



# Evaluation of projects related to the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security funded by Germany

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**Evaluation of projects related to the  
Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible  
Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and  
Forests in the Context of National Food  
Security funded by Germany**

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
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## Abstract

The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT) is an international agreement on the governance of tenure that promotes secure tenure rights and equitable access to land, fisheries and forests as a means of eradicating hunger and poverty, supporting sustainable development and enhancing the environment. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has been promoting the VGGT in several countries and the Federal Republic of Germany had significantly contributed by financially supporting FAO's activities.

This evaluation was requested by Germany to assess results and draw lessons from the implementation of such activities. The evaluation started with a workshop involving the main implementing partners to identify main changes generated by the programme followed by six country case studies covering all the countries benefiting from German funds: Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Mongolia, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

A major outcome of the VGGT programme has been the promotion of an inclusive dialogue through multi-stakeholder platforms which led in most countries to the emergence of a common vision on land governance and positively influenced the land reform processes with variable results. The programme significantly contributed to changes in mind-set which are needed for long-term improvements at country level. The inclusiveness of the platforms, bringing civil society and government together, was an important mechanism in initiating this process. Capacity development activities and awareness raising efforts had population-wide effects that contributed to the process. Such changes in mind-set, while requiring time, did have observable changes in terms of recognition of customary land rights, women's land rights, policy change and use of institutions to resolve problems.

Results have shown that the VGGT, while being international principles of land policy, can be translated into concrete actions at the local level. Indeed, the experiences of the local platforms in the Senegal River Basin region and the mapping exercise in Sierra Leone are the concrete actions that attracted the most attention and generated significant demand for replication. Particularly successful was also the strategy of including awareness raising efforts on women's access to land as part of local concrete activities.

The evaluation stressed the need for greater attention on developing concrete activities to be carried out in local communities which result in defined, precise and achievable gains on governance of tenure (conflict resolution, mapping, women's rights, etc.). There remains also a significant demand to continue working on women and youth land access issues.



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The evaluation benefited from the inputs of many other stakeholders, including government officers, farmers' organizations, civil society organizations and research centers. Their contributions were critical to the team's work and are deeply appreciated.

## Abbreviations and acronyms

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IPAR	Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OED	Office of Evaluation
OMVS	Organization for the Development of the Senegal River
RAI	Responsible investment in agriculture
VGGT	Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security

# Executive summary

## Introduction

1. This evaluation was requested by Germany to assess results and draw lessons from the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT) programme. The evaluation was conducted by an independent team of experts coordinated by the Office of Evaluation (OED) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). An initial workshop took place in Rome in February 2020 involving key government and civil society organization implementing partners. The workshop was followed by country case studies conducted in Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Mongolia, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

## Main findings and conclusions

2. The VGGT projects were unanimously regarded as highly relevant to the national contexts. There was excellent alignment with the stage of the land policy reform process between the VGGT efforts and the specific countries, complemented by effective consultations, realistic expectations, and overall inclusivity in the process. In defining activities, FAO adopted a flexible approach and was able to accommodate both demand-driven and supply driven countries, with better results observed in demand driven countries.
3. Partnerships established in the different countries were the appropriate ones, drawing on FAO familiarity of local actors. In the Senegal River Basin region, the project was entirely co-managed with Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale (IPAR), a regional think tank, and all strategic decisions had been taken together. The collaboration could benefit from IPAR's knowledge of the regional context and relations with national actors. Overall, the quality of collaboration with implementing partners was quite high. FAO's role in the often-political nature of land rights, was widely regarded as neutral. In some countries, the multi-stakeholder platforms experienced some issues of dominance and weakness due to the imbalance of representation of different actors and absence of the private sector.
4. The broad approach adopted led to occasional misalignment with some country-specific realities. Indeed, the focus on the primary land use sector (pastoralism in Mongolia, agriculture in West Africa) being prioritized over other sectors—such as forestry and pastoralism in West Africa, led to some important opportunities and issues being overlooked.
5. Positive 'spin-off' or catalytic effects occurred in all countries through a combination of community empowerment and greater knowledge of land rights and the institutional means to exercise them. Some project activities produced unplanned but positive spin-off effects, revealing significant local-to-national relevance and applicability of the project approach. Capacity development and learning efforts were important ingredients in the initiation of spin-off effects.
6. While the activities implemented were considered highly relevant, the lack of an internal technical roadmap connecting activities to each other, as well as to short-term and long-term objectives, affected the overall coherence of the programme. In addition, synergies with other FAO projects implemented by the country offices not directly related to the VGGT were only marginally explored.
7. FAO's participation in donor coordination groups contributed to increased coherence with interventions from other international partners. However, potential for further coherence was not

fully realized where other donors were willing but did not see FAO having the coordination role they would have liked to see.

8. There are three primary outcomes at the national level. First, the VGGT projects contributed to the initiation of changes in mind-set that is needed for long-term improvement in land tenure at country level. The inclusiveness of the platforms, bringing civil society and government together, was an important mechanism in initiating the process of a change in mind-set. In addition, the learning programmes and capacity development activities (particularly cross-border trainings), sensitizations, and awareness raising efforts had population-wide effects that contributed to the process. Such changes in mind-set, while requiring time, did have observable changes in terms of recognition of customary land rights, women's land rights, policy change, and use of institutions to resolve problems.
9. Second, the promotion of an inclusive dialogue through use of the multi-stakeholder platforms led to the emergence of a common vision on land governance at different levels and positively influenced the land reform processes. The platforms contributed very significantly in most cases to the construction or improvement of a state – civil society dialogue on land. The promotion of dialogue as part of the platform exercise brought sensitive issues into national discussions. And while the platforms were a success overall, the success was variable, with high functioning platforms noted in Sierra Leone, Senegal and Mali, and lower functioning platforms noted in the other countries. While the platforms focused on the promotion of inclusive dialogue among actors, the potential to increase coordination of efforts at the national level has not been fully realized.
10. Third, while the programme significantly contributed to changes in national land policies and laws, there were variable results in terms of changes generated. This variability highlights the reality that ultimately the adoption of policies and laws supported by the VGGT projects depends to a significant degree on national political processes.
11. At the local level, there was a significant increase in knowledge regarding land rights and how to exercise rights. Activities carried out in the various countries have shown that the VGGT, while being international principles of land policy, can be translated into concrete actions at the local level — affecting the lives of local communities. Indeed, the experiences of the local platforms in the Senegal River Basin region and the mapping exercise in Sierra Leone are the concrete actions that attracted the most attention and generated significant demand for replication. The lack of a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system connected to project activities did not allow for a robust assessment of changes.
12. The learning programmes provided significant capacity to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations who were able to apply what was learned to change some of their projects, initiate new projects, and gain funding—with impacts at the local level. Government attendees also used the knowledge to influence decision-making.
13. In countries where the platforms were well functioning and mature such as in Sierra Leone, Senegal and Mali, there were clear signs that activities will continue beyond the end of the project. At the local level, the platforms appeared more fragile, and without the establishment of sustainable funding mechanisms, the likelihood of them remaining active is limited.
14. Capacity development and awareness raising activities on women's access to land generated changes in mind-sets both at the national-institutional and community levels, and allowed for several cascading effects. Particularly successful was the strategy of including women's access to land as part of local, concrete activities as opposed to stand alone awareness raising activities.

And while youth groups were engaged to a degree in Mauritania and Sierra Leone, there was not the time and resources to robustly engage with other vulnerable groups. There remains a significant demand to continue to work on women and youth land access issues.

15. Finally, key to the success of the programme has been the relationship with and involvement of the FAO country offices. Almost all country offices understood the importance of the programme and had a real interest in it given its centrality to rural development and hence to most of FAO's activities. Expertise provided by the VGGT projects to the FAO country teams were considered very useful, resulting in a demand for long-term governance of tenure expertise to be placed in the country offices.
16. The German projects had catalytic effects and allowed for the mobilization of resources from other donors. The Land Tenure Unit at FAO headquarters played a fundamental role in creating linkages and sharing lessons learned among different countries and in ensuring that projects funded by different donors were managed in a coherent manner under one overall programme.

## **Recommendations**

17. Based on the data collection and analysis, the evaluation provides nine recommendations addressed to the Land Tenure Unit in FAO in charge of the programme.
18. The evaluation recommends FAO to develop a West Africa sub-regional program on land governance and to mobilize resources to fund it and ensure that activities are developed within country-level roadmaps with defined short and long-term goals.
19. The evaluation recommends to continue work to:
  - i. Draw partners' attention to issues related to governance of tenure as part of FAO's participation in donor groups in order to improve coherence and coordination of efforts at the country level.
  - ii. Provide support to legal and institutional capacity development (particularly in Mali and Liberia where new laws have been adopted) and continue efforts for the adoption of the Pastoralist Law in Mongolia.
  - iii. Develop partners' capacities and sustainable funding mechanisms for the local platforms. While the platforms have demonstrated great utility in coordination and dialog development, at local level they remain fragile.
20. Greater attention needs to be focused on:
  - i. Developing concrete actions to be carried out in local communities which result in defined, precise and achievable gains. Such actions provide the opportunity to integrate fundamental components of the broader program into concrete objectives (women's land rights, dispute resolution, community empowerment, capacity development of local actors and institutions) and provide important settings for spin-offs and civil society demand to take place.
  - ii. Including all relevant production systems, as well as taking into account climate change and vulnerable groups.
  - iii. Involving the private sector in the VGGT programme goals, objectives and activities so as to secure business investment alongside community tenure security.

21. Finally, FAO should move ownership of the VGGT out of the FAO domain, so that it is seen as an international agreement, and not necessarily FAO-owned and place the VGGT in a supporting role within country land policy reform processes.

# **1. About this evaluation**

1. In 2019, Germany requested an independent evaluation focusing specifically on German funded projects with a direct link to the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT). Following this request, the Office of Evaluation (OED) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) launched the evaluation, which took place between February 2020 and December 2020.

## **1.1 Purpose of the evaluation**

2. The main purpose of the evaluation was to draw lessons from the implementation of the VGGT programme with a focus on German funded activities and document such lessons with a view to inform future interventions at the country level and provide illustrative examples of the operationalization of the VGGT.

## **1.2 Intended users**

3. The intended users are the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture as well as FAO divisions and offices directly accountable for the projects, in particular the Land Tenure Unit and FAO country offices. Intended users also include the governments and partners in the countries where the VGGT projects were evaluated. This evaluation could also serve other agencies, donors and civil society organizations working on related topics.

## **1.3 Scope and objective of the evaluation**

4. The evaluation assessed all VGGT-related projects funded by Germany since 2014. The list of projects is presented in the table below. It covered all countries that benefited from activities implemented under these projects, including: Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Mongolia, Senegal and Sierra Leone. The only exception is Nepal, which benefited only from the learning programmes, and therefore was not included.
5. In most of these countries, FAO implemented projects funded by other donors which directly or indirectly were linked to the VGGT. During the data collection, the evaluation team explored all results achieved at country level on governance of tenure triggered by FAO activities over the period 2014–2019. Only at a second stage, did the evaluation make the link between the results achieved and the source of funding, focusing on the analysis mainly on German funded activities. This approach was meant to ensure that an overall view of FAO's work was attained, in order to understand how the German funded projects related to the overall programme as well as examine linkages with other FAO activities.

**Table 1. List of projects evaluated**

Project Symbol	Project Title	Recipient countries	EOD	NTE	Budget (USD)
GCP/GLO/347/GER	Support for Country Level Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests	Sierra Leone, Mongolia and Liberia	Feb-14	Feb-17	2 715 792
GCP/GLO/501/GER	Learning programmes to support the implementation of the VGGT in five countries	Sierra Leone, Mongolia and Liberia	Apr-14	Mar-18	1 518 001
GCP/GLO/599/GER	Improved Governance of Tenure for Shared Prosperity in the Senegal River Basin	Senegal, Mauritania and Mali	Nov-15	Mar-19	2 000 000
GCP/GLO/784/GER	Promoting strategic intervention to achieve long term implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests	Sierra Leone, Mongolia and Liberia	Mar-17	Feb-19	1 670 000

Source: Field Programme Management Information System (FPMIS).

