiveness

For CSOs, legitimacy is often tied to inclusiveness. The key question is whether the platform represents and includes all relevant organisations, voices and stakeholders in land governance. Some platforms, for example, have made a conscious effort to integrate women's and youth organisations, as seen in Malawi and Burkina Faso. In other cases, they have worked to create subregional platforms and include various local and subregional actors, as in Guinea and Malawi. This approach helps platforms stay connected to local realities, inform regional actors about national debates, and account for diverse socio-economic, cultural, and agro-ecological conditions.

A platform that brings together many stakeholders, especially those with political influence, is more appealing to the government. The challenge then becomes whether the platform can align the messages of these diverse partners. Governments often receive conflicting or contradictory messages from different NGOs. Presenting a single, unified message through a platform – and having that message echoed by its members – is a welcome relief for policymakers, especially if they are genuinely open to reform.

Credibility and trustworthiness

From a government's perspective, a crucial issue is the platform's credibility and trustworthiness as a partner for dialogue. To engage in meaningful dialogue, the platform has to demonstrate a strong understanding of land governance policies and legal frameworks, and must be able to use the same terminology as experts and governments specialists. This is likely why most national secretaries are themselves land experts.

A platform can also build this credibility by including or collaborating with respected experts and academics. These individuals can bring high-quality empirical data to the discussion and are often already recognised by the government, as was the case with the AFD Technical Assistant in Guinea.

Trustworthiness comes from the technical credibility and quality of information a platform provides, as well as its ability to present that information in a clear and professional manner. A major advantage for platforms is their capacity to provide precise, on-the-ground information from local contexts. This benefit goes both ways. A platform's ability to present the legal framework and proposals for reform at the local level can also be a big plus for governments, which often lack resources to organise such consultations and information sessions in the community. A platform's reputation for trustworthiness is built over time by consistently basing its arguments on observed and verified facts, rather than on opinions or biased information.

Political neutrality of platforms

Maintaining political neutrality is essential for effective policy engagement. If a platform is perceived as favouring either the ruling party or opposition groups, key stakeholders, including the government, will be very reluctant to engage.

A good example of this is when the President of Malawi suspended all national consultations on land during the election period. While this decision frustrated NLC Malawi at the time, it was likely a wise move to avoid interference with electoral politics. Its political independence was a key factor in NLC's success in inviting traditional leaders for dialogue on the customary law and being able to negotiate an acceptable compromise.

Decentralisation: a strong asset

The choice made by several platforms to decentralise has been a highly effective strategy for encouraging the flow of information and ideas between national and local levels. By decentralising, as seen in Guinea and Malawi, platforms significantly increase their legitimacy with both local communities and the government. This top-down/bottom-up approach ensures that local concerns are heard at the national level, while national policies are better understood and accepted on the ground.

Duration of platforms

As a platform's credibility is built over time, the duration of platforms is certainly a key factor in their credibility. In the early years of operation, platforms may face mistrust. However, it is their long-term track record that allows stakeholders to assess their truthfulness, neutrality and concrete contributions to reform. It can take years for a major opportunity to arise that tests a platform's coherence and measures its contribution.

Meeting of Multi-stakeholder platform on land issues in 2021 in Guinea ©ACORD Guinea

4.5 How do multistakeholder platforms operate?

Whether the focus is on law making, law implementation or capacity-building, platforms operate through various mechanisms. In the cases studied, platforms worked through dialogue with government, evidence-based advocacy, capacity-building and mediation (see Figure 4).

Organising dialogue with government

A central function of platforms is to dialogue with governments, and the nature of government engagement within platforms varies significantly. While direct government participation can be a key to success, a variety of other strategies are often employed to ensure government input and buy-in, especially in politically sensitive environments. Government representatives can be involved in a platform's work, from direct membership to more informal or targeted forms of collaboration.

Active roles in the platform

Government representatives can be members of the platform itself, allowing them to be involved in all platform initiatives and participate in regular meetings. In Burkina Faso, the vice chair of the platform is a representative of the Ministry of Agriculture. In this case, the platform can be considered an ally of the ministry. In Guinea, the chair of the platform alternates between the Ministry of Urban Planning, Housing and Regional Development and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

National consultations

National consultations organised by platforms may involve both close consultation with and participation of government representatives. The National Land Forum in Guinea in 2021 was a significant event after such a long delay, largely made possible through the participation of the actions of PFMA-G.[17]

Local-level consultations

Platforms can organise local-level or decentralised consultations to inform national discussions. In 2019, PMAF-BF organised five communal-level consultations to gather feedback and recommendations from local farmers and authorities in the implementation of the Rural Land Law 034. The summary of these contributions was then communicated to the government as part of the review of the law in 2020. In Guinea, the platform supported the creation and operationalisation of MSPs in each of the country's four natural regions.

Figure 4. Key mechanisms in the operationalisation of multistakeholder platforms

Dialogue with government	Evidence-based advocacy
• Government participation in the platform • National consultations • Local-level consultations • Co-piloting new policies • Private discussions	• Analysing legal frameworks • Monitoring policy • Conducting participatory research • Collaborating with academia and technical specialists • Implementing pilots • Documenting innovative practices

Capacity-building	Mediation
For platform members: • legislative frameworks • power dynamics in land issues • regional exchanges For local communities and organisations: • understanding and claiming rights • conflict resolution For other key stakeholders: • training paralegals, judges and journalists	• Facilitating dialogue between competing interests • Breaking down bureaucratic silos • Engaging with traditional leaders • Finding acceptable compromises with interest groups • Resolving local-level conflicts

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17 The platform's active participation in technical preparation meetings ensured that rural land governance was fully considered in the agenda. It also played also an important role in the consultation process which resulted in the Agricultural Land Policy paper.

A representative from the Lao Farmers Network shares producers' perspectives at the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on RAI in 2023, Lao PDR ©MRLG

These serve as spaces to consult local actors on challenges they face, inform them about ongoing legislative work, and obtain their feedback. These decentralised platforms play an important role in the preparation and follow-up of national land consultations and lend legitimacy to the national platform in Guinea.

Co-piloting new policies

In some cases, dialogue happens more at the operational level. Some governments are cautious about national consultations and are reluctant to give too much influence to civil society. In these situations, a pragmatic approach can be to involve governments in designing their own initiatives with limited direct CSO participation, especially around piloting new policies. MRLG used this approach with the RAI Alliance in Lao PDR, where technical departments were directly involved in alliance activities on the formulation of Instruction 0457.

Private discussions

Dialogue is often complemented by private discussions between the platform secretariat and key government decision makers. This allows for more open discussion on 'red lines' and constraints on the government's side, which helps to tailor messages for public dialogue. Building trust with these civil servants is essential, as it ensures that they feel confident that their words will not be repeated publicly or used for political

manoeuvres, and that the information provided by the platform is reliable. In Cambodia, for example, representatives from the Ministry of Environment advised on certain occasions not to continue with an advocacy strategy.

The role of evidence in policy dialogue and advocacy

Platforms use various types of research to produce evidence that informs policy dialogue, helping them to engage more effectively with governments and other stakeholders. These may range from legal analysis to participatory studies to gather first-hand accounts from affected communities.

Analysing legal frameworks

Platforms often hire consultants to analyse legal frameworks, identify loopholes and assess their consequences. This research helps platforms stand on an equal footing with the government during policy discussions by lending credibility to their proposals.

These studies also serve as an internal capacity-building tool, helping platform members become familiar with legal language and concepts. Consultants play a role in explaining this complex information to various stakeholders during consultations at both the national and local level.

Monitoring policy implementation

When a new law or reform is passed, platforms can play an important role in monitoring its implementation in partnership with the relevant ministry. They can do this with their own members or encourage civil society monitoring where there is sufficient political space for citizen participation. In the case of Malawi, a mechanism was put in place to monitor the implementation of Traditional Land Management Areas, and NLC members were involved in a pilot programme funded by the European Union. In Burkina Faso, PMAF-BF was part of a five-year periodic review of the Rural Land Law in 2020, which evaluated progress on the ground and proposed minor revisions and mechanisms to speed up implementation.

In the case of Lao PDR, the RAI Alliance was asked specifically to monitor the application of the new Instruction on investments in plantations. Recommendations based on observed challenges in implementation were fed back during a workshop with the technical departments implementing the Instruction together with the private sector. An independent researcher with no direct government influence also collected on-the-ground data.

A risk for platforms and CSOs that receive substantial funding to participate in policy monitoring is that they may lose their objectivity if too heavily influenced by the donor's agenda. Conflicts of interest should be monitored, and ad hoc mechanisms established for platforms to maintain independence.

Conducting participatory research

Platforms often conduct participatory studies, usually at the local level, to understand how effectively laws are being implemented and the effect on communities. Involving local authorities in these studies is highly beneficial and such evidence serves a dual purpose. It exposes central government to problems they may be unaware of, or at least shows them the true scale of the issues. Even if the government is already aware, these studies make the problems more concrete and undeniable, forcing the authorities to take them seriously. Reports become even more powerful when they include personal testimonies from individuals affected. Studies in Guinea provided a snapshot of various difficulties and implications of applying the law at the local level.

Participatory research has proven to be a key element in establishing trust and transparency. In both Malawi and Guinea, involving local stakeholders and authorities in field studies on land tenure gave the findings significant credibility with national authorities. This approach, as observed in Land for Life and MRLG initiatives, shows that involving local authorities and technical departments in the process of data collection and analysis is more influential than merely disseminating a final report. Authorities and technical departments are more likely to accept and implement recommendations when they have been involved from the start in the process leading to these recommendations.

Villagers attend a meeting for participatory resource use mapping with Wildlife Conservation Society team in Preah Vihear Province, Cambodia ©MRLG

Collaborating with academia and technical specialists

Partnering with academic researchers, recognised experts or government specialists is also an important factor in building credibility with governments. National researchers have considerable influence in South-East Asia, particularly in Lao PDR or Viet Nam. In the case of Lao PDR, the study conducted by academics from the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute had a significant impact on the level of government awareness around the problems linked to banana plantations on land leased from local communities. Traditional academic research can be instrumental in raising concerns on land governance issues at both the national and international level. MRLG supported academic research, especially at the regional level, which provided a space for more critical analyses. The most effective approach is when academic researchers or well-known national experts agree to contribute to participatory research on topics defined by the platform, with civil society supporting data collection.

An important consideration in conducting such research is how any critical analysis is framed. Research findings that are overly critical of governments can draw the attention of the international community and donors, but may also provoke negative reactions from government. For this reason, platforms typically do not engage in this level of commentary. While some platform members might use their networks to share sensitive data at the international level, this is not an approach supported by platforms themselves.

Implementing pilots

The implementation of pilots is another way platforms can contribute to the policy debate. In Cambodia, the pilot implemented by an alliance member within a protected area first involved participatory research with local communities to identify and map their customary claims and uses in the protected area. This mapping informed the development of a zoning and management plan taking these customary rights into consideration. The pilot was effective in demonstrating that this was feasible and could be applied to other areas, and was an important argument in favour of the recognition of customary tenure rights in protected area legislation. This was relevant for both the ministry and other conservation organisations that had initially been sceptical.

In Lao PDR, alliance support to the monitoring of Instruction 0457 in selected provinces was crucial to understand the limitations and conditions for full implementation. It also helped improve coordination between the two key ministries. The pilot further highlighted the need to decentralise resources and capacities to provincial and district-level offices.