6. When the request for this evaluation was made, a German funded project on responsible investment in agriculture was starting (Enhancing the enabling environment for responsible investment in agriculture and food systems - GCP/INT/920/GER). This project has not been included in the scope of the evaluation.
7. The evaluation had three broad objectives: i) assessing major changes directly or indirectly generated by the VGGT programme in the beneficiary countries and their sustainability; ii) analysing the approach adopted by the VGGT programme, and its strengths and weaknesses; and ii) drawing lessons from the different country experiences to inform future interventions for improving governance of tenure.
8. OED, in consultation with the donor and the VGGT team in FAO headquarters, developed key questions which guided the work of the evaluation team. These questions, which reflect the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) criteria, are the following:
  - i. Were activities implemented relevant to the needs of the country on land management and natural resource management as well as the needs of the different stakeholders?
  - ii. To what extent were activities implemented by the programme coherent (compatible and complementary), with activities implemented by other actors as well as by the VGGT programme and FAO itself?
  - iii. What have been the most significant changes in governance of tenure triggered by the VGGT-related German funded projects at national level?
  - iv. What have been the main results achieved at local level and to what extent the VGGT are owned by local actors?
  - v. To what extent are the results achieved sustainable and has the programme created an enabling environment ensuring that the processes launched will continue?
  - vi. To what extent has the approach adopted by FAO in the implementation of the programme facilitated or not the achievement of results?
  - vii. To what extent has gender been integrated into the VGGT programme?

9. An evaluation matrix further detailing the main questions and adding sources of information was developed by the evaluation team to guide the data collection.

## 1.4 Methodology

10. Evaluating activities implemented by the VGGT programme presented two main challenges. First, the VGGT programme at country level was the result of several global-regional projects, therefore there was not one overall logical framework that the evaluation could use as basis for the assessment. In addition, many of the activities implemented by the VGGT programme aimed at influencing policies which is the core nature of the programme. In policy-influence types of projects, it is difficult to predict the final outcome of the intervention; tenure policy reforms could take a long time, depending on several factors on which FAO has no control, and takes place in changing political environments. Therefore, objectives and outcomes defined in project documents might not hold over time.<sup>1</sup>
11. To overcome these challenges, the evaluation adopted outcome harvesting as the main approach. Outcome harvesting is a process of backward analysis where the evaluation starts with understanding what has changed and then establishes whether and how the project contributed to the change. The team started with a review of the documents produced within the scope of the evaluation to identify main outcomes. This was followed by an initial stakeholder workshop held in Rome in February 2019 involving country representatives from implementing partners and governments, technical officers from the VGGT team and the donor. During the workshop, participants collectively identified and presented main outcomes achieved or triggered by the VGGT-related projects funded by Germany, and shared experiences on main challenges encountered and solutions adopted to overcome them.
12. In outcome harvesting, an outcome is defined as an observable and significant change (in behaviour, practice, agenda, relationship, policy, etc.) performed by a social actor, which has been influenced by the project. The types of outcomes harvested during the workshop included changes in policy and legal frameworks, changes in tenure security, and changes in the political agenda which can be observed and proved. However, they also included changes in perceptions, in relationships, in knowledge and in attitude, which are not always observable and therefore do not fall within the definition of outcome provided by this approach. Given the nature of the programme, the evaluation decided to take into account both types of changes (observable and not observable).
13. The workshop was followed by data collection at country level to verify outcomes harvested. Due to the travel restrictions following the COVID-19 outbreak, initially planned country missions were replaced by remote interviews. The remote data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with key informants identified in consultation with the project team and conducted by phone or online. Key informants included representatives from FAO country offices, representatives from government at national and local level, implementing partners, civil society organizations, farmer organizations and donors.
14. Exceptions to the remote data collection was Sierra Leone, where missions took place before the COVID-19 outbreak in December 2019 as part of the OED Country Programme Evaluation; and the local platforms in Podor, Senegal and Boghé, Mauritania where missions were conducted by the national evaluation team members after assessing the feasibility and risks related to the COVID-19 outbreak. This data gathering allowed the team to meet with communities and collect

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<sup>1</sup> See Jones (2011) for a discussion on how to evaluate policy influence programmes.

their feedback and views on activity results, and provide evidence for the evaluation findings. Overall, the evaluation team interviewed more than 200 key informants.

15. Other sources of information included: i) a survey of participants in the learning programmes which assessed the relevance of the programme and the use participants made of knowledge acquired (the survey reached between 60-70 persons in each country, with 56 people responding overall); and ii) a survey on the technical guides which was sent to a sample of 100 potential users. While Germany funded four of these technical guides, the survey was not specific to them and covered the entire series. Twenty-eight external potential users responded to the survey as well as seven personnel from the VGGT team.
16. The evaluation also benefited from a previous evaluation conducted by OED in 2017 on the VGGT umbrella programme (FAO, 2017). The results of this evaluation constituted an important starting point for the evaluation team.
17. The evaluation adhered to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms & Standards 2016 and the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation 2020. It is in-line with the OED Evaluation Manual and methodological guidelines and practices. It adopted a consultative and transparent approach with internal and external stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. All information and evidence collected and presented in this report have been triangulated by the evaluation team to ensure their reliability.

## **1.5 Limitations**

18. The COVID-19 outbreak and the travel restrictions that followed were the main limitations of the evaluation. Indeed, most of the data collection was conducted remotely by phone or online. To mitigate this problem, in all countries, national consultants with a good understanding of the national context in relation to tenure were included in the evaluation team and assisted in remote interviews to facilitate the discussion and provide the correct interpretation of the information collected during the analysis. This allowed the evaluation to take advantage of their deep knowledge of the context.
19. While the evaluation largely focuses on FAO and all recommendations are addressed to FAO, it is important to mention that results at country level were achieved thanks to the contributions of FAO's partners. This is particularly important in the case of the Senegal River Basin region where the idea of the project was proposed to Germany by Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale (IPAR), a regional think tank. The project document was then developed jointly by FAO and IPAR and activities were entirely co-managed by the two organisations.
20. All evaluated projects were closed at the time of the evaluation. In some FAO country offices, the national experts who had been key actors during implementation, were no longer working for FAO. In most cases, they made themselves available to support the work of the evaluation team.
21. Finally, some of the activities evaluated ended two or three years prior to the evaluation. In Liberia and in Mongolia in particular, comments were received during interviews with key stakeholders indicating that it was in some cases difficult to respond to detailed evaluation questions after a long period of time. The survey on the learning programmes was also affected by the time that had passed. The survey on the technical guides faced the limitation of having publications with very different formats and audience, resulting in challenges to identify potential users and analyse responses.

22. Despite these limitations, the evaluation team was able to collect and triangulate a larger amount of information than initially expected. The initial stakeholder workshop significantly contributed to this outcome. Evaluation results were validated through internal presentations with the project team, FAO country offices and implementing partners.

## **1.6 Structure of the report**

23. This chapter covered the purpose, scope and objectives of the evaluation. It also included a short description of the methodology. Chapter 2 provides a short description of the programme and activities implemented at country level. Chapter 3, which is the core part of the report, presents the key evaluation findings. The chapter follows the key evaluation questions. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter 4.



## 2. Background and context of the project

24. The VGGT is an international agreement on the governance of tenure that promotes secure tenure rights and equitable access to land, fisheries and forests as a means of eradicating hunger and poverty, supporting sustainable development and enhancing the environment.
25. The VGGT were developed through an inclusive multi-stakeholder process under the technical leadership of FAO and endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on 11 May 2012. Since then, implementation has been encouraged by the Group of 20 (G20), the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), the United Nations General Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie. VGGT's principles also feature in the targets of three of the newly endorsed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
26. FAO has been promoting the VGGT in more than 58 countries through a series of activities funded by donors as well as FAO's regular programme. At country level, FAO implementation strategy focused on four main aspects: i) awareness raising at institutional and community level; ii) capacity development, enabling stakeholders to develop a better understanding of, and ability to deal with tenure issues in their countries and to drive the policy development and implementation process; iii) provision of technical assistance for embedding the VGGT in national policies and processes; and iv) promotion of dialogue on governance of tenure through multi-stakeholder processes and platforms.
27. The Federal Republic of Germany had significantly contributed to the VGGT programme by financially supporting specific projects as well as indirectly benefitting other VGGT-related interventions assisted by FAO. The main beneficiary countries of the German funded projects have been Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Mongolia, Senegal and Sierra Leone. This section provides a description of the overall programme implemented by FAO in these countries with a specific focus on German funded activities.
28. **Mongolia:** FAO's activities in Mongolia included the organization of initial national awareness raising workshops in 2014 followed by the establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform and a working group on governance of tenure. FAO provided legal expert support for the development of a new project of law on pastureland, integrating the principals of the VGGT and supporting herder consultations on the draft law. The VGGT and related guides were translated to Mongolian. In 2016, FAO supported a forest tenure assessment based on the VGGT. Most of the activities in the country were funded by Germany. In Mongolia, the main implementing partners have been the People Centred Conservation (PCC) that ensured the secretariat of the multi-stakeholder platform and its facilitation, and civil society capacity development activities, and the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) that supported the pastoral land law consultations.
29. **Senegal River Basin:** Following an initial project funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) for the dissemination of the VGGT mostly towards civil society, a national workshop was organized in 2014 with funds from FAO, IFAD, France and Italy. Starting from 2015, Germany funded a project to promote the VGGT in the region. The project was jointly developed and managed by FAO and IPAR, that has been at the origin of the idea. The German project played a catalytic role in attracting funds from other donors and in facilitating FAO's adoption of a programmatic approach in the region. The main focus of the programme has been the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms to promote dialogue among actors and contribute to the development of platforms' action plans to improve land governance (including legal and policy reforms), raise awareness on the VGGT, and develop capacities. The programme established one national platform in each country and a total of five platforms at local level (of which three

funded by Germany). There was also an attempt to set up a basin level platform, which is finally rather a community of practice. The project funded meetings at regional level. The programme was first implemented in Senegal, Mali and Mauritania, while Guinea was included at a later stage. Partnerships were established by FAO and IPAR with national civil society organisations (Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes [CNOP] in Mali, and Groupement National des Associations de coopérative Pastorale [GNAP] and Réseau des Organisations de la Sécurité Alimentaire [ROSA] in Mauritania) to facilitate the work of the multi-stakeholder platforms, the local platforms, awareness raising and capacity development activities.

30. **Sierra Leone:** The VGGT were introduced in the country in 2014 through the organization of a national workshop. Following the workshop, a multi-stakeholder platform was established. In addition to the platform, FAO supported the establishment of technical working groups, an inter-ministerial task force, the VGGT secretariat and the steering committee. FAO provided support for integrating the VGGT principles in the national policy on land tenure. One of the main activities at local level funded through German funds was the piloting of customary land rights mapping. Activities were implemented in partnership with Green Scenery and Namati, two non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who conducted the preparatory work for the mapping exercise with the communities and the mapping itself. The secretariat of the VGGT multi-stakeholder platforms was hosted in the Ministry of Lands, Housing, Country Planning and the Environment.
31. **Liberia:** As in the other countries, FAO supported the initial national workshops which were followed by the establishment of a multi-stakeholder working group. Awareness raising activities on the VGGT were conducted at national and at local levels with a special focus on women's access to land. National stakeholder forums were organized each year, and awareness raising and capacity development activities were part of overall national efforts for the land policy reform in the country and in particular the passage of the Land Rights Act in 2018. In Liberia, the multi-stakeholder platform was hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture and awareness raising activities have been implemented by the NGO Sustainable Organization Initiative in Liberia (SOIL).
32. In addition to country level activities, Germany funded a series of learning programmes targeting change agents (GCP/GLO/501/GER). The learning programmes implemented were three distinct programmes and they took place in Mongolia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nepal. They included two sessions of a general learning programme on the VGGT and two specialized programmes on 'Governing Land for Women and Men' and 'Safeguarding land tenure rights in the context of agricultural investment – FPIC (Free, Prior and Informed Consent)'. These were comprehensive learning processes with several phases over an extended period; each learning programmes lasted about three months and used a blended learning approach, combining online, face-to-face and mentoring phase components.
33. Finally, Germany contributed to the development of four technical guides: i) Technical Guide n. 5: 'Responsible Governance of Tenure and the Law'; ii) Technical Guide n. 6: 'Improving governance of pastoral lands'; iii) Technical Guide n. 8: 'Governing Tenure Rights to Commons'; and iv) Technical Guide n. 12 'Strengthening civic spaces in spatial planning processes' which was published during the evaluation.