Documenting innovative practices

Platforms also document and analyse innovative local arrangements that can serve as models for new laws or regulations. For instance, a forestry company in southern Lao PDR negotiated agreements with communities to use part of their land for forest plantations in exchange for a share of the benefits, applying the principle of free, prior and informed consent. Alliance members visited the site, documented the results and shared them nationally. This provided a strong argument for including consent and benefit-sharing principles in the RAI policy being developed at the time.

Capacity-building

Capacity-building is an essential function of platforms, benefiting both their members and external stakeholders. By fostering collaboration and the exchange of knowledge, platforms empower a wide range of actors to engage more effectively in land governance.

For platform members

By their very nature, platforms build the capacity of members through sharing information and perspectives on land governance to develop a common vision and strategy. The process of establishing a platform is often supported by external experts to conduct studies on legislation and familiarise CSOs with the legal frameworks. In the case of MRLG, experts share political economy and stakeholders analyses, which deepens members' understanding of the power dynamics and interests related to land governance. Regional exchanges, such as transnational field visits or regional forums, also contribute to this learning. Some platforms organise specific training on advocacy skills or on land policy trajectories, using case studies from different countries.

For local communities and organisations

Platforms also play an important role in strengthening the capacity of local communities and organisations regarding legislation and their rights. Local-level consultations help to increase awareness and understanding of both existing and proposed laws. This enables communities to use existing laws to defend their rights and resolve conflicts, and to participate in implementing new

Regional consultation workshop on the Guinea national land policy ©ACORD Guinea

laws at the local level. The creation of decentralised platforms or forums at the regional level has been an important strategy to develop local capacity on a permanent basis, as seen in Guinea, Malawi and Burkina Faso.

For other stakeholders

In Burkina Faso, PMAF-BF has supported the training of paralegals at the local level to engage in conflict resolution and to help establish and improve the functioning of the locally elected Village Land Committees. In Guinea, training has also been organised for judges and journalists, among others.

Mediation role of platforms

Platforms serve a critical function as a mediator between various stakeholders and the government. While their main role is to bridge the gap between people-based organisations and government, they also work to integrate other stakeholders, especially academia, the private sector and international organisations such as FAO or AFD.

Mediating between competing interests

By facilitating public discussions on policy reform, platforms create the space for participants to understand different perspectives and constraints. This helps to build a consensus on acceptable reforms. Even when full consensus is not reached, it is quite useful for the platform to understand the resistance to change and the arguments behind it, which is often not possible with closed-door lobbying.

Breaking down bureaucratic silos

Platforms are also instrumental in breaking down barriers between different government departments and ministries. These often operate in silos, pursuing their own agendas with limited coordination or information exchange due to power struggles or bureaucratic structures. In Guinea, the platform successfully brought together the two key ministries for productive discussions, despite their differing interests and views on land policy. In Lao PDR, the platform facilitated discussions between two government departments that were initially reluctant to cooperate. This ultimately helped them share information and harmonise their plans.

Navigating relationships with traditional leaders

In Africa, platforms have been particularly important in mediating with traditional leaders. These leaders play a crucial but often contradictory role in land management. They are both protectors of customary rights and, at times, abusers of their power, selling customary land to external interests. This explains why many initially resisted proposed reforms in both Burkina Faso and Malawi. Traditional leaders were concerned about losing their authority and misinformation was rife.

PMAF-BF was instrumental in reducing opposition from traditional leaders through sensitisation and public awareness campaigns. Many traditional leaders initially resisted reform of the Real Estate Law because it threatened a source of their wealth. Their resistance was compounded by lobbying from real estate agents and speculators, who falsely claimed that the State wanted to deprive them of their customary rights. PMAF organised a public radio campaign to explain the content of the proposed reform in rural areas, and this helped to change public perception and reduce opposition from customary leaders. In doing so, PMAF served as an ally of the new government to get the law passed.

NLC Malawi provided neutral spaces for dialogue and negotiating compromises on the proposed reform of the Customary Land Act, which proposed the establishment of local land management commissions to manage customary lands. Initially, the intention was for these commissions to be formed through local elections. This met with strong resistance from traditional leaders, who felt that the government was undermining their traditional authority and regulatory function over land. Traditional leaders wield significant political influence over voters and had the potential to derail the legislative process. However, the government was reluctant to engage in direct discussions with what they perceived as adversaries on this issue. Acting as a neutral facilitator, NLC organised an extraordinary meeting of traditional leaders across the country to discuss the matter. After

dispelling misconceptions and misinformation, a compromise was reached around the question of land management committees. The traditional authority would statutorily take the role of chair. In return, they agreed on the principle of transparency and inclusivity in decision-making processes. Recognising that some traditional leaders had a history of misusing their function, it was agreed that the law would be revised after a period of time in case any significant malpractice by traditional leaders was observed. Because of the perceived political neutrality of the platform and its trustworthy reputation, NLC Malawi was able to act as an honest broker between government and an important group of stakeholders resisting reform. This mediation role ultimately contributed to the law getting passed.

Resolving local-level conflicts

In some cases, platforms also play an active role in mediating between local populations and investors. This was the case in Malawi, where communities around Lake Malawi were unhappy with investors who were blocking access to the lake. NLC Malawi organised meetings that allowed businesses to raise their concerns about waste and rubbish left by the local population. The discussion also provided the opportunity to remind investors that the law required them to provide free access to locals at least every 20 metres. This mediation led to a better mutual understanding and more acceptable arrangements for both parties.

Drone footage of housing development illustrating the pressure of urbanisation on agricultural land in Burkina Faso © Burkina Info

5. PLATFORM CONTRIBUTIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON LAND GOVERNANCE

Platforms play an instrumental role in driving change by influencing both policy and practice. They help facilitate new legislation and help ensure that laws are effectively implemented. These platforms even have the power to shift public discourse around critical issues. The five cases studies have provided insights into the extent of platform contributions to land reform and governance, and also present questions on attribution and the implications for programme design and funding.

Because of the dependence on the political context and policy development agenda, the direct impacts on policies observed within each programme did not occur in all respective countries at the same time. For MRLG, laws were developed to integrate customary tenure in Lao PDR and Viet Nam, but in Myanmar progress was halted by the military coup. The ILC programme saw new land laws adopted in Malawi, but the process in Guinea is ongoing yet promising.[18]

5.1 Changes in policy

The case studies have shown significant policy achievements, such as the passing of 10 new land acts in Malawi, Instruction 0457 on agricultural investment in Lao PDR, and a new real estate law in Burkina Faso. In Guinea, the platform contributed to the passing of a progressive agricultural land policy and was active in bringing together two competing ministries to adopt a joint declaration – although translation into the National Land Policy is still needed.

5.2 Changes in implementation

Platforms have been instrumental in bridging the gap between progressive laws and their actual implementation, which often lags behind. The training of paralegals in Burkina Faso, training and follow-up with local authorities and government officers in Malawi, and support to government pilots of the implementation of Instruction 0457 in Lao PDR all aim to contribute to more effective implementation of legislation. The platforms also played a role in advocating for gender equity with local actors, particularly local authorities and traditional leaders.

Rubber plantation from a land concession allocated by the government over indigenous forest land in Mondulkiri Province, Cambodia ©Brian Moore

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18 In other cases, platform mobilisation contributed to the government abandoning laws or reforms which were regressive for farmers' rights (such as in Burkina Faso and Madagascar)..

5.3 Changes in capacity

Platforms have significantly strengthened their members' capacity through a shared understanding of policy frameworks and problems to be addressed. This has been especially evident in Guinea and Malawi, where local consultations and the establishment of subregional platforms have greatly enhanced the capacity of local actors.

These platforms also play a crucial role in managing conflict and resistance. The support to paralegals in Burkina Faso has helped local communities to resolve their disputes and register their land rights. Similarly, local groups supported by NLC Malawi have successfully settled conflicts between investors and local communities.[19]

5.4 Changes in the public narrative

Platforms play a crucial role in changing the public narrative, including the views of government and national elites. In Lao PDR the platform helped shift the official narrative from promoting large-scale investments in agriculture and plantations (turning land into capital) to a discourse about responsible agricultural investment. This new narrative includes the rights of affected communities to consent or refuse any proposed investment.

5.5 Measuring the impact of platforms on land governance

Observable changes in policies and laws often happen as a result of many years of discussion and engagement, exceeding the typical project timeline of three to four years. Even when a policy change does occur, it is hard to determine exactly how much a specific platform contributed to that success.[20]

It is relatively easy to observe the results of programmes and projects on policies, but it is more challenging to assess and measure their true impact. The full impact of a policy is not known until it is applied on the ground and it can take years to see how tenure governance affects local farmers and other land users. Measuring these changes would require large-scale surveys with significant numbers of participants.

However, a greater challenge is determining attribution. How much did a specific programme or campaign contribute to a change in legislation? Given the complex nature of lawmaking and the number of people involved in the process, it is always debatable whether a particular activity or lobbying effort was a determinant in policy change.

Representatives from the PMAF, FENOP and FIAN at a workshop on the real estate promotion law in 2022 in Burkina Faso ©PMAF

19 A similar dynamic was observed in Senegal, where a CSO platform has been instrumental in assisting communities dispossessed by public or private investments.

20 Some programmes have developed specific tools to identify their contributions to policy processes/reforms. For instance, ILC uses the Contribution Analysis method and WHH uses the Outcome Harvesting method..

Measuring the impact of a platform's work on the ground is also challenging. While a platform can point to immediate results – such as helping a community secure its land rights – it is much harder to measure the long-term effects of capacity-building programmes aimed at farmers and communities, even though they have the potential to significantly improve tenure security on the ground.

A platform's core work of building internal capacity and raising public awareness is equally difficult to measure. Another impact that is even harder to measure is the changing of the public narrative. In contexts where a government is resistant to criticism of its liberalisation agenda, the ability to introduce and discuss a new concept such as responsible agricultural investment at public events is a significant step. When high-level officials begin using this language, it creates an opening for broader advocacy around shared benefits and allows for a critical examination of irresponsible practices at all levels of society. While some may see this as a mere change in rhetoric, words matter and they can have a real, transformative effect in strictly controlled states.

5.6 Consequences for support programmes and donors

For many donors, the difficulty in measuring impact can be problematic. Donors often rely on logical frameworks and verifiable indicators to report on results and ensure accountability. As a result, some donors require more evidence of impact and sometimes require platforms to narrow their objectives to a specific policy change.

The perceived lack of effectiveness is sometimes wrongly attributed to platforms being unfocused. However, the absence of short-term, measurable impact is a natural part of influencing governance and policy. Forcing a platform to focus on a single objective can be counterproductive, as political processes are often unpredictable.

A more effective approach would be for donors to consider platforms from a processes angle, and allow platforms to pursue several strategies at once. This includes working with both governments and CSOs, focusing on both policy formulation and implementation, and simultaneously aligning with government priorities while empowering local stakeholders to voice their concerns and defend their rights.

For multistakeholder collaborations to succeed, it is crucial that donors and local actors can jointly design their agenda, and remain flexible in its pursuit. This collaborative and flexible approach often conflicts with the rigid structure of typical project proposals and donor expectations.

5.7 Longevity and readiness to seize opportunities

In all the cases studied, the duration of a platform is an important factor in its effectiveness. Most have been active in some capacity for over a decade. The longest-running, in Malawi, has existed for 25 years if including its predecessor LandNet Malawi. The newest platforms in Burkina Faso and Guinea have been active for six years.