### 3. Evaluation findings

#### 3.1 EQ 1. Were the activities implemented relevant to the needs of the country on land management and natural resource management as well as the needs of the different stakeholders?

**Finding 1. The logic behind the decision as to which activities to implement in each country were broadly based on the stage of land policy reform of each country—adopting (correctly) a flexible approach.**

34. The VGGT project successfully engaged in broad recognition of the different land policy reform stages that different countries were in, and this significantly influenced the nature of the projects that were implemented in each country. This was possible thanks to the adoption of a flexible approach which proved to be most appropriate. National workshops, platforms, consultations and negotiations were extensively used to define activities and action plans at the country level, which allowed needs to be identified and definition of project activities.
35. In the Senegal River Basin the project conducted a study on land rights to identify the stages of land policy reform of the different countries along with the main challenges and shortcomings. The study effort was intended to produce an analysis of the context in which the project was going to operate. In addition, in-depth analytical tools, the Land Governance Assessment Framework (LGAF), were developed/complemented for the three countries covering land, fisheries and livestock.
36. Mali and Liberia were at the stage of adopting a new law that had already been drafted and there was a need for advocacy to help accelerate its adoption, as well as needs for stakeholder capacity development and derivation of tools for implementation of laws. Senegal was in the midst of an extensive consultation process around the issues to be addressed by the land tenure policy; whereas Mauritania was at the beginning of their land policy reform process. In Sierra Leone the project was able to embed a significant number of the VGGT principles into its new national land policy while it was in the drafting process; while in Mongolia the project supported the drafting of the pastoralism law.

**Finding 2. The VGGT programme found that some country activities were demand-driven (governments and civil society having a clear vision with regard to the kinds of activities they needed and wanted from FAO in a given context); while others were supply-driven (governments and civil society relying on FAO to supply ideas and activities relevant to their situation). Still others were a mix. FAO recognized and attended to these different approaches as needed. Better results were observed when the process was demand-driven.**

37. In the countries where the programme activities were assessed as more demand driven, partners (both government and civil society) were highly aware of the land rights problems they were experiencing, and the activities needed to attend to problems. They were clear on their requests to FAO. There was motivated buy-in and cooperation by the different components of government and in civil society. In Sierra Leone for example, government and civil society were specific with regard to their needs for land demarcation, improved customary community relationships with investors and consultation on the national land policy. In the Senegal River Basin the initial project concept note was presented by IPAR and after resources had been mobilised a full project document was jointly developed by IPAR and FAO that co-managed activities in the region. In these countries, VGGT activities were defined according to needs expressed by partner

organizations, as well as governments, civil society organizations and other relevant actors during the project inception phase.

38. In other countries, while certainly FAO's partners were very much aware of the existing land rights problems, they had less of a clear technical understanding on how to go about addressing them. Liberia needed assistance in organizing effective responses to specific problems, which FAO was able to provide. Mongolia needed a supply of different ideas and approaches to attend to problems of law, recognition of customary rights, definitions of ownership, land use planning, and civil society participation in law-making.
39. Associated with demand vs. supply situations were the expectations that FAO had with regard to the prospect of success for the activities implemented in different countries. Such expectations appeared to have been part of the logic for determining which activities to implement in the different countries. For example, in Liberia expectations were somewhat lower than in other countries such that the overall focus was primarily on awareness raising. In the Senegal River Basin, on the other hand, expectations for success were higher given a clearer vision of needs and greater capacity. In Sierra Leone expectations were quite high given the capacity and political will of government and civil society, and the strong demand-driven nature of the process.
40. Better overall outcomes were observed associated with demand-driven processes. This was demonstrated by much greater buy-in by government units, greater cooperation among government units and with civil society, greater political will, and more sustainability in projects and outcomes.

**Finding 3. The partnerships established with local actors were the appropriate ones, drawing on FAO (and IPAR for the Senegal River Basin region) familiarity of local actors. In some countries, the multi-stakeholder platforms experienced some issues of dominance and weakness due to the imbalance of representation of different actors and absence of the private sector.**

41. FAO's longstanding presence in the project countries facilitated the appropriate selection of partners to implement project activities. Familiarity with the different relevant government agencies, NGOs, international NGOs and civil society organizations, the personnel within them, and the work histories of these actors (including with FAO) greatly facilitated the selection of partnerships for implementation. There was a strong effort to work with the existing dynamics of these partners with regard to their efforts on land rights.
42. In the Senegal River Basin region, the project was entirely co-managed with IPAR and all strategic decisions were taken jointly by the two organisations. As a think tank operating at both the national and regional level, IPAR lent its knowledge of local actors and its many partnership relationships to the project. In Mali, the project selected to work with a farmer organization (CNOP) with whom IPAR had collaborations and who was already very involved in the land policy reform process. In Mauritania, partnerships were established through IPAR with GNAP and ROSA, both active civil society organizations.
43. In some cases, the dominance of some actors in activities such as the stakeholder platform led to problems of functionality and sustainability. For example, in Liberia and to some degree Mongolia, the dominance of government in the stakeholder platform together with the high turnover of government personnel (particularly for Liberia) meant that new people frequently needed to be trained, and new relationships established, leading to slow progress and a problem of coordination. In Liberia this led to the International Land Coalition (ILC) reconstituting the platform so that civil society could play a larger role in it. In Senegal and Mali on the other hand,

government as a partner was participating less than certain NGOs, depending to a large extent on individuals rather than on ministries as a whole.

**Finding 4. The primary focus of the VGGT projects evaluated was on agriculture (except in Mongolia); other sectors received less attention although there was significant need.**

44. In West Africa the focus was on agriculture (crop production), meanwhile agro-pastoral conflict was of primary importance. For example, the local platform in Podor, Senegal focused on agriculture while most of the land is used for agro-pastoral and pastoral activities. Consultations with local stakeholders in Mali and Mauritania also stressed the key importance of tackling transboundary issues related to transhumance and agro-pastoral conflicts. More recent FAO projects are addressing issues related to governance of pastoralist land in the region.
45. Forestry was another sector that received less attention. This was particularly important for Liberia and Sierra Leone, which have forestry commodity sectors that are quite active, contentious, involve outside investors, and include both tree crops (oil palms, cocoa) and natural forest timber products. The exception was forestry in Mongolia which did receive attention in terms of establishing user groups.
46. The mining sector is often a problematic actor in land rights, so much so that it was left out of VGGT activities for fear of prompting negative repercussions. This was the case in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Mongolia, the impact of mining on pastoral land management has been discussed in the workshops and during the debates on the pastoral land law. While FAO has no mandate to work in the mining sector, ministries of mines are not usually FAO counterparts, and the VGGT do not expressly cover mining resources. There is however a concern given the competition over land rights that often emerge.
47. Inland fisheries development (particularly aquaculture development) holds significant potential for food security, but it has been a minor aspect of the VGGT projects evaluated even in countries where the potential is high, such as Sierra Leone. In Senegal, the VGGT programme (through the sister project funded by Italy) supported the consultation process for the development of the law on inland fisheries.

**Finding 5. A number of activities were relevant to the change in mind-set that is needed for long-term improvement in land tenure at the country level.**

48. Large-scale improvement in land rights for a national population is a long-term process requiring a change in mind-set within civil society and government. Sometimes this change in mind-set is a generational change. While it is unlikely that any donor project would be able to last as long as it takes for such a change to be completed, what is important is that the project and activities be relevant to initiating this process of change.
49. Among the activities important to a change in mind-set are i) the VGGT activities that dealt with how customary rights interact with statutory rights (relevant to the new land policies and laws in all project countries); ii) the empowerment of women's land rights along with and other marginalized groups (especially in Sierra Leone and Liberia); iii) the robustly operating platforms that brought different actors of government and civil society together; and iv) the introduction of new tenure concepts to Mongolia.
50. Deriving a national level 'vision' (necessarily different from the global VGGT vision) that is broadly understood and owned by different stakeholders, can provide a valuable guideline for ongoing project activities, synergies and sustainability that emerge as project activities interact with local

land tenure priorities and needs. These can play a significant role in changes in mind-sets over time. In Senegal, Mali, Sierra Leone and Liberia for example, the VGGT project provided a vision (facilitated by the platforms and capacity development activities) that was then shared and owned by the different stakeholders, including those who had very different perspectives on land use and access. The inclusiveness aspect of the multi-stakeholder platforms were found to be highly relevant to the development of such a vision.

51. The projects invested a good deal of efforts in awareness raising and capacity development given that the VGGT in a number of countries was not known. The learning programmes were relevant to setting in motion a change in mind-set on land rights, through: i) trainings that facilitated networking and wide collaboration among participants; ii) use of new skills; and iii) the sharing of information learned with colleagues in the workplace, with broad benefits perceived to be accruing to organizations that sent participants. The focus on the selection of key change agents to participate in the learning programmes and the consultation of participants to define the contents proved to be a good strategy. Indeed, capacity development is most successful when participants are carefully selected and their participation firmly requested.

**Finding 6. In the Senegal River Basin region, the project served as a forum for exchange between representatives of different countries - producing a certain 'fast forwarding' of important issues.**

52. In the Senegal River Basin region, the project brought country representatives together to interact in a new way, thereby learning from each other's experiences—including how certain difficulties are solved in different countries. It facilitated discussion and dialogue on land tenure related issues, whereas previously such issues had been too sensitive to treat in an effective way. Such exchanges also facilitated the development of a 'land charter' with the potential to push for reforms in the four countries. The partnership established with the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS) proved to be instrumental to ensure country participation in the dialogue. IPAR played a leading role in establishing the partnership and FAO's credibility and neutrality contributed to facilitate countries' participation.

**Finding 7. FAO's role in the often-political nature of land rights, was widely regarded as neutral.**

53. There was a universal opinion on the neutrality of FAO in the political aspects of the project. This was most evident when the laws went into a political phase of the process - cabinet, parliament, etc. This was also evident in the advocacy role that different actors took. FAO stood away from such political advocacy activities and kept its efforts on the technical parts of the process. When FAO was involved in the law-making process, it was largely limited to technical assistance in consultation, drafting and explanation of relevant VGGT principles. There were no government complaints that FAO took a political position on land rights.
54. Where advocacy activities did occur, it sometimes involved FAO's implementing partners, with these activities being owned by the partners themselves. There was some desire expressed that FAO should have been more political in certain activities; nevertheless, FAO kept its neutrality. While remaining neutral, FAO's credibility contributed to strengthening civil society organizations' own arguments regarding land rights.
55. FAO rightly drew a distinction between advocating for the adoption of the VGGT as an international agreement by countries, versus advocating for implementation of the agreement as part of a law-making process internal to a country.