The importance of duration is closely linked to two factors: building legitimacy and adapting to the slow, non-linear nature of policy reform. A platform's legitimacy is built over time – the more consistent the engagement with a variety of stakeholders and government, the greater the recognition. Policy reform is a slow process, often spanning multiple decades with periods of stagnation followed by periods of acceleration. Platforms must therefore be built with a long-term perspective to align with the nature of policy reform and must have the capacity to react to windows of opportunity that might open unexpectedly after long periods of little or no change.

A representative from the Multi-stakeholder platform on land issues (PFMA) reading the final declaration from the Land Forum in Guinea ©Amel Benkahla

6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LAND GOVERNANCE PROGRAMMING

Improving land governance is a key issue for international cooperation. The link between land tenure insecurity and issues such as poverty, armed conflicts (including civil wars), environmental degradation and climate change is becoming increasingly clear. Land should be viewed not as a commodity but as a common good whose proper use and preservation concerns all citizens at both the national and global level.

Since the adoption of the VGGT, the international community has invested in MSPs for improved land governance in over 40 countries. This paper has explored some of the learning from these efforts by drawing on the five case studies from four international programmes working on land policy and advocacy through MSPs.

Lessons suggest that programmes that support MSPs can maximise their impact by adopting strategic and flexible approaches that acknowledge the complexities of land governance reform. Some key overarching principles for donors and partners are presented for application to future programming across multiple contexts.

Invest in platforms over the long term

The effectiveness of multistakeholder platforms depends heavily on their longevity, as trust and legitimacy are built over time. This long-term presence also allows platforms to capitalise on unexpected opportunities and navigate the slow, unpredictable pace of policy reform. Recognising that improving land governance is a long-term process, platforms must be supported over the long term to be effective. One potential approach could be for donors to consider coordinating efforts through multi-donor or pooled funds to ensure the sustainability of platforms.

Regional consultations on land management conducted using the Territories tool ©ACORD Guinea

Support platform models appropriate for the national political context

There is no single model for a successful land governance platform in any given context. The best approach very much depends on the country's political landscape and the government's willingness to engage in reform.

In countries with open political environments, platforms tend to be inclusive, bringing together a wide range of stakeholders, including the government. Their legitimacy comes from representing many different voices. In more restrictive environments, platforms are often more focused and function as technical coalitions, working with specific government sectors. Their legitimacy is based on their credibility and technical expertise.

Regardless of their form, all platforms must maintain political neutrality to be trusted. However, this does not prevent them from actively advocating for the rights of marginalised groups such as smallholder farmers, Indigenous peoples and women.

Platform configuration should recognise that both inclusive multistakeholder models and focused, technical coalitions are valid and necessary approaches depending on the local situation. The key is to support platforms that can build and maintain legitimacy, whether through broad inclusivity or technical credibility.

Prioritise flexibility in strategy design

Adaptation and flexibility are key for success. Platforms must be able to respond quickly to unexpected events that negatively affect communities. Similarly, they must be in a position to seize new opportunities, such as a when a new law is suddenly being scheduled for adoption after long periods of inactivity, or a change in government that creates a push for land reform. This requires a flexible strategy design that can adapt to changing political environments. Platforms should be encouraged to pursue multiple strategies simultaneously rather than being forced to concentrate all their efforts on a single, easily measurable objective. They should not put all their eggs in one basket and combine policy influence, implementation, capacity-building and rights-based approaches with various levels of intensity, depending on the prevailing context.

Appreciate the value of processes rather than direct results

Multistakeholder platforms can achieve a wide range of results, including changes in laws, stronger policy implementation and enhanced capacity among their members and local communities. They also play a crucial role in shifting public discourse and creating space for dialogue. However, these process changes are more difficult to measure and are generally not captured in typical results frameworks.

Donors and organisations should adopt a more flexible approach to evaluating platforms. Instead of solely relying on short-term, quantifiable metrics like new laws passed, they should recognise and value the broader, long-term impacts, such as strengthening local capacity and shifting the public narrative.

Strengthen the link between platform policy processes and implementation

Much emphasis is placed by platforms and donors on improving the legal framework. While adopting a new law or policy is an important step, it does not guarantee greater land tenure security for smallholder farmers. In many cases, new laws are not effectively implemented due to a lack of funding, poor implementation mechanisms, or limited support for citizens to defend their rights. This creates the potential for special interest groups to exploit weaknesses or loopholes in the law. A fundamental function of platforms is therefore to support the practical implementation of laws. However, platforms cannot do this alone and substantial investment is required to scale up policy implementation.

When a positive legal change is made, donors should be ready to channel significant resources to encourage governments to focus on effective implementation of the legislation, and to make sure the new policies translate into tangible benefits for local communities. Donors must commit to providing support for the implementation phase. This includes not only helping to roll out the new policies but also ensuring they can be adapted to institutional and socio-economic conditions and the realities on the ground. Platforms can assist by monitoring the results on the ground, participating in awareness campaigns and cooperating in pilots.

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Annex 1: Benchmark of programmes working on land policy and advocacy through multistakeholder platforms[21]

Initiatives that foster collaboration between different stakeholders to improve land governance, promote local communities' land rights and share knowledge and best practices.

Projects / programme	Donor	Implementing partners	Activities	Countries	Comments
MRLG – Mekong Regional Land Governance	SDC, Germany, Luxembourg	GRET, LEI	RAI and CT workstreams Knowledge production	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Viet Nam	
CTFD – Comité Technique Foncier et Développement (Land and development technical committee)	AFD/MEAE	GRET, country partners in West Africa and Madagascar	• Platform bringing together different French development and research institutions to create and share knowledge and foster dialogue • Specific topics: land policy with a specific focus on promoting the recognition of the variety of customary tenure practices; land markets and transactions, including large-scale land deals • Support for stakeholder networks in 7 West African countries (Benin, Niger, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Ivory Coast) and Madagascar to promote more inclusive land tenure reforms that respect the rights of family farms. • Library on publications and documents on francophone African and some Asian countries	Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Madagascar, Niger, Senegal	Would be interesting to review one experience with MSP in Africa (Senegal?)
International Land Coalition (ILC)	EU, IFAD, Netherlands, Sweden, SDC, GIZ, Irish Aid?	ILC	Global alliance CSOs and farmers' movements working on land issues Promote the land rights of local communities, particularly rural and Indigenous populations Multi-stakeholder platforms LANDex National Engagement Strategies	Cameroon, DR Congo, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda	MSP (NES) in Cambodia, but probably more interesting to look at experience in supporting MSP in other countries Already partnering with MRLG Etoa meki, CED, NES Cameroon?

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21 Benchmarking took place in early 2023 and was based on a review of existing documentation online and selected interviews with programme implementers when available.

Projects / programme	Donor	Implementing partners	Activities	Countries	Comments
LEGEND - Land-Enhancing Governance for Economic Development 2014-2022 GBP 38 million	DFID	KPMG, ODI, NRI/ Greenwich University, PLAAS, IDS, IIED	ODI is leading the LEGEND Knowledge Management Alliance (IIED, NRI and ODI) Project completed in June 2022: programme completion review https://odi.org/en/about/our-work/land-enhancing-governance-for-economic-development-legend/ https://landportal.org/library/resources/dfid-portfolio-overview/legend-portfolio-overview https://www.iied.org/g03941	Mozambique, Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Liberia Tanzania, Nepal, South Africa? Mechanism of funding projects mostly CSOs, (Namati, Canasta) + knowledge production + dialog with private sector.	Very large funding programme with multiple components. One of the four original objectives for LEGEND includes: "Supporting a network of global civil society partners to improve information & and knowledge through research, new diagnostic tools, better data and performance assessments, government capacity-building, clear and practical tools to help all stakeholders deliver better on land. Through LEGEND grant support, partners have established new platforms to share and deliver land knowledge and data amongst stakeholders, deepen understanding of tenure risk in land investments, and helped to protect land rights and strengthen land governance processes across the globe." However it seems some of the Multistakeholder Platform programme may have been conducted through Namati and Canasta- Not much information about their outcome The national-level programme did not function due to DFID national office reluctance.
Global Land Tool Network - GLTN	https://gltn.net/gltn-partners-3/#bilateral-multilateral		The Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) is a dynamic and multisectoral alliance of international partners committed to increasing access to land and tenure security for all, with a particular focus on the poor, women and youth. The Network's partners include international rural and urban civil society organisations, research and training institutions, bilateral and multilateral organisations, and international professional bodies.	DR Congo, Iraq, Kenya, Namibia, Nepal, Philippines, Somalia, Syria, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia	Seems to focus on tools rather than policies. Not applying an MSP approach at national level

Projects / programme	Donor	Implementing partners	Activities	Countries	Comments
Land Rights Now		Oxfam, Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI), ILC contact@ landrightsnow. org	International alliance campaign to secure Indigenous and community land rights		International campaign, not sure if this translates in national-level alliances; check further RRI which is supporting many CSOs
The People's Alliance for Right to Land(PARL)		PARL, Supported by Oxfam	https://www.parlsl.com		PARL is a Sri Lanka organisation only.
Women's land rights for inclusive development and growth in Africa	2018-2020 EUR 3 million Fin EU	OXFAM-Novib	Specific on women land rights Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Togo and Tunisia.		Focus specifically on land rights, but might have an interesting alliance approach
Land for Life (NB : They participate in "land collaborative" group established by ILC on similar MAP support programmes,with FAO also, already had a session with MRLG (Rob Cole) NB2 MAP programmes supported by BMZ through BENGO	BMZ 2017 -2026 EUR 5 million in 3 phases? EUR 3 million phase imple-mentation: 2019–2023	WHH Welthunger-hilfe Bonn, Germany	Supporting multi-actor partnerships working on land governance	Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Sierra Leone	This looks like MRLG approach at national level. To be explored further ≠ : they choose one lead CSO partner from the start and delegated the MAP formation and activity planning. • International staff based in Bonn does not play a facilitating role, rather support and advisory • 3 MAPs out of 4 already decides to institutionalise, and start to look for other funding • Use the dialogic model of CLI : Learn How the Dialogic Change Model Works › Collective Leadership Institute • But also ToC
Global Programme Responsible Land Policy (GPRLP)		GIZ	1. Improved institutional capacities and procedures for securing land use and land ownership rights of the rural population. 2. Support to CSOs in the participation of responsible land governance. Civil society groups like farmers' organisations and Indigenous people's organisations are strengthened and supported in active participation in policy dialogue. 3. Sensitisation of agricultural investors for international and national guidelines and legislation.	Benin, Ethiopia, Lao PDR, Madagascar, Paraguay, Peru and Uganda	Global programme. Include support to CSOs and policies, but apparently not through MSP.

Annex 2: Comparison of the four eligible land governance programmes with a multistakeholder platform approach[22]