**Finding 8. There were two significant categories of catalytic effects from several activities: i) those operating at the local level, and ii) innovative participation by partners and donors at the national level. While the catalytic effects are often unexpected from the perspective of FAO or government, they hold large implications for future programming.**

56. The local level catalytic effects that came about due to several VGGT activities were the result of the mix of empowerment, greater knowledge of land rights, and the presence of the institutional and organizational means to exercise land rights.
57. Improvements due to greater awareness in women's land rights in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Mauritania are a primary example of such a local level catalytic effect. In a number of activities, training and sensitization with regard to women's land rights led to action by empowered women to pursue improved inheritance, demarcation, land access and co-titling, beyond the intended outcomes of the projects.
58. Greatly improved community interaction with large-scale investors also resulted from the empowerment-knowledge-institution mix. Communities participating in land mapping in Sierra Leone now know for how much land they have to negotiate with investors, how much land they need for their own food production, which lands they do not wish to be available for investments, and an ability to veto some investment projects. In Podor, Senegal, hostility by the local population toward foreign and national investors changed with the popularization of the VGGT; more knowledge of local communities on their rights allowed for a more open attitude toward dialogue with investors. Local communities now see possible potential win-win scenarios for both communities and investors "People have understood that we should not reject all investors for no reason because investments can help reduce unemployment and increase production" (member of the local platform in Podor, Senegal).
59. In a mapping project in the case of Sierra Leone, the pilot activity was so successful that the dispute resolution aspect of the activity which targeted boundaries between lineage-held lands, expanded on its own to include dispute resolution within lineage lands. The same mapping project created a very large demand from adjoining lineage-held lands for similar demarcation, well beyond the intent of the initial pilot activity.
60. At the national/international level, catalytic effects took various forms. In one example a national platform copying the Senegal River Basin model was initiated in neighbouring Guinea. In other cases, donors (Sierra Leone - Department for International Development; Senegal - Italy) came forward wanting to participate in specific aspects of the effort or adopting the approaches proposed by the VGGT programme such as the local platforms.
61. In other cases, international partners emerged (such as ILC) to take over some activities. In Mongolia, ILC took over the operation of the platform because it was successful and it wanted to continue its operation. In another case (Liberia), ILC took over the platform because it was poorly functioning, but nevertheless held significant potential. In several cases some NGOs used the capacities gained in FAO training to develop other projects that were then funded - as was the case in Mauritania and in Sierra Leone. In still another case the World Bank is intending to fund a 'Land Observatory' in Senegal - the idea for which was developed during the land policy consultation process and developed further by the Senegal River Basin programme. Also in Senegal, a donor group specifically on land tenure was created as a spill-over effect of the project.

**Finding 9. The technical guides were seen as very relevant by users, with additional improvements suggested.**

62. The user survey on the technical guides shows that they were used extensively by more than two thirds of respondents, with “Governing land for women and men” being the most known. The guides were seen as particularly useful for practitioners, seen by most as very well developed and practical. Also significantly known by over half of the respondents to the survey were the guides on improving governance of forest tenure, respecting free, prior and informed consent, safeguarding land tenure rights in the context of agricultural investments, improving of pastoral lands, and governing tenure rights to commons.
63. The guides were used as reference material for capacity development, research, context analysis, to develop other tools and in at least a couple of cases to secure lands in pastoral areas. In the Niger, the guides were used to set up transhumance committees.
64. While one suggestion was that they were somewhat redundant, it should be noted that they are intended as independent reference materials, and not necessarily to build off of one another.
65. Several respondents indicated the need to disseminate them more given their relevance; there is a sense that they are still under-used. There were suggestions to improve accessibility and their use through the production of: i) printed copies; ii) videos; iii) light (simpler) versions able to be understood by non-technical people and even by local land users such as farmers and pastoralists; iv) involve more case studies; v) examples of the implementation of the VGGT; vi) versions of the guides that are tailored to specific countries; and vii) curriculum materials for each guide including online open courses . Accessibility could also be improved by making the guides available to research institutions, and in educational curricula. The involvement of regional experts and indigenous voices was suggested as a valuable addition. Linking the guides with other organizations and their documentation (Global Land Tool Network [GLTN], IFAD, UN Women, etc.) would allow for complementarity.
66. Additional topics suggested by respondents that could be covered included inland and marine fisheries, compulsory purchase of lands, forced acquisition, taxation, and indigenous knowledge on conflict resolution.

**Finding 10. The international VGGT effort intended to equip states as well as civil society organizations, with guiding principles and relevant methodological tools to develop and implement equitable, participatory and inclusive land policies. In this framework, the role of FAO and other development partners can only be a supporting one. Often the VGGT can be perceived in country as a tool belonging to FAO.**

67. In some countries, the VGGT were perceived as being a tool belonging to FAO (‘FAO Guidelines’ or FAO platforms). This perception did not favour the establishment of synergies between interventions and it even sometimes gave rise to competition between projects on land tenure funded by different donors (as in the case of Liberia).
68. The implementation of the VGGT was often communicated as the primary objective of the programme. However, the goal at country level is not the implementation of the agreement itself, but rather improving governance of land and natural resources with the VGGT playing a supporting role in the process. The way the VGGT and related activities were communicated did not always reflect this role adequately.

### **3.2 EQ 2. To what extent were activities implemented by the programme coherent with activities implemented by other actors as well as by the VGGT programme and FAO itself?**

69. The evaluation assessed coherence at different levels: i) coherence with other FAO activities; ii) coherence among activities inside the VGGT programme; and iii) coherence with other international programs.

#### **Finding 11. Coherence between country-level VGGT activities and other FAO activities was variable overall.**

70. Broadly, there were cases of good coherence with in-country FAO activities in other programs, made possible by robust coordination between the VGGT activities and objectives, with the FAO Country Programmes. Sierra Leone is notable in this regard, by having VGGT team members also having other duties in the Country Office. In Sierra Leone the VGGT project coordinated with other donor projects in a coherent way, including projects funded by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on agribusiness, investment, and the development of the Solutions for Open Land Administration (SOLA) and Open Tenure packages used for mapping, along with the Irish Aid project on women's customary land rights and the Peacebuilding Funded project. In Senegal, FAO was also able to coordinate funding from different donors and join these together into a cohesive programme.
71. VGGT projects were not linked to other FAO projects that did not focus on land tenure, even though such projects might have had land tenure repercussions associated with them. This was variable however, in some cases being more of a problem than others.
72. Liberia stood out as particularly problematic with regard to coherence with the FAO Liberia Country Programme, there being essentially no coordination between the VGGT effort and the Country Office. This lack of communication resulted in the loss of certain opportunities.

#### **Finding 12. Coherence within the VGGT programme at the country level would have been better served by a technical roadmap linking the different activities, and better coordination of implementing partners.**

73. While there was coherence in a general broad sense, particularly in countries with numerous activities (Sierra Leone, Senegal), in a technical sense the linkages between the different workshops and capacity development activities on one hand and the improvement of tenure security for communities on the other hand were not explicitly made. This should however be mitigated by the understanding that certain activities were intended to change the mind-set of government and civil society, are thus not likely to have had explicit, immediate impact on local community tenure security.
74. In some cases, there was a lack of coherence among the implementing partners engaged in rural VGGT activities with activities implemented by other actors. In such cases implementors visited the same communities in the same period of time, but were uncoordinated and so delivered very different messages, resulting in confusion among communities. This was particularly relevant to Liberia and Sierra Leone. This reveals a need to better coordinate with other projects engaged in similar activities.

**Finding 13. Coherence with other international programmes was good where it existed, but did not realize its full potential.**

75. Coherence with other donor funded projects varied depending on how many other donors were present, and compatibility between projects. In Mongolia, for example, there were few other donors involved in the land sector. In all countries, coherence was improved when FAO was involved in donor coordination working groups. In Senegal, the commitment of the FAO Representative and the presence of FAO personnel dedicated to land tenure facilitated the establishment of a donor working group on land tenure. This group engaged in exchanges and discussions, especially during the policy reform process (including exchanges between the donor group and the national platform). In Mali, where FAO participated in the donor working group on the rural sector, discussions with the French Development Agency (AFD) (which supported drafting of the land law) provided for an exchange of information which facilitated coherence between the efforts of AFD and FAO.
76. In Senegal after the World Bank met with the national platform when planning a large land registry project, they changed their approach to extend consultations during their formulation missions with a number of country stakeholders under the aegis of the VGGT platform, in particular civil society organizations, among which the members of the platform steering committee. This influenced the approach adopted in their project. The World Bank appreciated the opportunity to be able to meet with most of the partners working on land tenure, thus facilitating their consultations, and cited this process as an example possibly replicable in other countries.
77. Potential for coherence was however not fully realized where other donors were willing but did not see FAO having the coordinating role they would have liked to see, for them to fully participate (as in Sierra Leone and Liberia). Coherence was quite limited in Liberia, where numerous actors were active in the land sector with little coordination, and limited communication between them and the FAO effort.

**Finding 14. There were some coherence problems regarding international investors, in that there was a perception that the VGGT acted to delay or inhibit investment by creating confusion over what lands are in which categories of use and availability. This was connected to the lack of involvement of the private sector in the multi-stakeholder platforms.**

78. While Sierra Leone was able to more effectively address this issue, in Liberia the process, considered extremely important by the national counterpart, was still underway, and was weakly addressed in the Senegal River Basin region. This challenge may have been dealt with had the private sector been included in the platforms, or had responsible investment in agriculture (RAI) efforts in the countries been robust - as they were for Sierra Leone.

### **3.3 EQ 3. What have been the most significant changes in governance of tenure at the national level triggered by the projects evaluated?**

**Finding 15. There has been broad cross-country success in significantly raising awareness regarding land tenure - as one of the most successful aspects of the projects in all countries. The awareness raising contributed significantly to the change in mind-set regarding land tenure in the project countries.**

79. For all countries involved in the projects there is now a more advanced national discussion of land rights, resulting in a positive change in perception at the national level. Such change is of fundamental importance to the long-term change in mind-set regarding land rights. The VGGT programme had a significant contributing role in this change, which could not be readily

separated from the role of other actors active in the sector. Mongolia was likely the least successful in this regard due to the difficulty of reaching a nomadic population spread across a large, mountainous country.

80. Such a change in mind-set is a long-term process. While occurrences of greater tenure security are observable in sub-segments of the population fairly quickly, for large-populations of rural communities a change in mind-set can be longer-term. The priority in this sense should be on triggering the sustainable dynamics that can contribute to a change in mind-set.
81. In the Senegal River Basin region, land tenure issues, that for historical reasons were almost taboo to discuss, were brought into discussion among the countries. The project contributed to influence the OMVS that extended its area of work from water management and agricultural development to include land tenure. This increased focus on land tenure could potentially create crucial links between these sectors (see Appendix Table 1 - outcome 1).<sup>2</sup>
82. In some countries, discussions have developed into a national narrative regarding land tenure - such as in Sierra Leone and Liberia where the narrative now comprises a much greater role of customary tenure in law-making, and how customary tenure interacts with investors.
83. There is now a much greater awareness within FAO country offices regarding the VGGT. While most FAO personnel did not have a hand in developing the VGGT activities, they are now more aware of the guidelines. This is particularly the case in Mali and Senegal. This is important to the involvement of the VGGT in other FAO projects.
84. The existence of the VGGT principles and activities associated with them provided civil servants and civil society with the legitimacy needed to pursue changes in land rights along the lines of the VGGT. For example, in the Senegal River Basin countries when a national debate was underway regarding land rights, civil servants were able to refer to the VGGT principles as international practices in their work. At the same time civil society organizations were able to indicate that the ideas they were promoting with regard to land rights did not originate with them (were not their own opinion), but rather originated with the VGGT. This significantly helped to legitimize and drive the discussion forward.
85. In Mongolia, where the concept of land tenure did not exist, the translation of the VGGT into the Mongolian language required reaching consensus around new concepts (see Appendix Table 1 - outcome 2). The resulting change in mind-set can be seen by reference being made for the first time to customary rights in the decree on the Soum Territorial Development Plan (see Appendix Table 1 - outcome 3). Work is still to be done to have a wide appropriation of this new term and concept.

**Finding 16. The promotion of dialogue and collaborative work regarding inclusive and equitable land tenure among different actors at the national level met with variable success - to a large degree depending on the functionality of the platform.**

86. In Senegal, Mali and Sierra Leone, the promotion of dialogue based on the effectiveness of the platform was highest. This occurred by bringing together actors in government and civil society that would not have otherwise gotten together to seriously discuss land rights and facilitate interactions. This interaction was facilitated by FAO's international standing and legitimacy.

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 2 presents a description of the outcomes harvested and verified by the evaluation team at national and local level.

87. In Senegal, dialogue was created between the National Land Reform Commission and other national actors. In Mauritania, the platform became an extension of the Land Reform Technical Commission, which previously included only state actors. In Sierra Leone, the highly functional platform brought different national actors together and provided a highly significant facilitating role in the discussion of the national narrative on land tenure.
88. Other countries had considerably less success in this regard - in particular, the more limited functioning platforms of Liberia and Mongolia (which functioned more as annual workshops) have been less successful in encouraging dialogue on land tenure in the country. In Mongolia, the platform influenced the work of the National Land Agency (see Appendix Table 1 - outcome 3). In Liberia, there was at times confusion among some sectors about who was doing what, what the primary issues were, what the positions of the various stakeholders were in the country, and what the ideas are for a way forward. There continues to be unrealized potential for enhanced dialogue at the national level in these countries.

**Finding 17. The programme significantly contributed to changes in national land policies and laws. Contributions varied depending on the stages of the reform in which each country was. Depending on the needs, support consisted in facilitating inclusive dialogue, developing capacities of key actors to advocate on different aspects of the reform and/or providing technical support in the drafting of policy and laws.**

89. Given that the land policy reform process was at different stages in the different countries when the project was initiated, the types of contribution to changes, made by the project activities were varied as well.
90. In Sierra Leone, the timing was quite appropriate for the project to make a very significant contribution to the content of the National Land Policy already approved and the drafting of the new land law (along with land related laws such as the Customary Land Bill and the Land Commission Bill) such that the policy and the new law directly reflects a significant number of VGGT principles. In Sierra Leone, there was also significant change in the national level organizational framework regarding the governance of tenure.
91. In Liberia, assistance was provided along with other donors in the passage of the 2018 Land Right Act (see Appendix Table 1 - outcome 4). In Mongolia, support to the pastoralism law was provided (by organizing herders' consultations), and the pastoralism law was developed with technical support from the programme (see Appendix Table 1 - outcome 5). And while there was a pause in its progress as a new government was installed, there has been more recent movement of the law from Cabinet toward Parliament. In Mali, the platform was instrumental in advocating for the passage of the Agricultural Land Law (see Appendix Table 2 - outcome 6).
92. In Senegal, while there was a good contribution to the land policy document (see Appendix Table 1 - outcome 7), it has not yet been adopted into policy. In Mauritania, the government changed while the reform process was underway, and the process was then halted under the current government. Regionally at the level of the Senegal River Basin, the project has contributed to drafting the charter on land rights. Such a charter, if adopted, will hopefully encourage OMVS member states to move forward with land policy reforms (see Appendix Table 1 - outcome 8).

**Finding 18. While there has been overall national capacity improvement for governance of land tenure, this has occurred in different ways in different countries.**

93. In Liberia, the high turnover in government personnel participating in the platform meant that new personnel frequently needed to be trained over and over. And while this was a capacity

problem for the operation of the platform, presumably capacity was increased more broadly as previously trained personnel moved to other parts of government. However, this meant that any such broad increase in capacity was also difficult to actually measure. Sierra Leone stood out in terms of effective capacity development, with trained state actors staying in the process to put their enhanced capacity to direct use in policy reform.

94. While trainings, workshops, and awareness raising all contributed to capacity development at national level, the end result is difficult to measure. While positive outcomes come about for example in changed decisions by state actors, these can be difficult to observe, can be delayed but enduring, and can manifest themselves in a very wide variety of smaller unexpected ways.
95. Sierra Leone provides an example of improvement in capacity for dealing with investors - with RAI interaction with the VGGT being among the most successful. The RAI effort was well coordinated with the VGGT and the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIPEA) (see Appendix Table 1 - outcome 9). In Liberia, a similar exercise has been initiated and was considered very relevant by stakeholders interviewed.<sup>3</sup>

### **3.4 EQ 4. What have been the main results achieved at the local level and to what extent are the VGGT owned by local actors?**

**Finding 19. There was a significant increase in local level knowledge regarding land rights and how to exercise rights.**

96. Awareness raised at the local level was among the most significant successes of the project. Such awareness was manifest in different ways in different communities. In West Africa, broad local level evidence is present for positive outcomes regarding disputes, gender, youth, mapping, interacting with investors and knowing where to go to solve land problems.
97. In Mongolia, however, there was less indication of broad increases in awareness of land rights in civil society due to the remoteness of the nomadic population. However, among government and in areas that are contested with commercial herding and mining operations, and where access to the best lands is contentious, increased awareness of relevant land rights was evidenced, due to the sensitive nature of land rights in these areas and hence the desire on the part of those affected to know about how land rights work.

**Finding 20. The project contributed to the promotion of dialogue among local actors for progress in inclusive and equitable land tenure with widely varying results.**

98. Greater dialogue was achieved in the Senegal River Basin countries by the creation of local level stakeholder platforms to bring different actors together. Increased dialogue and interaction took place between local community members and local government as a result of the local platforms, along with awareness raising and sensitization activities.
99. In Mauritania, local authorities engaged in attending to the problems of the local population, including halting an unpopular local investment (see Appendix Table 2 - outcome 1). Women and youth are also now more involved in community decisions due to awareness raising (see Appendix Table 2 - outcome 2).

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<sup>3</sup> More information on the outcomes of the learning programmes at both national and local level are available in the next section.

100. In Senegal, a change in attitude toward investors has emerged, such that communities are now more knowledgeable of rights, institutions and instruments and are more willing to engage with investors instead of refusing to cooperate with them (see Appendix Table 2 - outcome 3). The local platform also allowed for the dissemination of other project results and land tenure tools in the local area (see Appendix Table 2 - outcome 4) and encouraged members to greatly engage in conflict resolution in their communities (see Appendix Table 2 - outcome 5).
101. In Liberia, and especially in Sierra Leone, women's empowerment regarding land rights was especially robust - bringing women and women's associations together with local leadership in often robust forms of dialogue. This was manifest in Sierra Leone by increased dialogue between women's associations and chiefs at different levels regarding inheritance, land access and co-ownership; and in Liberia and Sierra Leone by the robust pursuit of improved land rights by individual female change agents (see Appendix Table 2 - outcome 6).
102. In Sierra Leone, and to a lesser degree in Mongolia, there was increased interaction between local community members and large-scale investors and land users. In Sierra Leone, this was manifest through RAI efforts, the mapping project and awareness raising campaigns that placed local communities in an empowered position (see Appendix Table 2 - outcome 7); whereas in Mongolia, awareness raising regarding land rights among small-scale herders occasionally led to sometimes contentious interactions with commercial herders and mining operations.

**Finding 21. There was variable improvement in tenure security at the local level—with measurement made difficult due to the lack of an M&E program.**

103. The primary indicators of increased tenure security at the local level include: i) greater access to dispute resolution mechanisms; ii) a decrease in the volume of disputes; iii) an increase in local investments in land; and iv) decrease in land degradation processes. All of these indicators require a benchmark measurement prior to project activities and most importantly an 'after project' evaluation of the same indicators to determine if measurable change has occurred. However, because there was no robust M&E effort, these indicators have not been monitored or measured, and therefore the needed data are not available.
104. Based on anecdotal evidence collected by the evaluation, in Sierra Leone there was a greater community ability to interact with investors due to greater tenure security at the community level brought on by greater awareness of their land rights. Also, in Sierra Leone and Liberia there was greater tenure security experienced by women as evidenced by women being able to prevail in land disputes, inheritance and land access. In Mongolia, greater tenure security experienced by a segment of the local population resulted in greater resistance to commercial herding operations, leading to at times, contentious interactions due to the lack of effective dispute resolution mechanisms.
105. There were missed opportunities for enhancing tenure security at the local level that could have been technically addressed, sometimes easily. These included clarification on: i) tree planting by renters, women and members of marginalized groups, given that tree planting is a tenure security assertion; ii) problems with rental to strangers (those outside one's own lineage); and iii) the promotion of certain outgrower schemes in relationships with large-scale investors as a way to both retain/enhance tenure security for small-scale agriculturalists and engage with investors.
106. In Mali, land commissions were set up in ten communities as a contribution to the implementation of the Agricultural Land Law. These commissions are intended to deal with land management issues, land transactions, and resolve local land conflicts. But, with the exception of one

community, members of commissions did not get the necessary training and follow-up, thus affecting the functionality and sustainability of the commissions.

**Finding 22. The learning programmes provided significant capacity to NGOs and civil society organizations who were able to apply what was learned, to change some of their projects, initiate new projects, and gain funding - with impacts at the local level. While government attendees of the learning programmes were also able to use their knowledge to influence decision-making, the NGO/civil society organization community appeared more nimble and agile in the implementation of capacities acquired.**

107. The learning programmes had several cascading effects reported in the survey:
  - i. Participants used the capacities developed to raise awareness at national level (sensitize government officials and policy makers) and at community level (training of traditional leaders, communities, associations etc.).
  - ii. Capacities developed were used to advocate and inform policies (advocate for the passage of the Land Right Act in Liberia, including aspects of protection of women's rights and customary rights, recommend concepts in the Liberia national gender policy, and develop policy guidance on investment in a district in Sierra Leone).
  - iii. Concrete actions were carried out at the field level (used to mitigate various land disputes between national and multinational companies, to set up land committees, etc.).
  - iv. Knowledge acquired was used in research and learning (examples including develop and enrich university courses, and the development of a drama on the VGGT for children).
  - v. Participants in Sierra Leone and Liberia saw the need to improve the country's Agribusiness Investment Approval Process to bring it more in line with the VGGT. FAO further supported the process that led to a participatory review of the Agribusiness Investment Approval Processes, both in Sierra Leone where the document has been validated and in Liberia where the process is still on-going.
108. While government attendees of the Learning Programmes did influence decision-making in government (issuing of mining licenses on pastureland; land allocation; informing the Investment Approval Process), the NGO/civil society organizations communities seemed to have more freedom to apply a number of VGGT principles in their projects and proposal development to donors.
109. An NGO in Sierra Leone, for example, was able to use capacities acquired at the learning programmes to successfully engage in RAI efforts with large scale agriculture investment. Other NGOs (Liberia) were also able to more successfully engage the investment process in their normal operating activities with local communities. Changes in advocacy and teaching curriculum were also made to include the material from the learning programmes.
110. Several non-state actors were able to apply skills gained in the learning programmes in their work - land surveying, land governance consultancy, researchers, journalists and media organizations.
111. The learning programmes resulted in widespread sharing of the training experience with personnel and units in government, education, media, the private sector, donors, and the NGO/civil society organizations community, along with local beneficiaries through awareness raising. Responses clearly show that almost all participants shared what they learned to different audiences, with many examples provided.

### **3.5 EQ 5. To what extent are the results achieved sustainable, and has the programme created an enabling environment that will ensure that the processes launched will continue?**

#### **Finding 23. Sustainability of results was uneven across countries - it strongly depended on the partnerships established.**

112. Partnerships are fundamental to ensure sustainability of activities after the end of a project. In Senegal and Mali, the national platforms are still operational because the main project partners - IPAR and CNOP - were leading the platforms even before FAO procured funding. The project in Liberia was unable to produce sufficient government buy-in (likely connected to the high turnover of government personnel involved in the project); and unable to find champions (individual or core groups) willing and able to provide sustainability. In addition, the over-reliance on government as the primary partner in Liberia (and the dominant actor in the platform) proved unsustainable given their personnel turnover. In Mauritania, the national platform never became sufficiently active due to the time needed for its establishment and the change in government. For Mongolia and Liberia, where activities were on hold, ILC will continue to support the platform following consultations and agreements between FAO and ILC.
113. The fact that the multi-stakeholder platforms attract a healthy degree of criticism and debate (even after the end of the project) regarding its purpose, structure, membership, inclusivity/exclusivity, role in national policy reform, and representativeness in the different countries, is evidence of its ongoing success in strongly connecting with the population, the process of land policy reform and the importance of the management of land issues. Such criticisms, while valuable and worthy of consideration, do highlight that the concept of the platform and the way it was implemented as an activity, is particularly successful in drawing out a wide variety of stakeholders to engage in productive debate. Senegal is an example where the platform received a good deal of debate as to its role and purpose, drawing in a wide variety of actors into the discussion. This allowed for different ideas to be proposed, such as a rotating presidency, technical committee, an operating charter, which the platform members will need to discuss to define the way forward.
114. Sustainability is a challenge for local platforms. In Mali, great enthusiasm for participation decreased over time when funding stopped. In Mauritania and in Senegal, platform members showed a clear interest in continuing activities, however, there is a need for long-term funding mechanisms without which sustainability is unlikely. Local platforms also lack an autonomous place where to meet as well as dedicated facilitators.
115. A distinction is best drawn between 'actively sustainable' partnerships (with activities underway) and 'latent sustainable' partnerships (not currently active but easily and quickly reactivated). While a lack of funding can put the partnership's activities on hold, the relationships between partners is unlikely to end completely. This was the case for the VGGT programme in most of the countries evaluated, with the exception of Liberia. Indeed, despite the project activities already being closed at the time of the evaluation, professional relationships were still being maintained, and ways of operating continue to be shared and understood. This indicates that most probably if funding resumes later, partnership will likely recommence fairly quickly, instead of being forged anew. The sustainability of relations observed (between FAO and its partners but also among the partners) can be seen as evidence of the existence of a 'community of practice'.

**Finding 24. Perceptions of institutional and organizational gain and the existence of common objectives were important in sustainability of partnerships.**

116. In some cases, partnerships continued after the project (and funding) stopped because a significant perception of institutional or organizational gain was perceived. This was the case for universities in Sierra Leone, which perceived such significant gains through curriculum development, the involvement of student projects that could contribute to university degrees and enhance community land rights, and greater national visibility. Also in Liberia universities were very much interested in pursuing collaboration. In both countries, universities were continuing the effort initiated through the VGGT programme with the support of the Network of Excellence on Land Governance in Africa (NELGA).
117. In Sierra Leone, the government took over funding the interactions between certain partners (particularly some NGOs and civil society organizations) due to a strong perception of the value that such interaction provides to government.
118. In Mali, the Ministry of Agriculture and certain civil society organizations have a common objective in their advocating against some aspects of the new domanical and land laws which were in contradiction with some parts of the Agricultural Land Law.

**Finding 25. The importance of a 'service provided' due to the VGGT project can establish an obligation on the part of one or more partners to continue their role or activities.**

119. In certain cases, a relationship was established between partners that was sustainable due to demand for a service. This was the case in Sierra Leone with Namati, an implementing partner, who was asked to continue to provide legal aid to communities. In this case after the project ended, local community members who worked in partnership with Namati during the project continued to approach Namati with requests for assistance and information well after the project ended. This was because the local community and Namati now have an established relationship due to the project, and because the local community was empowered due to their raised awareness of land rights. Here the local community obligated their partner to continue in the sustainable relationship.

**Finding 26. The creation of conditions for scale-up of activities was limited. Exceptions include Sierra Leone, which highlights the importance of 'demand' in civil society for scale-up to occur. In the Senegal River Basin countries there was a strong demand for the establishment of local platforms that has been only partially met due to lack of funding.**

120. In Sierra Leone, the mapping project provided important conditions for scale-up. The approach that FAO took, and the empowered position this put local communities in, created a strong demand by neighbouring communities for the mapping. This included the activities associated with mapping - training, gender sensitization, ability to interact with investors and dispute resolution.
121. The demand created by the mapping effort in Sierra Leone can easily be met. What is needed is further training, and a 'light version' of FAO's Open Tenure mapping software. While other donors are replicating the mapping activity, a problem emerges when donors use different software other than Open Tenure, because Open Tenure is compatible with the SOLA Registry package adopted by the government for the national land registry.
122. In Mauritania the local platforms created significant demand for their replication and scale-up; however a lack of funding proved to be a constraint. This same demand in Senegal was met through additional funds made available by Italy.

123. In Mali, where the new Agricultural Land Law foresees the creation of land commissions at the village level, there was a large demand for these commissions to be put in place. Land commissions established by the project were largely not functional, however, due to the lack of capacity development and follow-up. The establishment of new land commissions if done should be accompanied by capacity development efforts.

**Finding 27. While the learning programmes were well received, certain obstacles acted to limit the application of the capacities developed, with repercussions on sustainability. Some of these obstacles are contextual (e.g. lack of resources) but others point to weak follow-up on the part of FAO, including with universities.**

124. As clearly shown in the participant survey, the learning programmes were very much appreciated and had significant cascading effects.
125. Respondents indicated the lack of funding as a primary challenge for the application of capacities developed. Other challenges impacting sustainability included: i) the lack of training for journalists; ii) the lack of support from policymakers; iii) non-recognition of female land rights in certain rural areas; iv) corruption; and v) a lack of production of printed materials explaining the VGGTs in easy-to-understand ways.
126. The slowness and cost of interacting with the justice system by local communities, and the poor operation of legal aid in assistance of local communities was also indicated as an obstacle in the application of capacities developed in the learning programmes. Likewise, certain private actors in the land sector proved to be uncooperative and unaware or dismissive as to the need for free, prior and informed consent, and instead acted to spread messages in local communities to counter messages that sought to raise awareness on land rights by NGOs. Finally, the high turnover in some government personnel, resulted in people being moved from units in which they could have made a difference, into less relevant units of government.
127. The programme included a one month mentoring phase to support participants to finalize action plans and start implementation of activities and FAO tried to give opportunities for continuation of activities within the limits posed by the projects' life span. Despite this, participants indicated that the absence of follow-up on the part of FAO with regard to the learning programmes acted to diminish subsequent enthusiasm, including the follow-up needed for collaboration with universities.

### **3.6 EQ 6. To what extent has gender and other vulnerable groups (youth, migrants, etc.), been integrated into the VGGT programme?**

**Finding 28. Women received primary consideration among the vulnerable groups in the VGGT programme; with youth, migrants and other groups being afforded less attention.**

128. Considerations for women's access to land played a large role in the design and implementation of the project's activities. These included specific activities on the sensitization of the need for women's roles in land governance, and awareness raising on the aspects of the various land laws that relate to women. After women, youth were the focus of attention in Liberia and Sierra Leone, where land rights regarding the youth sector played a large role in the wars in both countries. Specific attention on youth along with women was also important in the awareness raising activities conducted in Mauritania with positive results on their involvement in decisions at the local level.

129. Implementing partners that focused on land rights and were themselves operated by women, played a large role in advances of women's participation in land governance - for example, UN Women and Namati in Sierra Leone. The same was observed in Mauritania where concrete results at the local level were achieved as a result of the capacity development and awareness raising activities conducted by an NGO and led by a woman.

**Finding 29. Greater outcomes were realized in the advancement of women's role in land governance when gender was well integrated within on-the-ground, concrete deliverables. Stand-alone awareness raising efforts on gender were less successful.**

130. The mapping activity in Sierra Leone stands out as particularly successful in the integration of gender into the activity. Women were trained as mappers, were encouraged to be present during the mapping, and trained on how to read and interpret maps.
131. Gender activities relevant to the mapping outcomes were conducted at a time and place so as to realize synergies. For example, awareness raising about inheritance issues in the new land law with regard to women, occurred prior to the mapping, so that discussion on amounts of land, their location, and who is to inherit them could take place, with positive outcomes for women. Such integration is especially important when there exists the prospect for scale-up of activities. In contrast, Senegal River Basin countries had more stand-alone gender efforts focused on awareness raising, with variable successful outcomes.

**Finding 30. The way that women's role in the governance of tenure is presented for local communities is important to a successful change. If presented as a form of 'community empowerment', outcomes are more successful than if presented as, 'women gain land rights at the expense of men', which can be met with resistance.**

132. Sierra Leone found that if improvements in the role of women in the governance of land was presented as a form of empowerment and opportunity for prosperity for the whole community, and not as something that takes away land rights from men, then the community can be supportive of positive changes. This involves use of specific cases and examples of how women's land rights improve empowerment for the household and community. Such a purposeful presenting of women's role in governance as beneficial for the whole community is important because often the default assumption of men in a community is that they will lose some rights so that women can gain some rights.

**Finding 31. In the learning programmes, the gender components were regarded by participants as among the most valuable.**

133. The learning programmes survey asked participants to indicate which topics among the ones addressed were considered useful. The responses included: i) the protection of women's customary rights and of women's rights within customary tenure; ii) bringing women's land rights into statutory law; iii) specific techniques regarding equality of land rights between men and women; iv) the understanding that women's rights in land are recognized internationally as a priority; and v) the important role of women in the functioning of land tenure systems, such as pasture management and farming decisions.

### **3.7 EQ 7. To what extent has the approach adopted by FAO in the implementation of the VGGT programme facilitated or not the achievement of results?**

**Finding 32. Effective interaction with the FAO country offices produced better outcomes in implementation. The German projects had a catalytic effect and allowed to mobilize resources from other donors. The Land Tenure Unit at FAO headquarters played a fundamental role in creating linkages and sharing lessons among different countries and in ensuring that projects funded by different donors were managed in a coherent manner under one overall programme.**

134. The VGGT programme demonstrated very good interactions with the FAO representations. In most of the countries, VGGT national coordinators have been recruited and placed within the country offices. Robust interaction with the country offices allowed for the sharing of personnel, resources and logistics. This collaboration resulted in greater opportunity for land issues to be included in other FAO programmes and the possibility for the VGGT programme to provide support to country offices. In Mali, for example, the VGGT national coordinator provided training to communities as part of a Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) project.
135. The only exception being Liberia where due to communication issues the Country Office was not fully aware of activities implemented by the VGGT program and hence there were missed opportunities for coordination and synergy. This situation was aggravated with the international tenure officer in charge of both Sierra Leone and Liberia being based in Freetown.
136. As indicated by the previous evaluation of the VGGT programme, buy-in from FAO country offices was key to the achievement of results. The programme received support from senior personnel in country offices who understood the relevance of the topic for FAO's work. The international stature of the FAO country offices and in particular the FAO Representative proved to be useful for many VGGT programme activities. The good collaboration and coordination between the country offices and the Land Tenure Unit at FAO headquarters was broadly appreciated.
137. The Land Tenure Unit at FAO headquarters played a fundamental role in creating linkages between activities implemented at country level on the VGGT, propose and testing approaches, share lessons and best practices across countries.
138. The German projects had a catalytic effect and allowed the mobilization of additional funds from other donors. In Sierra Leone, FAO mobilized resources from the Department for International Development for a project on land investment, from Irish Aid for a project on gender, and two projects were funded by the PBF. In Senegal, resources were mobilized from the Italian Cooperation in support to the platforms. In Mali and Mauritania, activities are continuing through the Flexible Multi-Partner Mechanism (FMM ) with a specific focus on pastoralism. The VGGT were successful in managing the different funds in a coherent manner with projects contributing to the same overall programme.

**Finding 33. Overall, the quality of collaboration with implementing partners was quite high, but could benefit from a more robust M&E system.**

139. FAO was able to take advantage of the particular strengths and capacities of its partners, having worked with most of them in the past. Implementing partners were given a certain latitude in implementation, drawing on their local knowledge and experience.

140. In the Senegal River Basin region, the project was entirely co-managed with IPAR and all strategic decisions were taken by FAO and IPAR together. Thanks to this collaboration, the project could largely benefit from IPAR's knowledge of the regional context and actors, while stakeholders' perception of FAO's credibility and neutrality facilitated participation of all relevant actors.
141. Implementing partners noted however that their interaction with FAO could have been improved if there had been a robust M&E program. The lack of follow-up to implementation by FAO led to missed opportunities and limited the possibilities of drawing lessons to improve or redirect activities. In addition, in Liberia and Sierra Leone, limited coordination of implementing partners' activities with similar activities of other actors led to different partners visiting the same communities with different and confusing activities and messages.



## **4. Conclusions and recommendations**

### **4.1 Conclusions**

#### **Conclusion 1. Relevance of the VGGT projects**

142. The VGGT projects were unanimously regarded as highly relevant to the national contexts. There was excellent alignment with the stage of the land policy reform process between the VGGT efforts and the specific countries, complemented by effective consultations, realistic expectations, and overall inclusivity in the process. The broad approach adopted however led to occasional misalignment with some country-specific realities. Indeed, the focus on the primary land use sector (pastoralism in Mongolia, agriculture in West Africa) being prioritized over other sectors, such as forestry and pastoralism in West Africa, led to some important opportunities and issues being overlooked. In defining activities, FAO adopted a flexible approach and was able to accommodate both demand-driven and supply-driven countries, with better results observed in demand-driven countries.
143. Positive 'spin-off' or catalytic effects occurred in all countries through a combination of empowerment and greater knowledge of land rights and the institutional means to exercise them. Some project activities produced unplanned but positive spin-off effects, revealing significant local-to-national relevance and applicability of the project approach. Examples of spin-offs include the establishment of platforms at different levels in the Senegal River Basin countries; and large increases in demand for land-related activities and services such as boundary demarcation, dispute resolution and mapping in Sierra Leone. Capacity development and learning efforts were important ingredients in the initiation of spin-off effects.

#### **Conclusion 2. Internal and external coherence**

144. While the activities implemented were considered highly relevant, the lack of an internal technical roadmap connecting activities to each other, as well as to short-term and long-term objectives, affected the overall coherence of the programme. In addition, synergies with other FAO projects implemented by the country offices were only marginally explored.
145. FAO's participation in donor coordination groups contributed to increased coherence with interventions from other international partners. However, potential for further coherence was not fully realized where other donors were willing but did not see FAO having the coordination role they would have liked to see.

#### **Conclusion 3. Results at national level**

146. There are three primary outcomes at the national level. First, the VGGT projects contributed to the initiation of long-term changes in mind-set regarding land rights at the level of the national population. The inclusiveness of the platforms, bringing civil society and government together, was an important mechanism in initiating the process of a change in mind-set. In addition, the learning programmes and capacity development activities organised (particularly cross-border trainings), sensitizations, and awareness raising efforts had population-wide effects that contributed to the process. Such changes in mind-set, while requiring time, did have observable changes in terms of recognition of customary land rights, women's land rights, policy change, and use of institutions to resolve problems.
147. Second, the promotion of an inclusive dialogue through use of the multi-stakeholder platforms led to the emergence of a common vision on land governance at different levels and positively

influenced the land reform processes. The platforms contributed very significantly in most cases to the construction or improvement of a state–civil society dialogue on land. The promotion of dialogue as part of the platform exercise brought sensitive issues into national discussions. And while the platforms were a success overall, the success was variable, with high functioning platforms noted in Sierra Leone, Senegal and Mali, and lower functioning platforms noted in the other countries. While the platforms focused on the promotion of inclusive dialogue among actors, the potential to increase coordination of efforts at the national level has not been fully realized.

148. Third, the program made a significant overall contribution to the different national land policy processes in all countries, with variable results in terms of changes generated. This variability highlights the reality that ultimately the adoption of policies and laws supported by the VGGT projects depends to a significant degree on national political processes.

#### **Conclusion 4. Results at local level**

149. Activities carried out in the various countries have shown that the VGGT, while being international principles of land policy, can be translated into concrete actions at the local level, affecting the lives of local communities. Indeed, the experiences of the local platforms in the Senegal River Basin and the mapping exercise in Sierra Leone are the concrete actions that attracted the most attention and generated significant demand for replication.
150. The lack of an M&E system connected to project activities did not allow for a robust assessment of changes. Developing a solid M&E system becomes particularly important when implementing activities at the community level, not only in order to adequately assess results, but to change the course of an activity if need be and draw lessons for future activities. It is also important in managing partnerships.

#### **Conclusion 5. Sustainability of results**

151. In countries where the platforms were well functioning and mature such as in Sierra Leone, Senegal and Mali, there were clear signs that activities will continue beyond the end of the project. The drafting process of the Customary Land Bill and the Land Commission Bill stand out as important examples. Key elements for such sustainability include the existence of common objectives among members of the platforms, and a potential for the realization of future gains. In some cases, the platforms were able to attract new funding. At the local level the platforms appeared more fragile, and without the establishment of ongoing funding mechanisms, the likelihood that these platforms will remain active is limited. Specifically, funds are needed to ensure that at least one person is in charge of facilitating the platform, i.e. organizing meetings and following up on agreed upon activities and their implementation. Community contributions such as payment for certain services and provision of a meeting place can be significant.

#### **Conclusion 6. Integration of gender and other vulnerable groups**

152. Capacity development and awareness raising activities on women's access to land generated changes in mind-set both at the national-institutional and community levels, and allowed for several cascading effects. Particularly successful was the strategy of including women's access to land as part of local, concrete activities as opposed to stand-alone awareness raising activities. And while youth groups were engaged to a degree in Mauritania and Sierra Leone, there were no time and resources to robustly engage with other vulnerable groups. There remains a significant demand to continue to work on women and youth land access issues.

### **Conclusion 7. FAO's approach in implementing the VGGT programme**

153. The evaluation confirms the finding of the previous evaluation which indicated that key to the success of the programme is the relationship with and involvement of the FAO country offices. Almost all country offices understood the importance of the programme and had a real interest in it given its centrality to rural development and hence to most of FAO's activities. Expertise provided by the VGGT projects to the FAO country teams were considered very useful despite the short-term nature of their presence, resulting in a demand for long-term land tenure expertise to be placed in the country offices. The joint management of the project with IPAR in the Senegal River Basin region allowed the programme to take advantage of the comparative advantages of each one. While FAO was able to implement the VGGT project as a programme by building synergies among the different projects funded by Germany and other donors, this had some transaction costs that could have been avoided through a pooled multi-donor fund.

## **4.2 Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1. FAO should develop a West Africa sub-regional program on land governance and mobilize resources to fund it.**

154. The development of a sub-regional programme would retain and solidify the gains made in the region and overcome challenges linked to the current context of fragmented and short-term projects.
155. This programme would allow land tenure expertise to be available in the region (in the sub-regional office and in the countries) to provide further support to both country and regional efforts in land governance, further cultivate partnerships at regional level and provide opportunities for new projects.
156. Such a regional approach would facilitate the building of synergies with ongoing actions supported by regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS).

### **Recommendation 2. FAO should work within country-level roadmaps with specific short and long-term goals.**

157. Working within country specific technical roadmaps built out from existing national action plans (or assisting in their development if absent) can facilitate national ownership and greater effectiveness.
158. One aspect of such roadmap work should be to conduct an analysis of the reasons why tenure insecurity exists for farmers and herders in country specific contexts.
159. An M&E system should be developed to monitor progress towards achievements of set goals at national level and contributions to increased tenure security at the local level.

**Recommendation 3. FAO should continue drawing partners' attention to issues related to governance of tenure as part of its participation in donor groups and improving coherence and coordination of efforts at the country level.**

160. Participation in donor groups should be used as an opportunity to draw partners' attention to the importance of responsible governance of tenure for food and nutrition security, conflict prevention, and gender equity, and mobilize resources for activities at country level.
161. Broader coordination is also needed to ensure that approaches and messages are harmonized with regard to local communities that are the targets of implementation. The national and local platforms can play a significant role in this coordination effort. It is also important to continue developing synergies among projects implemented by different actors on land tenure in the same regions.

**Recommendation 4. Greater attention needs to be focused on developing concrete actions to be carried out in local communities which result in defined, precise and achievable gains. Such actions provide the opportunity to integrate fundamental components of the broader programme into concrete objectives (women's land rights, dispute resolution, community empowerment, capacity development of local actors and institutions), and provide important settings for spin-offs and civil society demand to take place.**

162. Concrete actions in the field are those which directly and immediately affect the lives of local communities. Particular attention should be paid to land mapping, establishment of reliable land information systems, establishment or upgrading of local courts, land use and allocation plans, the development and implementation of land management tools, capacity development of local communities on the principles of responsible investment and negotiating with investors.
163. This approach could also include the establishment of synergies between the VGGT programme and other FAO projects implemented at the country level (such as club DIMITRA, farmer field schools and Caisses de résilience, projects funded by the PBF, etc.). This would allow the potential of the VGGT in terms of conflict prevention and equitable management of land and natural resources, to be translated into concrete results.

**Recommendation 5. The VGGT programme should pay greater attention to all relevant production systems, as well as take into account climate change and vulnerable groups.**

164. There is a demand to place greater attention on all production systems and not just crop production. Depending on the country, these would include forestry, fisheries, pastoralism, cross-border issues and mining.
165. Greater attention is also needed on two specific themes: i) women and youth access to land and ii) the impact of climate change on governance of tenure.

**Recommendation 6. While the platforms have demonstrated great utility in coordination and dialog development, they remain fragile especially at the local level. FAO should work to develop partners' capacities to ensure sustainability of platforms.**

166. Given platforms' success and central position in the project, greater attention should be given to their sustainability, particularly in the case of local platforms.
167. Platforms need to be opened up to all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector which has been absent in most cases. There is a need to develop a specific approach towards the private

sector. Operating rules should be formalized according to local realities. The dominance of platforms by a particular actor or sector should be mitigated.

168. Exchanges between platforms (at both local and national level) should be continued as a way to further share experiences and develop capacities.

**Recommendation 7. There is a need to continue to provide support to legal and institutional capacity development (particularly in Mali and Liberia where new laws have been adopted), and continue efforts for the adoption of the pastoralist law in Mongolia.**

169. Countries which have adopted new laws continue to need assistance in the implementation of these laws as part of their land policy reform process. Additional legal assistance is needed in the development of implementing regulations, enforcement, awareness raising about new laws, legal assistance to local communities and training of local officials.
170. Also needed in all countries is support for strengthening or establishing institutions at local and national level (courts, land tenure commissions, etc.) to improve access of community members, associations and villages to the means to exercise their rights.
171. Collaborations with universities could be further promoted in view of developing curricula on responsible governance of tenure (including reviewing existing courses on governance of tenure to integrate the VGGT), so as to contribute to legal and institutional capacity development.
172. Awareness raising of actors on responsible governance of tenure should be continued to include representatives of political parties and groups.

**Recommendation 8. FAO should move ownership of the VGGT out of the FAO domain, so that it is seen as an international agreement, and not necessarily FAO-owned. It should also place the VGGT in a supporting role instead of a leading role within country land policy reform processes.**

173. Rethinking how the VGGT and related projects are communicated could contribute to increased ownership by the various actors intervening in land governance, synergies and coherence of actions, and decrease donor competition over land rights efforts.
174. The efforts of communicating the VGGT should continue extending to other countries.

**Recommendation 9. Greater attention should be placed on including the private sector in the VGGT programme goals, objectives and activities so as to secure business investments alongside community tenure security.**

175. Emphasis on community-investor interaction and consultation, and the formation of mutually beneficial economic arrangements would greatly enhance the role of investments in development.
176. There is a need to develop specific methods and approaches to involve the private sector in policy dialogue on governance of tenure and other VGGT activities and programmes.

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## Appendix 1. People interviewed

Country	FAO personnel (including former implementing team)	Central and local government	Local authorities	Civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and farmer organizations	Other UN agencies and intergovernmental organizations	Donors	Other	Total
<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>								
Liberia	4	5		11	1	5	2	28
Mali	2	8	1	12		1	4	28
Mauritania	2	2	4	6		1	13	28
Mongolia	3	4		9			4	20
Senegal	2	8	9	11		3	6	39
Sierra Leone	13	21	1	4	2	2	7	50
Not country-specific	9				5	1	1	16
<b>Outcome Harvesting Workshop</b>								
Liberia	2							2
Mali		1		1				2
Mauritania				2				2
Mongolia				2				2
Senegal	1			1			1	3
Sierra Leone	1			1				2
Not country-specific	5			1	2	1		9
<b>Total stakeholders providing inputs</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>231</b>

## Appendix 2. Outcomes harvested and validated

**Appendix Table 1. Outcomes at national level**

1	Senegal River Basin	In the Senegal River Basin region, due to historical conflicts on land tenure issues, the land question has long been considered taboo. Through the organization of regional workshops and advocacy at institutional level, the programme contributed to bringing back the discussion on land tenure among the OMVS member countries. As a result, the OMVS has included securing access to land as a strategic focus in its action plan. Favouring a basin-wide approach is of particular importance to tackle food insecurity and manage cross-border transhumance. It can also have an indirect, but fundamental impact on efficient water management, a key issue for OMVS.	Harvested during the workshop. Validated during the country case study.
2	Mongolia	In Mongolia, given that historically herders moved from one place to another, there was no term to define tenure. The concept of tenure was difficult to explain to policymakers and herder communities. The VGGT programme delivered learning programmes and organized a workshop for land experts, civil society organizations and some herder community leaders which brought into a common understanding the concept of tenure and how it can be translated into the Mongolian language. The VGGT were then translated in Mongolian and disseminated.	Harvested during the workshop. Validated during the country case study.
3	Mongolia	In 2016, the land agency released a decree approving the procedure to developing the Soum Territorial Development Plan. This is the first official document in which the Government of Mongolia through the land agency recognizes the customary rights of herders (both individual and group grants depending on the land and usage). This was possible due to the workshops, awareness-raising and trainings provided to government officials and in particular the land agency.	Harvested during the workshop. Validated during the country case study.
4	Liberia	In 2018, the Government of Liberia passed the Land Rights Act which integrates the principles of the VGGT. This outcome was possible due to a joint effort by civil society organizations, the Land Rights Working Group, and different donors and agencies (the United States Agency for International Development [USAID]; the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency [SIDA]; the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP]; the European Union), along with the private sector and local communities. FAO in particular contributed to this process by providing civil society organizations with the knowledge and concepts needed to be able to advocate for the passage of the act, and by raising awareness of government actors with regard to the VGGT principles with special attention on women's rights.	Harvested during the workshop. Validated during the country case study.

5	Mongolia	In 2016, the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry developed a law on pastureland through a large consultation with herders (over than 2 000 herders). The draft law is in line with the VGGT principals and integrates herders' and local government officials' feedback. While the draft law benefits from significant consensus with herders, it has not yet been adopted and discussions at the national level on how best the pastureland shall be regulated are on-going and new consultations are planned. The law responds to a need for a new framework to manage rangeland, which is increasingly under pressure due to climate change, competition of different economic sectors and increased grazing. FAO provided technical support in the drafting of the law and in the organization of consultations.	Harvested during the workshop. Validated during the country case study.
6	Mali	In Mali, the project brought together government, academia, and civil society in a national platform. The platform was instrumental in advocating for the passage of the Agricultural Land Law which has several new elements: i) the recognition of traditional/customary lands in the definition of land tenure; ii) introduction of village land commissions for providing certificates of possession and transaction at the village level, and for providing assistance with managing land conflicts, iii) introduction of tenure security tools such as evidence of both customary possession and land ownership; and iv) the allocation of 15 percent of the land from public land rehabilitation being reserved for women and young people.	Harvested during the workshop. Validated during the country case study.
7	Senegal	The programme supported the establishment of a national platform to promote dialogue and discussions among national stakeholders working on issues related to land tenure. Discussions among the platform and the national commission in charge of the land policy reform contributed to ensure the integration of the VGGT principles in the land policy document under development. The land policy has been validated by the national commission but has not been adopted by the government.	Harvested during the workshop. Validated during the country case study.
8	Senegal River Basin	A regional charter on land rights was developed with the aim of defining common principles to be adapted to each country. The charter has not been adopted yet. The OMVS has included the charter project in its action plan.	Harvested during the workshop. Validated during the country case study.
9	Sierra Leone	The programme in Sierra Leone robustly engaged the private sector by working with the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA), and RAI initiatives. SLIEPA is promoting outgrower schemes with investors so as to achieve a better relationship with communities. This occurred for at least one investor in recent years. FAO supported SLIEPA in this effort.	Initially found during the country case study and again noted in the workshop.

**Appendix Table 2. Outcomes at local level**

1	Mauritania	The project supported the establishment of a local platform contributing to bringing state actors and the population together to secure tenure rights. In one municipality, new investors had an allocation agreement from the government to exploit 3 200 hectares to start farming. When the local authorities became aware of this, they convened the local multi-stakeholder platform. The members of the platform met with the local population and determined how to work together to deal with the investment. They first issued a report to the national authorities to express their disagreement and opposition to the project, which resulted in the project being blocked. Thus, the platform, by bringing together different actors, generated a change in behaviour (the local government now feels more accountable to the population) and has made it possible to achieve concrete outcomes.	Harvested during the workshop. Validated during the country case study.
2	Mauritania	Through the local platform the programme promoted an approach based on inclusive consultation, while at the same time conducted training and awareness raising on the role that women and youth play in society. The overall result is that women and youth are increasingly consulted and involved in decisions at community level. In one municipality, for example, approximately one hundred women now are able to operate and manage their plots independently, which was not possible previously. Women have also attained more control over their revenues due to this change in mind-set.	Harvested by the evaluation team during discussions with the local population.
3	Senegal	The project worked in one department in Northern Senegal where communities have been very hostile towards foreign and national private investors, resulting in occasional violence. However, with the popularization of the voluntary guidelines and the exchanges developed within the local platform, a change in mind-set and behaviour is beginning to take place regarding investors. The result is the emergence of a new perception of land governance much more focused on land development in consultation, and in a win-win spirit regarding investments.	Harvested by the evaluation team during discussions with the local population.
4	Senegal	The local platform established with the support of the Senegal River Basin project brought together various actors that were implementing projects focused on (or with a component on) land governance. As such, it provided a forum to share existing tools and results on land tenure of projects operated by different actors.	Harvested by the evaluation team during discussions with the local population.
5	Senegal	The project helped to calm the social climate and strengthen the propensity of local actors to prevent and manage land conflicts on their own. Thanks to what they learned in the platform, local actors contribute to establish peace and harmony around land. Different members are working on specific cases and they discuss the cases during the platform's meetings. They now have tools that help calm the social climate.	Harvested by the evaluation team during discussions with platform's members.

Appendix 2. Outcomes harvested and validated

6	Liberia	Thanks to the advocacy, training and awareness raising activities women are now taking charge of their land by taking their concerns and issues to the Liberia Land Authority and to civil society organizations for redress.	Harvested by the team. Confirmed by several key informants. Not verified at field level.
7	Sierra Leone	The mapping activity that took place in four districts by local communities with FAO support led to a reduction in land conflicts and increases in agricultural productivity. This occurred as tenure security increased, allowing smallholders to invest more in their lands.	Initially found during the country case study and again noted in the workshop.
8	Mali	In Mali, the project supported the establishment of ten land commissions at the village level which were intended as a tool to increase tenure security following the new law. The commissions have a role in managing land conflicts and can give certificates of possession and transaction at the village level. This makes the process of certification faster and less expensive than when certificates were issued only at the regional level. While most of the land commissions are not operational due to lack of follow-up and training at the end of the project, the evaluation collected evidence of a couple of villages where land commissions played an active role in managing land conflicts.	Harvested during the workshop. Validated during the country case study.

## Appendix 3. Projects on the VGGT implemented in the countries covered by the evaluation

<i>Direct</i>					
Project symbol	Project title	Recipient countries	EOD	NTE	Budget (USD)
GCP/GLO/347/GER	Support for Country Level Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests	Sierra Leone, Mongolia and Liberia	Feb-14	Feb-17	2 715 792
GCP/GLO/501/GER	Learning programmes to support the implementation of the VGGT in five countries	Sierra Leone, Mongolia and Liberia	Apr-14	Mar-18	1 518 001
GCP/GLO/599/GER	Improved Governance of Tenure for Shared Prosperity in the Senegal River Basin	Senegal, Mauritania and Mali	Nov-15	Mar-19	2 000 000
GCP/GLO/784/GER	Promoting strategic intervention to achieve long term implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests	Sierra Leone, Mongolia and Liberia	Mar-17	Feb-19	1 670 000
<i>Indirect</i>					
Project symbol	Project title	Recipient countries	EOD	NTE	Budget (USD)
GCP/SIL/049/IRE	Protecting women's customary land rights in Sierra Leone	Sierra Leone	Oct-17	Nov-18	580 725
GCP/GLO/347/MUL	Supporting Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests	Guatemala, Senegal, Niger, Madagascar, Malawi	Nov-12	Jun-20	13 478 291
FMM/GLO/111/MUL	FMM support to SO 1	Guatemala, Malawi, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Senegal, South Africa	Aug-14	May-18	2 824 116
GCP/INT/328/UK	Supporting the Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests - phase II	China, Colombia, Kenya, Myanmar, Nepal, Sierra Leone, United Republic of Tanzania	Mar-18	Mar-20	3 364 737
GCP/GLO/347/UK	Supporting Implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests	Nigeria, Uganda, China, Nepal, South Africa and Myanmar	Dec-13	Sep-17	7 640 985
UNJP/SIL/050/PBF	Creating Peaceful Societies through women's improved access to management of natural resources, land tenure rights and economic empowerment in Sierra Leone	Sierra Leone	Jan-19	Jun-20	1 000 000

# Evaluation of projects related to the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security funded by Germany

## Corrigendum

25/10/2022

The following corrections were made to the PDF of the report after it went to print.

Page	Location	Text in printed PDF	Text in corrected PDF
36		In 2016, the land agency director released a decree approving the procedure to developing the Soum Territorial Development Plan.	In 2016, the land agency released a decree approving the procedure to developing the Soum Territorial Development Plan.
38		The establishment of the local platform in Boghé contributed to bringing state actors and the population together to secure tenure rights. In Dar El Barka, new investors had an allocation agreement from the government to exploit 3 200 hectares to start farming. When the local prefect became aware of this, he convened the local multi-stakeholder platform. The members of the platform met with the local population and determined how to work together to deal with the investment. They first issued a report to the authorities to express their disagreement and opposition to the project, which resulted in the project being blocked.	The project supported the establishment of a local platform contributing to bringing state actors and the population together to secure tenure rights. In one municipality, new investors had an allocation agreement from the government to exploit 3 200 hectares to start farming. When the local authorities became aware of this, they convened the local multi-stakeholder platform. The members of the platform met with the local population and determined how to work together to deal with the investment. They first issued a report to the national authorities to express their disagreement and opposition to the project, which resulted in the project being blocked.
38		The overall result is that women and youth are increasingly consulted and involved in decisions at community level. In the community of Dar El Avia, for example, approximately one hundred women now are able to operate and manage their plots independently, which was not possible previously.	The overall result is that women and youth are increasingly consulted and involved in decisions at community level. In one municipality, for example, approximately one hundred women now are able to operate and manage their plots independently, which was not possible previously.
38		In the recent past, communities in the department of Podor have been very hostile towards foreign and national private investors, resulting in occasional violence, including looting, deaths and burning of buildings. However, with the popularization of the voluntary guidelines and the exchanges developed within the framework of the meetings of the local platform, a change in mind-set and behaviour is beginning to take place regarding investors.	The project worked in one department in Northern Senegal where communities have been very hostile towards foreign and national private investors, resulting in occasional violence. However, with the popularization of the voluntary guidelines and the exchanges developed within the local platform, a change in mind-set and behaviour is beginning to take place regarding investors. The result is the emergence of a new perception of land governance much more focused on land development in consultation, and in a win-win spirit regarding investments.
38		The platform facilitated the dissemination of the results of other relevant projects not part of the VGGT effort. This was done by bringing together various actors that were implementing projects focused on land governance or had a component on land governance. The local platform created (with the support of the Senegal River Basin project) a local framework for sharing existing tools on land tenure and results of projects implemented by other actors.	The local platform established with the support of the Senegal River Basin project brought together various actors that were implementing projects focused on (or with a component on) land governance. As such, it provided a forum to share existing tools and results on land tenure of projects operated by different actors.
39		The mapping activity that took place in Bombali, Kenema, Bo, and Port Loko districts by local communities with FAO support led to a reduction in land conflicts and increases in agricultural productivity.	The mapping activity that took place in four districts by local communities with FAO support led to a reduction in land conflicts and increases in agricultural productivity.

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