	MRLG	CTFD Support to national land reform processes	ILC National Land Coalitions/ National Engagement Strategies	Land for Life
Donors	SDC, Germany, Luxembourg	AFD/ MEAE	EU, IFAD, Netherlands, Sweden, SDC, GIZ, Irish Aid	BMZ
Implementing Partners	GRET, LEI, support from GIZ	GRET, country partners	ILC	WHH Welthungerhilfe
Countries	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Viet Nam	Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Madagascar, Niger, Senegal	31 Countries with National land Coalitions : 14 in Africa, including Cameroon, DR Congo, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, 8 in Asia (inc. Philippines, Cambodia), 6 in Latin America, 3 in Europe	Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Sierra Leone
Duration	2014–2025 (3 phases)	2019–ongoing (2024)	2013–ongoing	2017–2026 (3 phases)
Historical context	The governments in the 4 countries pushed for large-scale concessions in the 2010s, resulting in many conflicts and troubles and civil society protests. The project was conceived as an effort to mitigate these policies and restore dialogue with governments. It came in a fairly tense context.	CTFD, which initially was mostly oriented on knowledge production, started to support reform actors and processes in-country in 2006 on an ad hoc basis. In 2019, regular national-level dialogue on land reform were initiated in Guinea, Burkina, Mali, Senegal and in 2022 it was decided to systematise this process of multistakeholder dialogue in 4 other countries, supporting groups or platforms of strategic actors.	Launching of MSPs at national level was recommended by the VGGT adopted in 2012. ILC therefore decided to encourage the creation of MSPs in 2013, as one of its 2 main mechanisms. At this time it had a lot of support from funding partners. The number of platforms increased over time, but donors support has dwindled in recent years, therefore bringing a need to focus the support on structural costs (facilitation/ governance and data collection), and encouraging platforms to obtain other co-funding for their activities.	Initiated by BMZ, wanted to pilot MSP (MAP) new programmes, WHH was interested, and got support from BENGO who is following the project as advisory/ control. WHH proposed to develop this programme with its historical partners in four countries : the Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD), Sierra Leone, the Forum for Social Studies (FSS), Ethiopia Rights & Rice Foundation, Liberia Confédération Paysanne du Faso (CPF), Burkina Faso. In Liberia and SL, the MSP builds on (or revitalised) existing FAO MSP.

22 This table was compiled in November 2024 based on interviews with programme partners.

	MRLG	CTFD Support to national land reform processes	ILC National Land Coalitions/ National Engagement Strategies	Land for Life
Budget	USD 37 million of which 42% to support Alliances – average 120,000/year for National alliances, 250,000 for regional ones	EUR 5.5 million total, including 3.6 million for operational activities in 5 years, including 1.6 million for the support to national country initiatives : 200,000/country for 4 years. The rest go to transversal knowledge productions, involving sometimes some of the same country actors.	EUR 100,000 to EUR 250,000/NLC-NES/year	EUR 6 million in total (1/3 of staff cost overall approx..)
Main objective	Improved land policies and practices are approved and implemented in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam, and supported through national and regional platforms. The project focuses on two thematic areas: the recognition of customary tenure (CT) and responsible agricultural investment (RAI) – previously 'large-scale land investment'.	Support strategic actors of land reform in countries to contribute to policy debates and support land reform process	People-centred land governance. « Our collective goal as a network is to realise land governance for and with people at the country level, responding to the needs and protecting the rights of those who live on and from the land. »	Improve food security through improved land governance – influence policies and behaviour - Based on VGGT, and on the guidelines for responsible agricultural. Investment
Type of platforms	In all, 10 Alliances are supported with two thematic focusses in each country and at regional level / CT alliances and RAI alliances.	Loose platforms, sometimes organised in working groups or networks. No formal membership	NES platforms are based on collaboration and evidence-based policy dialogue and work to bridge the gap between national and local government, international agencies, the private sector, and civil society, including grassroots organisations representing land users, traditional authorities and academia.	
Membership	These alliances are in principle multistakeholder, with a strong emphasis on government participation, in practice CSOs and academia are the main participants, but in half of the cases government is actively involved	CSOs, farmers' organisations, academia, experts and sometimes local and national authorities (for MSPs)	Membership of national land coalitions is not restricted to ILC members. On the contrary, most NLC actively engage with other relevant and interested stakeholders, after mapping them. 3 types of platforms overall : only CSO, CSO + other NS actors, CSOs + government	Quite variable, in some cases it includes government and CS networks (Liberia, and to some extent Sierra Leone), in Ethiopia it is mostly CSO at national level, plus multistakeholders at local level (community-investors platforms), In Burkina Faso it is mostly farmers' organisations and civil society based.

	MRLG	CTFD Support to national land reform processes	ILC National Land Coalitions/ National Engagement Strategies	Land for Life
Governance of platforms	Participation in the alliances has been open to all stakeholders invited in several national consultations. No formal by-laws have been established. They meet every 3 months and every year for a reflection workshop to assess/ correct strategy	When land platforms or networks already exist, they are invited to join and sometimes take the lead in activities. In other cases, the secretariat is ensured by "natural leaders", already partners of CTFD or new key partners identified during inception phase	Generally, NLC establish a steering committee and have annual General Assembly. They also have by-laws formalising governance structure and decision rules.	
Support staff and its role	A regional team of 10 people (of which 4 are dedicated to alliance support), plus 2 facilitators / policy advisor at national Support/ facilitation role of MRLG team important in alliance building, PESA, ToC, plan of work (plus capacity-building)	+/- 3 staff in the international secretariat managed by GRET + national/ regional consultants commissioned at the start of the process. Support role important in identification of key partners in less known countries, then lighter on work programme development. Later on more "contractual" type relationship	2 international facilitators at international level, 2 M&E officers, 1 regional facilitator in 3 regions, 1 national facilitator funded in the lead organisation of NLC Lighter support, relying more on existing ILC members at national level at the start.	Light follow-up by WHH, with a team of 2 in headquarters, coordinator, student assistant (formerly communication officer) + advisory support (from Civil Society Academy). WHH is not facilitating, it is only advising. In each country, team of 3 in partner organisation : coord, comm officer, accountant
Method of work	In practice, a nucleus of 5 to 10 organisations has been formed during the development of joint strategies/ ToC with the support of the project facilitators and based on political economy and stakeholder analysis some activities – and budget - can be shared between different members.	1) Identification and interview of strategic actors and key partners 2)Launching workshops opened to all strategic actors with key partners 3) Development of strategic work programme by key partners + secretariat 4) Validation by CTFD global membership 5) Contracting with several tranches	Identify interested members, choose a host organisation (with fund management capacity), propose NLC structure (members and steering committee), then develop a strategy, action plan and budget with the support of ILC regional facilitators, then approved by ILC in Roma. 2 visits and 2 reports per year	Inspired by Collective Leadership Institute, with a 4-phase model « dialogic change model » 1) Exploring and engaging: Identify partners, train on MAP, then form a core group 2) Building and formalising: develop proposal with log frame and budget, establish governance system and MoU, start stakeholders dialogue 3) Implementing and monitoring 4) Sustaining and expanding impact: creating sustainable structure, expanding activities and partnerships

	MRLG	CTFD Support to national land reform processes	ILC National Land Coalitions/ National Engagement Strategies	Land for Life
Activities	Alliance activities include thematic workshops, trainings, case studies and thematic research. Some activities are focused on policy development and engagement with government, others are more focused on practice change and implementation, including developing new tools and guidelines, small pilots on the ground to test policy implementation, etc. The project includes a knowledge management component that supports the alliances to conduct research, publish and disseminate research findings, produce ad hoc policy analyses, etc. It also organises regional workshops and exchanges, academic research, trainings, publications.	Documentation, research, capitalisation, workshops, training and communication/ advocacy. CTFD also supports regional exchanges. At the beginning, no support for national secretariat, then some support was provided. Flexibility in answering to "emergencies" / windows of opportunity when they arise	ILC prioritises structural costs: secretariat in host organisations, SC and GA meetings. Activities are proposed in the NES action plan, consultations, case studies, policy dialogue, advocacy and communication. In some case, support to regional platforms for improved local governance	Dialogue events, studies and research, policy briefs, thematic meetings
Difficulties/ lessons learned	Process to develop PESA, ToC, plan of action very lengthy and time consuming → Need to start concrete activities before ToC completed International CSOs more accustomed to this process, need to strengthen national ones Government participation difficult to secure → need to let them conduct their own projects Competition felt by existing CSOs networks	It has been complicated to identify legitimate leaders in two countries where CTFD had less experience. Led to long delays before starting activities (sometimes 2–3 years) and need to support several competing partners in other countries. In some countries, activities had to stop because of international political situation. Difficulty to influence policy process when powerful lobbies/ vested interests prevail. Big differences in dynamics between countries	Tensions between lead organisation and other members → sometimes create thematic working groups with separate budgets → In other cases, an audit can lead to change of lead partner Difficulty to involve government, especially in a formal coalition → In most case loose govt participation Big differences in the dynamic of different NLC	

	MRLG	CTFD Support to national land reform processes	ILC National Land Coalitions/ National Engagement Strategies	Land for Life
Main impacts (examples)	Recognition of CT in laws in Lao, VN, MMR (stopped after the coup), adoption of regional guidelines on CT and RAI at ASEAN Level	Guinea: the MSP managed to bring together 2 competing ministries (agriculture and urban) and strengthen CSO participation in the Agricultural Land Policy formulation Madagascar: successful mobilisation of FO and CSO to cancel PPNT new law which was reverting on previous progresses	Malawi: involvement in new land law and piloting it Togo: Contributed to new land law and application decrees to	In Sierra Leone: adoption of a very progressive land law. In Liberia: also contributed to progressive land law in 2018, now involved in difficult implementation at subnational level
Conditions of impact (lessons learned)	Flexibility is highly needed to adapt to policy opportunities.		Long-term commitment needed to grab policy opportunities	
Sustainability	Alliances remain informal for the time being, are working now to see if they are willing to continue, institutionalise, and able to access funds from other donors after project end	Not an objective of CTFD. When platforms already exist, they can continue.	Some NLCs are based on pre-existing networks, and cooperate with other MSP programmes such as CTFD, LIFE. No NLC yet engaged in institutionalisation (although some are interested) but it could create difficulties for funding (new organisations) and also damage relationship with Govt	Each platform was left to decide if they want to institutionalise. 2 of them decided to form « Land for Life » Ethiopia (2021), SL (2023), and « plateforme foncière » Burkina (2022). Lots of questions: governance, applying for other projects and their own funding, partnership agreement to be transferred = administrative requirements of WHH. Competition for funding between old partner and new organisation In Ethiopia, they become more and more like a new CSO, not so governed by the platform. It was mostly their decision. They want to be taken seriously and access funding.

Following recommendations from the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure adopted in 2012, many international development programmes have been supporting multistakeholder platforms at the country level to improve land governance for farmers and local communities. In 2024, four international land governance programmes embarked on a joint reflection to review their experiences of working with multistakeholder platforms. This study presents a comparative analysis of five case studies based in Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Guinea, Lao PDR and Malawi. These experiences highlight the importance of the political contexts, structure, governance and operational models of the platforms. It presents platform contributions to changes in policy and practice and provides key learnings that could be applied to land governance programming across multiple contexts.

The Capitalisation of Experience draws lessons learned from improving land governance through multistakeholder platforms for policy dialogue, and is a joint effort of the following four organisations:

The **Comité Technique Foncier et Développement** (CTFD) is a platform of multi-disciplinary experts that discusses and debates rural and urban land issues in the Global South. CTFD meets under the tutelage of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the *Agence Francaise de Développement* (AFD).

Please visit: **www.foncier-developpement.fr**

The **International Land Coalition** (ILC) is an independent global alliance of 300+ People's Organisations, civil society and intergovernmental organisations working together to put people at the centre of land governance.

Please visit: **www.landcoalition.org**

The **Mekong Region Land Governance Project** (MRLG) is a project of the Government of Switzerland, through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), with co-financing from the Government of Germany and the Government of Luxembourg. MRLG has been working to improve the land tenure security of smallholder farmers in the Mekong Region since 2014.

Please visit: **www.mrlg.org**

Welthungerhilfe (WHH) is a private politically and religiously independent aid agency in Germany that fights for "Zero Hunger by 2030". The **Land for Life Project** is supporting multi-actor partnerships working on land governance in Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Germany.

Please visit: **land-for-life.org**

Funders:

MRLG technical partners: