

2025

Summary Report Human Rights & Land Governance in Sierra Leone

Rights4Land Assessment



Disclaimer

This Summary Report was developed by TMG Research gGmbH. It synthesizes the results of the Rights4Land Assessment in Sierra Leone, carried out by the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) and Land for Life Sierra Leone (LfL). TMG gratefully acknowledges their work, that formed the basis of this report.

The data and recommendations in this report originate entirely from the analysis reports of HRCSL and LfL and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of FAO or TMG Research.

The lead authors of this Summary Report are Daniel Montas and Ilse Pelkmans (TMG Research gGmbH), published November 2025.

Edited by Tate & Clayburn

Designed by Axelina Gunnarsson

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Table of Contents

- Abbreviation List..... **1**
- Key points..... **2**
- Introduction..... **4**
- Methodology..... **8**
- Cluster 1: Protection of legitimate tenure rights..... **13**
- Cluster 2: Responsible governance of tenure..... **17**
- Cluster 5: Information, consultation, and participation..... **21**
- Cluster 6: Access to remedy..... **25**
- Cluster 8: Promotion of responsible investments..... **29**
- Conclusion..... **31**
- References..... **34**

Abbreviation List

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CLRA	Customary Land Rights Act
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EPA	Environment Protection Agency
ESIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment
ESHIA	Environmental, Social, and Health Impact Assessment
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (of the United Nations)
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
HRCSL	Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
LfL	Land for Life
MDAs	Ministries, Departments, and Agencies
MMDA	Mines and Minerals Development Act
NAP	National Action Plan
NMA	National Minerals Agency
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN)
R4L	Rights4Land
RAIC	Right to Access Information Commission
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SLLAP	Sierra Leone Land Administration Project
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDROP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UN	United Nations
VGGT	Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests

Key Points

Human rights are at risk where land pressure is high

- Land is finite but it is under rapidly increasing pressure from food, energy, urban growth, and land-based climate mitigation (potentially requiring up to one billion hectares of land by 2060), fuelling conflict and inequity.
- Beyond being a mere technocratic or administrative issue, weak tenure and land governance expose communities, especially Indigenous Peoples and rural groups, to marginalization and human rights abuses.

The Rights4Land (R4L) Monitoring Tool connects land governance with human rights

- The R4L Monitoring Tool assesses compliance of land governance with the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests (VGGT) and their underpinning human rights obligations.
- The monitoring tool pairs national legal analysis with local-level realities using standardized, rights-based indicators, bridging law and life.
- Results from the R4L tool assessment enable cross-country and time-bounded benchmarking of VGGT uptake and human rights alignment, while providing a common language and evidence base for joint advocacy by land and human rights actors.

Sierra Leone: R4L assessment highlights progressive land laws but ongoing human rights risks in practice

- The results from Sierra Leone showcase a persistent gap between policy intent and lived reality, indicating where progressive laws are yet to result in the effective protection of land and human rights.
- In practice, the gap is illustrated by fewer than half of respondents participating in the assessment reporting legal, land-tenure security; only 56 per cent experiencing some form of consultation before a land-based project was implemented; and 74 per cent of those who had experienced a land conflict not seeking formal redress. In addition, distribution and payment of benefits by investment companies are perceived as unfair and untransparent, while company grievance systems are slow and unresponsive.

- To address the gap and turn progressive laws into responsible land governance in practice—which secures access to land and livelihoods, and complies with human rights obligations such as the right to food and housing, information, meaningful participation, and access to justice—the Government of Sierra Leone should:
 - fully operationalize land institutions; decentralize and digitize mapping and registration; and publish information on procedures, contacts, costs, and timelines of land-related services
 - ensure a fair and inclusive governance system, respect women’s equal rights and direct participation, proactively disclose environmental and social impact assessments to ensure transparency, and issue legally binding standards on free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC)
 - strengthen alternative dispute resolution mechanisms alongside effective company grievance mechanisms.

Introduction

Land is more than simply a physical asset. In practice, land underpins nearly every aspect of our lives: it grows our food, houses our families, sustains our ecosystems, and is a vital pillar for achieving climate goals. Beyond its ecological and economic functions, land holds cultural, social, and political significance, and access to it determines the realization of fundamental human rights. The land's capacity, however, is finite: one hectare cannot simultaneously serve as farmland, forest, carbon sink, and settlement. Yet, competition for land is intensifying at an unprecedented rate. Population growth, urbanization, and the rising demand for food, energy, and carbon sequestration are placing immense pressure on land systems (IPCC, 2022).

Climate action, ironically, has become a double-edged sword: while critical to our survival, many mitigation strategies, particularly land-based, carbon-offset initiatives — potentially requiring up to one billion hectares of land (roughly twice the size of India) by 2060 — are triggering land grabs, displacing communities, and exacerbating inequalities (TMG, 2024). These dynamics are unfolding against a backdrop of weak land tenure systems and insufficient governance, leaving communities, especially Indigenous Peoples and rural populations, exposed to exploitation and violence. In 2023 alone, 196 land and environmental defenders were murdered for protecting their territories and ecosystems, bringing the global total to over 2,100 since 2012 (Global Witness, 2024). These killings are not isolated incidents, but indicators of a systemic failure to uphold the human rights of those most intimately tied to land.

Within this intensifying global land rush, the underutilization of international and national human rights frameworks in national land governance systems remains a critical gap. Despite their potential to secure tenure rights and protect vulnerable populations, global, regional, and national human rights instruments are often absent from policy responses to land-related challenges (FAO, 2022). Instead, land governance is frequently treated as a technocratic or administrative issue, removed from the lived experiences of smallholder farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and rural communities.

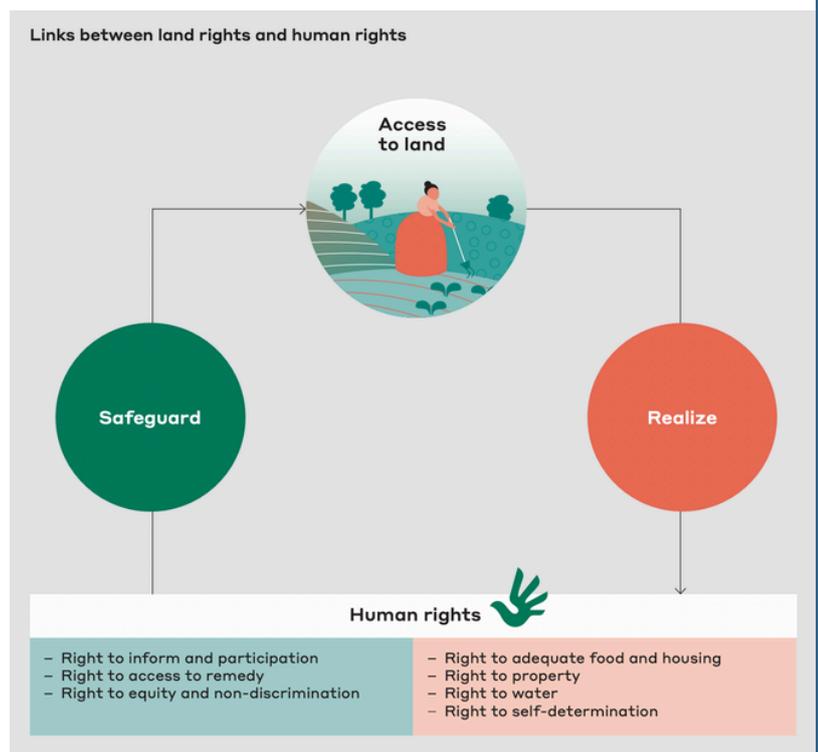


Figure 1

The link between land rights and human rights is both direct and deeply intertwined (see Figure 1). Secure access to land is a precondition for the realization of many economic, social, and cultural rights, including the rights to food, housing, work, and a healthy environment. When tenure rights are insecure or violated, these rights are at risk.

Land injustice is manifested in many forms: from land grabbing and forced evictions to the systemic exclusion of women from land ownership due to discriminatory customs. The consequences are far-reaching, undermining rights to adequate food and housing, property, and self-determination. Alarming, many of these violations remain hidden or unreported, perpetuated by power asymmetries and weak accountability mechanisms (FAO, 2020; Global Witness, 2024). In addition, the realization of human rights, such as rights to information and participation, access to remedy, and equity and non-discrimination, can also function as a safeguard to help secure access to land.

The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests (VGGT), adopted in 2012 by the Committee on World Food Security, provide a landmark framework to address these concerns. Although non-binding, the VGGT are grounded in obligatory human rights standards and promote inclusive, transparent, and equitable land governance systems that prioritize the needs of those most marginalized in society. They call on states to recognize all legitimate tenure rights, whether formally recorded or not, and to protect these rights from infringement (FAO, 2022).

In response to this call, TMG Research, the Danish Institute for Human Rights, and the Malawi Human Rights Commission developed the [Rights4Land platform](#). Building on the experiences of the VGGT, the platform includes two innovative tools that strengthen land governance through a human rights lens, helping advocates and institutions identify, monitor, and address tenure-related rights violations. These tools promote accountability and support rights holders, especially those most at risk of dispossession, by anchoring land governance within internationally recognized human rights obligations, including those enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Sierra Leone: Country background

This report focuses on Sierra Leone, a country undergoing transformation in its land governance landscape. The country's dual tenure system—freehold in the Western Area and customary tenure in the provinces—has long been marked by inequality, ambiguity, and weak protections, particularly for women, young people, and marginalized rural populations.

Historically, land in the Western Area, including Freetown, is governed by general law, allowing for freehold sales and leases, while land in the provinces is held communally under customary law, mediated by traditional authorities such as paramount chiefs. Following a decade-long civil war (1991–2002), Sierra Leone experienced a wave of land-based investments. Mining concessions and large-scale farming operations were the most common, often under the guise of rural development and poverty reduction. However, these projects were frequently negotiated with limited transparency, weak consultation processes, and minimal safeguards for affected communities (Land Portal, 2020).

Although there has been historical state investment in the country, investment interests have expanded to include international actors such as Chinese, Turkish, and Saudi Arabian companies. These investments have often mirrored earlier patterns of exploitation, fuelled by unclear tenure arrangements and competing and underfunded government institutions vulnerable to corruption (HRW, 2014), creating fertile ground for human rights abuses. Indeed, human rights violations such as involuntary displacement, lack of participation in land decisions, and restricted access to resources have become widespread. Marginalized groups, especially women, young people, and land-using families, have been largely excluded from decision-making processes despite being most affected by them. Additionally, tensions have persisted between land-holding and land-using families within chieftaincies, exacerbating intra-community power imbalances.

In response to these challenges and serious human rights violations that accompanied Sierra Leone's decade-long civil war, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) was established as part of the country's post-conflict peacebuilding process. It was first proposed in the 1999 Lomé Peace Agreement and later formally created by Act No. 9 of 2004 to serve as an independent national body mandated to protect and promote human rights (HRCSL, 2025). Since its inception, the HRCSL has undertaken significant work to raise awareness of land-related human rights violations, including producing reports and statutory instruments such as the Public Lands Ordinance, emphasizing the need for robust grievance mechanisms, equitable dispute resolution, and the enforcement of human rights standards in land matters.

Additionally, in recognizing the broader context of reform, Sierra Leone has embarked on a progressive legal transformation. Anchored in its commitment to implement the VGGT, the government adopted the National Land Policy in 2015 and two landmark laws in 2022: the Customary Land Rights Act (CLRA) and the National Land Commission Act. Described as “globally unprecedented” (Trocaire, 2022), these laws aim to harmonize tenure systems, end gender-based discrimination in land access, and empower local communities to exercise full ownership of their land.

Companies operating in Sierra Leone must now obtain the free, prior, and informed consent of communities before starting mining, industrial, or farming activities. These laws criminalize forced acquisitions and introduce procedural safeguards aligned with international human rights standards.

Despite these advancements, gaps remain, particularly in connecting national legal reforms with the lived reality of land users at local level. Most assessments of land governance either focus exclusively on legal frameworks or rely on unstandardized case studies that lack scalability.

Report objectives

This report aims to assess the extent to which human rights instruments are integrated into the land governance framework of Sierra Leone. Through this assessment, this report seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the alignment between national land governance practices and international human rights standards, and to inform future policy development and advocacy efforts. The report showcases how the Rights4Land tools have been applied in Sierra Leone in collaboration with the HRCSL and Land for Life (LfL) – a civil society organization (CSO) – providing a model for other countries grappling with similar challenges.

By making visible the human rights dimensions of land governance, this assessment serves three key functions:

- raising awareness and building capacity among land and human rights advocates
- forging synergies between national and local actors to promote tenure security
- driving political momentum for rights-based reforms that place vulnerable land users at the centre of equitable transitions.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) support enabled LfL and the HRCSL to undertake this assessment, and the FAO continues to advance efforts to improve land governance in law and practice.

In a world in which land injustice often goes unnoticed, Sierra Leone's experience demonstrates the transformative potential of integrating human rights into land governance. This report not only documents that experience but also contributes to a growing body of work calling for land justice as a pathway to sustainable development and the fulfilment of human rights.

Methodology

This report draws on the Rights4Land tools to provide a systematic, rights-based analysis of land governance, using Sierra Leone as a case study example. The methodology is designed to bridge national and local perspectives by comparing legal frameworks with the lived experiences of land users.

The Rights4Land tools

At the core of this methodology are the [Rights4Land Navigator](#) and the [Rights4Land Monitoring tools](#). Developed by TMG Research, the Danish Institute for Human Rights, and the Malawi Human Rights Commission, the tools offer a structured approach for assessing land governance systems in alignment with international human rights standards and the VGGT. These tools map each paragraph of the VGGT against legally binding human rights standards, including United Nations (UN) human rights treaties, key (International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, and various UN declarations. This mapping informs a series of thematic clusters and indicators that are used to evaluate land governance performance at both national and local levels.

The indicators of the Rights4Land Monitoring tool are grounded in the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) methodology for developing human-rights-based indicators. They build as much as possible on existing indicators from other monitoring frameworks, including Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators 1.4.2 (land tenure security) and 16.5.1 (corruption).

The indicators are organized into 11 clusters, based on the VGGT, reflecting critical dimensions of responsible tenure governance:

1. Protection of legitimate tenure rights
2. Responsible governance of tenure
3. Dispossession and land grabbing
4. Multiple functions of land, fisheries, and forests
5. Information, consultation, and participation
6. Access to remedy and justice
7. Prevention of corruption
8. Promotion of responsible investments
9. Protection of human rights defenders
10. Valuation and taxation
11. International cooperation

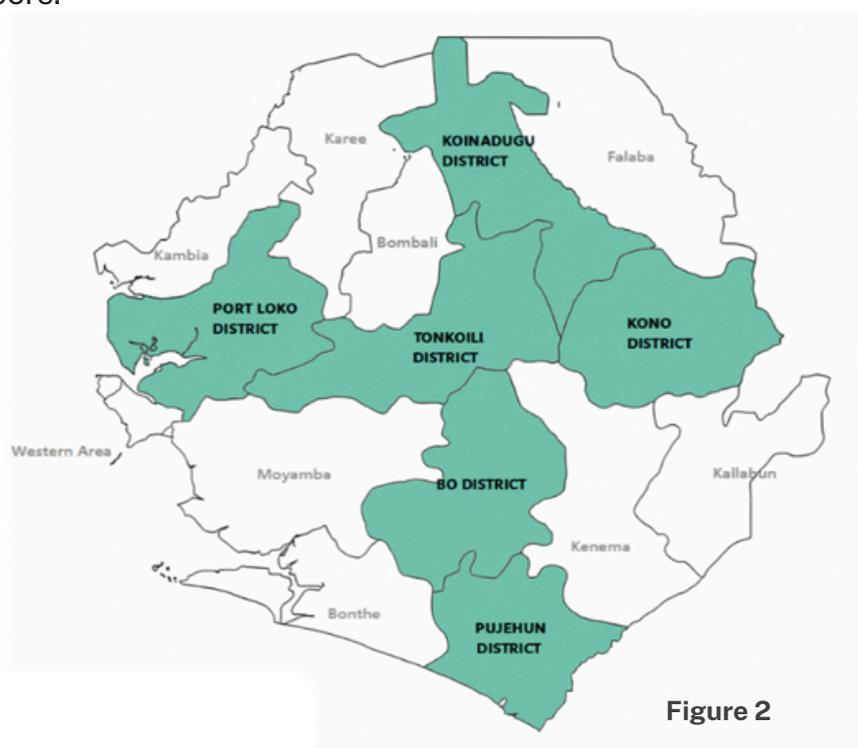
The monitoring tool consists of national and local questionnaires, and questions are organized under the 11 aforementioned clusters. While the full reports of this assessment present findings across all 11 clusters, this summary emphasizes five thematic areas that emerged as particularly significant during the assessment: Clusters 1 and 2 for their unique positioning of land tenure rights; Cluster 5, which cuts across key human rights such as access to information and the right to participation, both fundamental to the responsible governance of tenure; Cluster 6, which addresses the legal frameworks and mechanisms available to respond to human rights violations; and Cluster 8, which highlights pathways for future action to ensure that human rights are fully integrated into land tenure decisions.

National-level methodology

The national questionnaire was designed around the 11 thematic clusters. A critical pillar of the methodology involved stakeholder engagement. Preliminary workshops introduced 40 national stakeholders to the Rights4Land Monitoring Tool and its clusters. Subsequently, the HRCSL identified and conducted interviews with representatives from 15 strategic institutions, including the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Country Planning, the Environment Protection Agency, and the Judiciary of Sierra Leone, to gather expert insights and validate data. The information gathered through this engagement was compiled and iteratively reviewed during 15 formal sessions, resulting in the final inputs to the national online questionnaire. The HRCSL also conducted follow-up visits to eight key ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) to corroborate data and assess the extent to which rights-based principles are reflected in current land governance practices.

Local-level methodology

Local-level data collection was led by the LfL Team with the support of regional HRCSL officers.



Fieldwork was conducted across 60 communities in 18 chiefdoms within the six districts of Bo, Pujehun, Port Loko, Tonkolili, Kono, and Koinadugu (See Figure 2). In each district, enumerators surveyed at least three chiefdoms: one hosting the district headquarters, one with active land-related disputes or investments, and one randomly selected to reflect harder-to-reach areas. A total of 601 structured questionnaires were administered over 30 days, with quotas designed to ensure balance in age, gender, and social representation, including 66 women landowners and 24 people with disabilities.

The survey instrument preserved methodological alignment with the national tool, allowing for a two-sided evaluation of each cluster, where possible. The involvement of HRCSL regional staff further supported consistency and legitimacy during fieldwork and facilitated coordination between local realities and national policy frameworks.

Beyond collecting quantitative data, LfL organized six district-level town hall meetings that engaged approximately 300 stakeholders, followed by a series of radio broadcasts to raise public awareness and contextualize the research process. Each team of enumerators also documented three case studies capturing personal experiences and land-related conflicts, further enriching the qualitative depth of the assessment.

Data integration strategy

One of the distinctive strengths of this methodology is its integrative design. The Rights4Land tools enable a two-pronged assessment of each thematic cluster, examining land governance indicators from both national (legal-institutional) and local (community-practice) perspectives (see Figure 3). This dual-layered strategy allows for a comprehensive understanding of how land governance frameworks, informed by the VGGT, are manifested in both policy and practice. To enable this integration, as previously mentioned, a common set of human-rights-based indicators was developed, organized into 11 thematic clusters and then structured into three types of indicators: structural, process, and outcome.

Wherever feasible, the same indicator was addressed through both national and local data sources. Similarly, provisions for consultation and participation were examined in terms of both law and how affected communities experience them on the ground. By anchoring both legal and grassroots insights within the same indicator framework, the assessment generates a multidimensional picture that bridges the frequently siloed discourses of tenure governance and human rights.

This integration allows for meaningful comparison, highlights implementation gaps, and provides an evidence base for rights-based policy reform that places affected communities (particularly women, young people, and marginalized groups) at the centre of land governance.

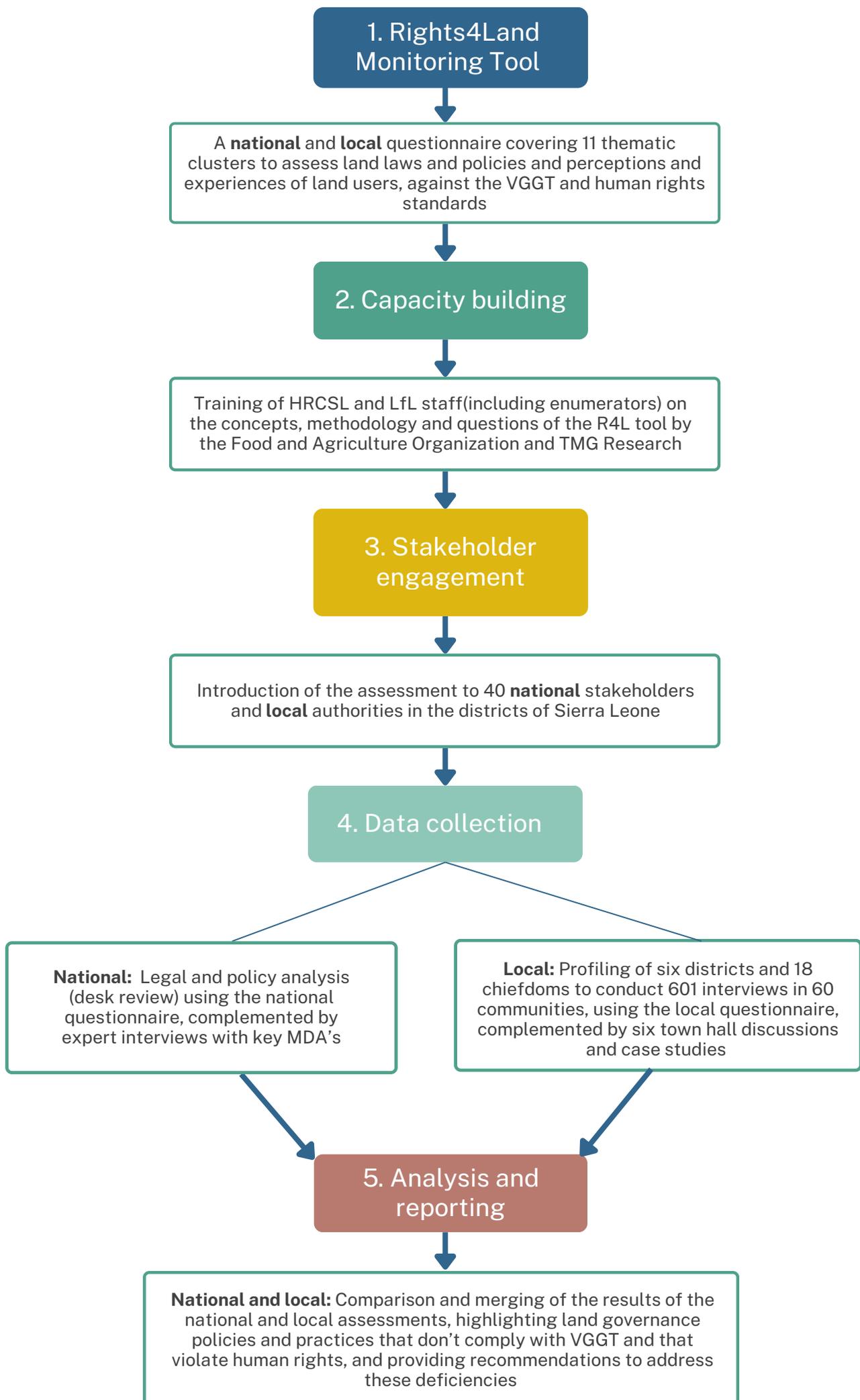


Figure 3

Limitations

As with any field-based assessment, this research has several limitations. While significant efforts were made to engage all relevant stakeholders, their availability and responsiveness varied across institutions, occasionally affecting the comprehensiveness of the national-level data. At local level, limited infrastructure, literacy challenges, and sensitivities around land issues occasionally constrained the depth of qualitative insights. Additionally, some clusters, such as those related to responsible investment and corruption, relied more heavily on anecdotal evidence.

Nonetheless, the participatory design, rights-based framing, and triangulation of data sources significantly strengthens the reliability of the findings. Taken together, this methodology supports a holistic understanding of tenure governance in Sierra Leone and provides an evidence-based foundation for policy recommendations that uphold the rights of land users and advance equitable land reform.

Cluster 1: Protection of legitimate tenure rights

Introduction

The concept of legitimate tenure rights refers to a broad range of rights from formal rights and legal ownership to non-formal rights, limited rights of use and access, and customary land rights. The protection of these different forms of legitimate tenure rights is fundamental to achieving equitable land governance and ensuring the realization of an adequate standard of living (ICESCR Article 11) including the right to adequate housing, food, and livelihoods.

Legislative and institutional framework

Sierra Leone's land governance regime is shaped by a dual legal structure: freehold tenure in the Western Area and customary tenure across the provinces. Recent legal reforms such as the 2022 CLRA and the National Land Commission Act signal important progress in recognizing diverse tenure systems. They represent a significant step towards equitable and secure tenure rights by explicitly acknowledging customary land rights and establishing mechanisms for community land governance. They are in line with the VGGT and provide evidence of national/local adoption of international human rights laws.

Despite this progress, some key legal and institutional gaps persist. The national-level assessment reveals that national legislation remains inadequate in fully eliminating discrimination. For example, the Devolution of Estates Act (2007) and the CLRA (2022) have made important strides in addressing historical biases, such as the exclusion of Creole peoples from land acquisition in the provinces and the marginalization of women in land arrangements. However, they fall short of providing full protection for women's land rights in marital and inheritance contexts. There is no explicit safeguard for a surviving spouse's right to permanent crops or investments on family land, leaving room for customary norms that continue to exclude women from ownership and inheritance despite their vital role in land-based livelihoods. These provisions contravene state obligations to secure women's access to property and land, as defined in CEDAW (Article 16.1 and General Comment 34, Article 33) and contradicts Sierra Leone's national Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act 2023.

Discrimination against women also persists in political participation. Section 8(1) (b) of the Chieftaincy Act (2009) prevents women from holding paramount chief positions in some traditional settings in the North-East, North-West, and Eastern provinces. This contravenes obligations under CEDAW Article 7(b), the Maputo Protocol Article 9, and the GEWE Act of 2023, which all emphasize the right of rural women to participate in public life and decision-making processes.

Tenure security in practice: Rights holders' perspectives

Despite the overall progressive land laws intended to recognize and secure legitimate tenure rights, the tenure rights of most land users remain largely informal. The local-level assessment reveals that among 601 respondents in six districts, 54 per cent had no formal documentation for their land. However, disparities between urban and rural areas are significant: 83 per cent of respondents in peri-urban Bo had formal documentation compared to only 17 per cent in rural Koinadugu.

Respondents cited motivations for formalizing land rights, including preparation for private investment, safeguarding inheritance, and enabling personal development, but they faced barriers such as cost, technical complexity, and administrative burdens. As a result, many rely on informal or customary arrangements that offer little protection against dispossession.

Perceptions of tenure security are high. While 74 per cent of respondents felt secure in their land rights, 2 per cent reported feeling likely or very likely to lose their land in the next five years. Major sources of insecurity included state expropriation (14 per cent), acquisition by private investors (13 per cent), and intra-family disputes following a death (10 per cent).

Land-related conflicts are widespread: 34 per cent of respondents had experienced conflict in the past three years, with this figure reaching 73 per cent in Kono District. Common disputes included intra-family conflicts (25 per cent), disputes with neighbours (20 per cent), and conflicts with private landholders (20 per cent). High land values, weak documentation systems, and entrenched customary authority contribute to overlapping claims and boundary disputes.

Comparative analysis

A comparison of Sierra Leone's legal reforms and practical outcomes for rights holders reveals a persistent implementation gap. The legal framework, although increasingly robust, relies heavily on mechanisms, such as formal documentation, that remain inaccessible to much of the rural population. This undermines statutory protections and creates a disconnect between legal recognition and lived tenure security.

Legal provisions intended to formalize customary land ownership and recognize community land governance are undermined by persistent ambiguities in practice. While legal recognition of tenure rights exists, implementation is hampered by limited awareness, institutional capacity, and resources. Furthermore, the institutional infrastructure necessary for implementation is not yet fully in place. The National Land Commission and District Land Commissions are still being operationalized, and affordable, accessible land services remain out of reach for many. Until these structures are functional, the transformative potential of legislative reforms will remain unrealized.

Discriminatory customary norms, particularly those affecting women, remain entrenched despite being legally prohibited. In addition to customary practices, the lack of legal clarity around inheritance and ownership in cases of marital dissolution or death also continues to expose women to tenure insecurity.

In the context of rising demands for land—due to rapid urbanization, land investments, or environmental action—weak implementation of the legal framework continues to give rise to land conflicts, within and between families, and with public and private actors. In an attempt to address growing land conflicts, the government established a Complaints Committee that received 305 complaints between 2018 and 2021, yet only investigated and resolved 118 of them. The committee was immediately dissolved after submitting its report.

Alignment with human rights standards

Under international human rights law—particularly ICESCR—which is ratified by the Government of Sierra Leone, as well as VGGT 4.4, states are obligated to confer legal security of tenure upon all persons, regardless of the form of tenure. This includes protection against arbitrary dispossession, harassment, and forced eviction, as defined in ICESCR’s General Comments 4, 7, and 26, which also clarify that legal security of tenure is a core aspect of the right to adequate housing (ICESCR Article 11). In Sierra Leone, these standards are not yet fully realized in practice, despite progress being made with the recent land law reforms. The exclusion of vulnerable groups from formal documentation processes and the persistence of discriminatory customary norms constitute violations of these international obligations.

Similarly, international standards on the equal rights of men and women to property and land—as defined in CEDAW Article 16.1, CEDAW General Comment 34, Article 33, and the Maputo Protocol Article 19.c, under the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the provisions of the national GEWE Act 2023—are being violated. The assessment of both the legal framework and the local reality experienced by land users shows violations of the right of women to equality and non-discrimination.

Conclusion and recommendations

Sierra Leone has made commendable legal strides in strengthening tenure rights, especially under the 2022 land laws. However, these reforms remain aspirational for many communities, particularly where formal documentation is inaccessible or gender-discriminatory customs prevail.

To close the implementation gap and ensure the realization of the rights of land users to land, housing, and food, the following steps are recommended:

- Clarify customary land rights: Following state obligations to confer legal security of tenure upon all persons—in line with standards provided by ICESCR Article 11 and General Comments 4, 7, and 26, and VGGT 4.4—regardless of the form of tenure, the government should clearly define the conditions under which long-term settlers, such as those who have lived on the land for over 50 years or cultivated permanent crops, may claim land rights. These conditions should be integrated into the forthcoming Land Title Registration Act—which is currently at the drafting stage with the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Country Planning and the Office of the Attorney General—to provide clarity and legal certainty. At the same time, the National Council of Paramount Chiefs should receive consistent training in the provisions and obligations of the new land laws, especially in districts such as Kono, Koinadugu, and Tonkolili, where resistance has been reported.
- Promote gender equality: The government should align the Devolution of Estates Act (2007), the CLRA (2022), and the Chieftaincy Act (2009) with the provisions of the GEWE Act (2023) and international human rights standards provided by CEDAW Article 16.1 and General Recommendation 34, and the Maputo Protocol Article 20.1, by explicitly protecting women’s rights to inherit and own land, including permanent investments in family land, and allowing women to hold paramount chief positions and participate in public decision-making on equal terms with men.
- Operationalize land institutions: The government should expedite the establishment of the National Land Commission and ensure all 14 District Land Commissions are fully functional. These institutions should be staffed through merit-based recruitment and be adequately resourced to implement their mandates. Equally important is ensuring they are physically and socially accessible to all communities, including women, young people, and marginalized groups.

These recommendations will secure access to land for people in vulnerable and marginalized situations, which is a precondition of realizing their right to an adequate standard of living (ICESCR Article 11).

Cluster 2: Responsible governance of tenure

Introduction

This cluster concerns the administration of tenure rights and the safeguards in place to protect land users from dispossession.

Responsible governance of tenure requires the existence of clear laws and institutions, accessible services, and mechanisms that promote accountability and reduce the number of disputes. International human rights bodies, particularly ICESCR, have made specific observations and recommendations on the necessity of ensuring adequate demarcation, mapping, and registration of land, and on clear safeguards prior to dispossession, with a view to ensuring adequate protection of land, property, and resource rights (ICESCR General Comment 26).

Legislative and institutional framework

The National Land Policy (2015) and National Land Commission Act (2022) have introduced ambitious reforms aimed at formalizing land tenure and improving administrative capacity. The latter establishes a multi-tiered structure for land governance, including the National Land Commission, District Land Commissions, Chiefdom Land Committees, and Town/Village Area Land Committees (sections 32, 42, and 49). These bodies are tasked with overseeing land mapping, demarcation, registration, and conflict resolution. A national digital land information system has been under development since 2024, but land registration at regional offices remains paper based. The Sierra Leone Land Administration Project (SLLAP) aims to effectively modernize and decentralize land services.

These reforms align with standards enshrined in VGGT 6.2 (delivery of services section) and global human rights instruments such as ICESCR General Comment 26. These instruments emphasize the right to equal, accessible, affordable, and transparent public services, especially for marginalized populations. Ideally, the new structures and digital systems will enable individuals to transform informal tenure into formally recognized rights, thereby reducing land-related conflicts and curbing corruption. However, very little land in Sierra Leone has been formally mapped or demarcated at the time of this research.

Land governance in practice: Rights holders' perspectives

Field data collected across six districts confirms a large gap between national policy and local realities. Only 21 per cent of respondents indicated that land in their communities had been mapped or was in the process of being mapped (see Figure 4). The remaining majority either reported no such initiative or had no awareness of any efforts underway.

Has there been a process with public authorities to mao/register your land in the last three years?

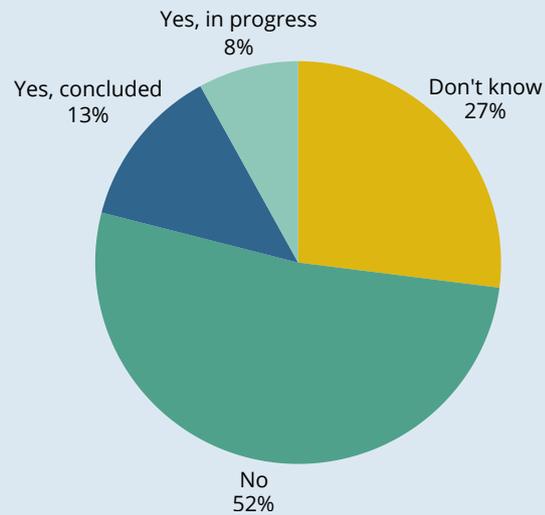


Figure 4

The availability and accessibility of land services remain a major obstacle. In many rural communities, government land-title registration offices are physically distant and services are viewed as overly bureaucratic or prohibitively expensive. Similarly, there is a limited number of qualified licensed surveyors at district level.

Beyond logistics, informational barriers are acute. Only 30 per cent of respondents were aware of the formal steps needed to register land. Some respondents were unaware that land leased to private companies could not be registered, a sign that underscores the need for greater transparency and public education.

Among respondents, 40 per cent indicated there was no information available to them about official processes to demarcate, map, and register land. A similar number (39 per cent) of respondents had no idea whether such information even exists. Some respondents mentioned the complex legal language (25 per cent), lack of translation into local languages (15 per cent), and cost of obtaining information (82 per cent) as further barriers that limit access to information about land policies and procedures for land-user registration, particularly in remote areas.

Comparative analysis

There is a vast disconnect between progressive national policy frameworks and the lived experience of communities. The formal governance infrastructure remains aspirational for most rural Sierra Leoneans. In practice, governance continues to rely heavily on customary norms and ad hoc administrative arrangements, often managed by traditional authorities.

Moreover, very little land in Sierra Leone has been formally mapped or demarcated. Without geospatial records, administrative enforcement is weak, boundaries remain contested, and the risk of tenure insecurity persists, particularly in areas targeted for investment or affected by urban expansion. Notwithstanding these challenges, it is important to note that efforts are being made by development partners such as the World Bank, FAO, and the German Ministry of Agriculture to provide funding support to implement these reforms.

Alignment with human rights standards

This gap in mapping represents more than just a technical failure; it is also a human rights concern. The right of access to public services and information is protected under multiple international instruments, including:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 19.2 and Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) Article 19 (freedom to seek and receive information)
- Aarhus Convention (environmental governance and access to information)
- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights Article 9 (right to receive information)
- ICESCR General Comment No. 26, section C (obligation of states to provide land services that are prompt, accessible, and non-discriminatory, especially in remote areas).

The VGGT (particularly section 6 on the delivery of services) reinforces these rights by calling for accessible land registration, elimination of unnecessary legal procedures, and simplified services tailored to the needs of all population groups, including the most vulnerable.

Conclusion and recommendations

Sierra Leone's legal architecture for land governance is commendable in its ambition and human rights orientation. However, its implementation is stymied by resource constraints, institutional inertia, and a lack of clear communication with the public. Without tangible progress in operationalizing land services—particularly in rural areas—the goal of responsible tenure governance remains elusive.

To bridge this gap, the following actions are recommended:

- **Operationalize district and local land institutions:** The government should expedite the set-up of District Land Commissions and community-level land committees with clearly defined mandates, trained personnel, and adequate funding, complying with VGGT 6.1 and ICESCR General Comment 26, section C. Where capacity does not exist to have a stand-alone office, qualified District Land Officers should be attached to the local councils of the respective districts and supported in carrying out their daily functions.
- **Simplify and decentralize land services:** The government should ensure that land registration services are accessible at chiefdom or district level, with affordable, transparent, and time-bound procedures, ensuring compliance with VGGT 6.3. Prioritize the digitization and public accessibility of land records as a tool for accountability and tenure security.
- **Develop and disseminate public service charters:** The government should clearly outline procedures, costs, timelines, and contact points for land-related services. Translate this information into local languages and distribute through trusted community networks and national and local mainstream media, to improve access to information, enhance transparency, and increase trust.
- **Clarify roles between customary and statutory authorities:** The government and CSOs should raise awareness among rural citizens about the division of roles and responsibilities between traditional chiefs and formal land institutions to create clarity on where to seek information and services, and who to hold accountable.

Cluster 5: Information, consultation, and participation

Introduction

Information, consultation, and participation are central to equitable land and natural resource governance. They encompass the right to seek, receive, and impart information, as well as the right of affected individuals and communities, especially women and other marginalized groups, to actively shape decisions about land use, investments, and resource extraction. Meaningful consultation goes beyond one-off disclosure; it is a continuous, good-faith process before, during, and after decision-making, providing genuine opportunities to influence outcomes.

Legislative and institutional framework

Sierra Leone has undertaken significant reforms that codify access to information and participation rights. At the national level, Section 25 of the 1991 Constitution, the Right to Access Information Act (2013), and the Environment Protection Agency Act (2022) protect access to public information, including environmental information. The Mines and Minerals Development Act (MMDA) (2022) and the CLRA (2022) require the documented consent of landowners for mining licences and embed free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) obligations in community land transactions and resettlement processes. Together with the National Development-Induced Resettlement Act (2023), these instruments align domestic law with VGGT guidance on consultation and participation and with international human rights standards.

Despite this strong legal scaffold, institutions mandated to operationalize these rights, such as the Environment Protection Agency (EPA), the National Minerals Agency (NMA), and the Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC), face persistent funding, staffing, and logistical constraints, limiting their presence and effectiveness in remote areas where land-based investments occur.

Consultation and participation in practice: Rights holders' perspectives

Local-level evidence highlights a sizeable gap between legal ambition and lived experience. Of 601 respondents across six districts, 110 (18 per cent) reported at least one land- or resource-affecting project in the past three years. Among these 110 respondents, 56 per cent said they were adequately consulted before project approval, 25 per cent said they were not, and 18 per cent did not know (see Figure 5).

Did consultation take place before approval of a land-based project/measure?

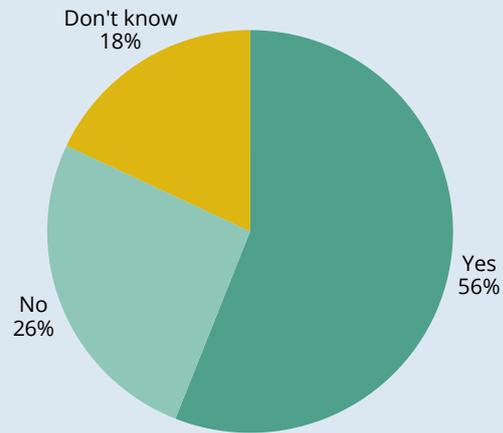


Figure 5

When the decision was reached for the various projects to start, 94 of the 110 respondents (85 per cent) said they were no longer consulted during the implementation phase, while 16 (15 per cent) said they were further consulted during this phase (see Figure 6).

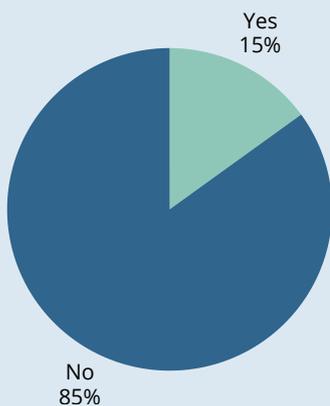


Figure 6

Did consultation take place during implementation of a land-based project/measure?

Of those who experienced pre-approval consultation, only 30 per cent were directly consulted; the majority engaged through intermediaries. Among 19 women who reported implementation-phase consultation, only two were consulted directly. Consultations were frequently described as public meetings framed as information sessions about already-approved projects, rather than conversations capable of altering decisions. Where better practices were reported, most notably in Tonkolili with Miro Forestry (which piloted the Responsible Agricultural Investment principles of the Committee on World Food Security), consultations directly targeted landowners and community stakeholders. The substance and quality of information varied. While many respondents understood the language and format, key topics—such as environmental and social impacts, consequences for livelihoods, women’s differentiated impacts, and effects on the total land area of the community—were inconsistently addressed. Time to digest information and provide input was often insufficient. Just over half of respondents (53 per cent) felt their views influenced final decisions.

Among respondents who were consulted, 94 per cent reported granting consent; however, a minority alleged coercion or decisions by authorities or individuals portraying as family members, and some reported land loss without payment. Impact assessment practice was widely seen as formalistic: public disclosure meetings were sometimes treated as the sole consultation, with weak follow-up on concerns. The majority of respondents (52 per cent) did not know whether final environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA) reports were shared, 35 per cent said they were, and 14 per cent said they were not.

Community land-use planning remains limited: 78 per cent reported no rural land-use plan. Where plans exist, they rarely affect rights or reflect inclusive input. In some areas, ad hoc by-laws (e.g. Kono's cattle-settlement calendar) attempt to manage recurring resource conflicts but underscore the absence of integrated land-use governance.

Comparative analysis

In theory, Sierra Leone demonstrates almost complete alignment with international standards for access to information and participation in land governance. In practice, three gaps persist:

1. Procedural gap: Consultations are too often late, one-off, or framed as disclosure rather than deliberation capable of altering outcomes.
2. Institutional capacity gap: Under-resourced EPA, NMA, and RAIC offices hinder regular local presence, proactive disclosure, and systematic monitoring of consultation quality.
3. Inclusion gap: Women, young people, land users without formal title, and minority groups are less likely to be directly consulted, and documentation is rarely available in time to support informed, collective decision-making.

These gaps erode trust, reduce the legitimacy of consent, and heighten conflict risks, particularly where investments proceed amid weak land-use planning and overlapping customary authority.

Alignment with human rights standards

The current legal framework reflects ICCPR Article 19 (access to information) and Article 25 (participation), CEDAW Article 14(2) (rural women's participation in development planning), United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) Article 10 (peasants' participation), VGGT 3B.6 (consultation and participation), UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Article 32.2. The latter protects the rights of Indigenous Peoples through the obligation to obtain FPIC prior to the approval of any project affecting their land. The CLRA's (2022) FPIC requirements extend these protections to community-land relations.

Nonetheless, inconsistent, late, or non-inclusive consultations, as well as limited disclosure and accessibility to ESIA outputs, mean that the realization of these rights remains uneven. Where consent is secured without meaningful participation free of coercion, compliance with FPIC and due-process standards is not fully achieved.

Conclusion and recommendations

Sierra Leone has built a robust legal foundation for access to information, consultation, and participation in land governance. The decisive test now lies in its implementation: ensuring consultations are meaningful, iterative, inclusive, and capable of influencing decisions, with transparent documentation and accessible impact assessments. The following actions are recommended:

- **Operationalize FPIC in practice:** The government should issue binding FPIC regulations under the CLRA (2022) and the MMDA (2022) that define minimum standards (timing, representation, women's direct participation, accessible formats, reasonable timeframes, and documentation of consent/withholding of consent) and require evidence of compliance prior to approval, during implementation, and at review stages.
- **Standardize consultation quality:** The government (through the National Land Commission, EPA, and NMA) together with CSOs and community representatives, should co-develop a nationally applicable consultation checklist, aligned with VGGT and FPIC, to ensure the quality of consultation processes. Make the checklist and completed records public and attach them to lease, licence, and environmental, social, and health impact assessment (ESHIA) files.
- **Strengthen institutional presence and oversight:** The government should provide resources to EPA, NMA, RAIC, and the National/District Land Commissions to maintain a regular field presence, monitor consultations, and verify that public disclosure meetings are not treated as the sole consultation.

Land users will be in a position to genuinely influence or take control over decisions that affect their land, resources, and livelihoods only once these quality-assurance measures have been put in place. Implementing international rights to information and meaningful participation enables land users to secure their access to land and realize their right to an adequate standard of living.

Cluster 6: Access to remedy

Introduction

Access to remedy concerns whether people can obtain timely, affordable, and effective redress, through formal courts or informal mechanisms, when their tenure rights are violated. It spans compensation, resettlement, and restitution for all forms of tenure; the ability to challenge public decisions (including environmental approvals and calculation of compensation); and access to legal support, especially for women, rural people and other marginalized groups.

Legislative and institutional framework

Sierra Leone's framework for remedies has expanded significantly. The 1991 Constitution (s.21) guarantees protection of property and compensation for compulsory acquisition. The National Development-Induced Resettlement Act (2023), CLRA (2022), MMDA (2022), and Environment Protection Agency Act (2022) provide specific bases for compensation, resettlement, restitution, and challenging environmental decisions. The High Court of Sierra Leone created a new division named Land, Property and Environment Division (2019) to hear environment-related cases and the Anti Land-Grabbing Unit of the Sierra Leone Police is tasked with investigating reported land-grabbing cases. Access to legal aid is anchored in the Legal Aid Act (2012), and the 2022 CLRA (s.30) enables government support for communities during land negotiations. The Arbitration Act (2022) strengthens alternative dispute resolution (ADR) across the justice chain.

When asked why they had not sought legal remedy, one respondent replied: "The lands were sold by the chiefs and the government approved [the decision]. Who are we, very poor people, to go to court? Which chief do I go to when they were the ones who sold the lands? We leave it all to God. I heard that some people are in court, but me, I don't have money to go to court."

Despite these advances, core implementing bodies — such as the Legal Aid Board (LAB), EPA, and NMA — face funding, staffing, and logistical constraints, limiting their presence beyond regional hubs and curbing effective coverage in remote districts where need is high.

Access to remedy in practice: Rights holders' perspectives

Local data reveals a persistent implementation gap. Of 601 respondents, 156 reported land-related conflict in the last three years and only 39 (25 per cent of those with conflict; 7 per cent overall) sought legal remedy. A large majority (117 of 156; 75 per cent) did not pursue formal redress, citing the following reasons: perceived influence by politicians and traditional authorities in large-scale investment areas, lack of documentary proof, distance to services, cost, procedural complexity, perceived sensitivity/political nature of cases, discrimination, and non-recognition of customary rights.

Among those who sought help, 44 per cent received legal support (state, CSO paralegals, or private counsel), 36 per cent did not, and 20 per cent received partial support.

Source of legal support to vulnerable and marginalized people?

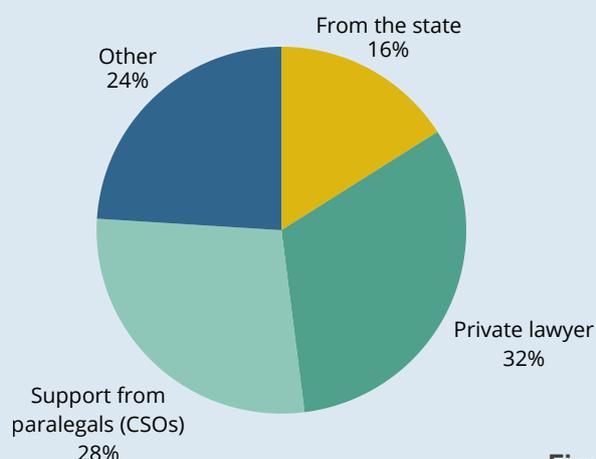


Figure 7

Reparations are uneven. Among those who experienced dispossession, eviction, or relocation, 66 per cent received no compensation, 15 per cent received partial compensation, and 19 per cent received full redress. Valuation processes are opaque; communities report little influence over compensation rates, with historic “floor prices”, or minimum allowable price per hectare of land that can be charged for leasing, (e.g. USD12/ha/year leases) often treated as fixed official values that foreclose negotiation. Replacement land may be inferior in location or value, and sanctions and enforcement are weak: of 130 people reporting rights violations, 80 per cent said perpetrators were not reprimanded or required to compensate them.

Customary or informal dispute resolution mechanisms are widely used (reported by 101 respondents), but outcomes are mixed (see Figure 7): 28 per cent of respondents found them to be satisfactory, 24 per cent partially satisfactory, and 48 per cent unsatisfactory. Users reported bias, cultural norms disadvantaging women, and untransparent decisions due to corruption and lack of understanding of the CLRA (2022) among traditional authorities; nonetheless, ADR remains the first, most accessible tier of dispute handling.

Comparative analysis

While Sierra Leone's legal architecture for remedies has strengthened, a persistent missing middle', in terms of lacking procedures and resources to ensure its effective implementation, separates law from lived outcomes, separates law from lived outcomes. Legal avenues exist but access to them lags behind due to a thin local presence on the ground and under-resourced institutions. Procedures for compensation valuation and for challenging ES(H)IA outcomes remain opaque. Inclusion is uneven, with women, people with disabilities, poorer households, and those without documents facing higher hurdles in both formal and customary redress mechanisms. An enforcement deficit, irregular sanctions, weak follow-through on judgments, and inconsistent company grievance outcomes further erode trust, depress uptake of formal remedies, and sustain conflict risks in investment-affected areas.

Alignment with human rights standards

The institutional framework of Sierra Leone reflects human rights standards on effective (accessible, affordable, and timely) remedy (ICCPR Article 2(3)), and fair trial and legal aid (ICCPR Article 14; VGGT 3.1.4, 6.6, 21.1, 21.3, and 21.6; UNDROP 12; CEDAW General Recommendation 34). The framework (partly) corresponds to the standards on adequate, effective, and prompt reparation (ICESCR General Comment 7 on forced evictions, and basic principles and guidelines on development-based evictions and displacement, Annex 1, A/HRC/4/18), including the right to appeal against valuations and compensation (VGGT 16.6 and UNDROP Article 12.2). In practice, however, barriers to access, weak enforcement, opaque valuations, and inconsistent and untransparent compensation (including failure to ensure co-beneficiary status for women) mean these standards are not yet fully realized.

Conclusion and recommendations

Sierra Leone has taken commendable steps to establish the legal right to remedy; the priority now is implementation that is accessible, affordable, gender-responsive, and enforceable. The following actions are recommended:

- Expedite and strengthen out-of-court arbitration and recognize paralegals in the formal justice chain: The government should fast-track implementation of the Arbitration Act (2022) with district-level panels; institutionalize ADR as a first resort in land cases; formally recognize and integrate paralegal casework (intake, mediation notes, and referrals) into court and administrative procedures; and provide resources for mobile ADR services for remote communities.
- Scale community legal empowerment through CSOs and expand coverage: The government should provide sustained funding and coordination support to CSOs to extend paralegal networks to chiefdom level, run joint clinics with the LAB, standardize referral pathways, and track outcomes, prioritizing women, young people, people with disabilities, and Indigenous Peoples.

Both recommendations will support the Government of Sierra Leone in complying with its international obligations to ensure effective access to justice, as defined in VGGT 6.6, CEDAW General Recommendation 34, and UNDROP 12.3.

Cluster 8: Promotion of responsible investments

Introduction

This cluster examines state duties to protect and business duties to respect human rights in land-related investments, with a focus on whether company grievance mechanisms are accessible, predictable, and effective from rights holders' perspectives.

Legislative and institutional framework

Responsible investment principles are embedded in recent reforms: the CLRA (2022) (part 7 on responsible investment; section 43 on investor conduct), the MMDA (2022), the amended Environmental Protection Agency Act (2022), the National Investment Board Act (2022), the amended Wildlife Conservation Act (2022), and the National Development-Induced Resettlement Act (2023). The HRCSL, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Ireland, has drafted a National Policy on Business and Human Rights and is advancing a National Action Plan (NAP). The document is nearing completion to be submitted to the Attorney General's Office. The NAP specifically focuses on "Land and Environment" as a thematic area for extensive discussion.

Responsible investment in practice: Rights holders' perspectives

Most disputes are intra-family or inter-community rather than company-related: 95 per cent (571/601) of respondents reported no company-linked disputes, while 5 per cent (30/601) did. Of the 30 who did, only 10 pursued the issue with the investor; four found complaint procedures easy to access, five found them difficult, and one fairly easy. Outcomes were modest: 7 of the 10 said the company did not address their grievance, while three reported partial or satisfactory efforts (sometimes with local authority involvement). Patterns vary: in Malen (Socfin) long-running grievances relate to FPIC and lease-rent flows via authorities; in Koidu Limited/Cheng Li areas, acquisition and benefit concerns persist; and in Tonkolili (Miro Forestry), expectations centre on employment commitments and responsiveness to complaints. In this context, rights advocates continue to press private-sector management and government to remedy perceived injustices in the redistribution of land-lease revenues, arguing that a greater share should reach affected landowners directly rather than through intermediaries.

Comparative analysis

A credible national architecture for responsible investment exists, yet local practice often falls short. Company grievance systems exist but can be hard to find, slow, or unresponsive; records and feedback loops are sparse; and transparency around payments and commitments is uneven, weakening trust and limiting uptake. Communities sometimes expect retroactive correction of legacy issues under new laws, which companies and authorities may be unable— or unwilling— to deliver. This gap sustains low resolution rates and continued reliance on public authorities or informal mediation.

Alignment with human rights standards

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (Pillar 2), state that business enterprises should have processes in place that enable a response and redress to any adverse human rights impact they cause or to which they contribute. Companies are also required to deal with grievances independently through operational-level, grievance-redress mechanisms to progressively assess their impact with the genuine aim of operating as a responsible business entity (see also VGGT 3.2).

Practice is partially aligned with these standards: mechanisms exist, but accessibility, predictability, transparency, and rights-compatibility are inconsistent, with women and other marginalized groups facing the greatest barriers.

Conclusion and recommendations

To translate national commitments into local results, the following actions should be prioritized:

- **Enact a comprehensive agribusiness law:** The government should initiate a reform process aimed at enacting a comprehensive law on large-scale agribusiness, as is currently in place for mining. This law should aim to provide a clear legal framework for large-scale land acquisition processes specifically suitable for agribusinesses— that is, a framework consistent with the provisions in the CLRA (2022) that serves to further strengthen responsible investment in Sierra Leone.
- **Enhance community awareness and corporate compliance monitoring:** The HRCSL should collaborate with CSOs to increase awareness among communities of existing business and human rights standards and to monitor compliance of investment companies with the law.
- **Establish community-level monitoring mechanisms:** CSOs and donor partners should devise community-level monitoring mechanisms using community scorecards and other tools to ensure there is regular, open interface between the management of investment companies and local communities.
- **Strengthen local accountability through social audits:** Efforts to strengthen local accountability through social audit processes should be intensified, led by CSOs.

Conclusion

Sierra Leone's experience shows that anchoring land reform in the VGGT and applying a human-rights-based approach can transform governance from aspiration to action, providing legal change is matched by accessible, adequately resourced implementation. The Rights4Land assessment bridges law and life by comparing national frameworks with local outcomes, equipping both national and local organizations with data to diagnose the missing middle between laws and everyday land governance practice. This survey focuses on a few clusters only, highlighting human rights gaps in terms of secured tenure rights, access to information, accessibility and availability of land services, participation in land-use decision-making processes, access to effective remedy, and responsible land investments. The results for all 11 clusters can be found in the full assessment reports of LfL and the HRCSL.

Implementation of the VGGT in Sierra Leone: Impact and limitations

Within the clusters outlined in this report, the case of Sierra Leone underscores both the influence and the limits of global guidance. The VGGT has clearly shaped policy and law, most notably the 2015 National Land Policy and the 2022–2023 legal architecture (CLRA, National Land Commission Act, EPA, MMDA), by mainstreaming recognition of legitimate (including customary) tenure, FPIC, decentralized governance, and guidelines for compensation and redress. Yet local findings show that endorsement of guidelines and enactment of progressive laws do not automatically translate into effective, equitable practice. Procedural and capacity gaps, as well as lack of inclusion, erode trust, weaken consent, and sustain conflict, even under a strong normative scaffold. Additionally, progressive laws alone are no guarantee that social–cultural norms and power relations in chiefdoms and state institutions will shift in practice.

In line with VGGT 6.1, real-world results depend on sustained investment in implementation, adequate funding, clear procedures, trained staff, and sufficient time allocation, as well as on whether duty bearers and rights holders at every level know their rights and trust the rules. Without information sharing and continuous awareness raising, formal guarantees remain paper promises.

Looking ahead, the common denominator across the recommendations for Sierra Leone is a shift from theoretical laws to services people can use. This involves:

- getting the National/District Land Commissions and local committees up and running with clear transparent non-discriminatory procedures and budgets to ensure availability, affordability, accessibility, and quality of land services
- decentralizing and digitizing mapping and registration to secure access to land for vulnerable land users as a precondition for realizing their right to an adequate standard of living
- improving access to information and clarifying FPIC procedures throughout project lifecycles to ensure land users can fully exercise their rights to meaningfully participate in and influence land-use and environmental decision-making
- publishing ESIA's, making human rights impact assessments mandatory, and providing consent records in order to comply with the CLRA (2022)
- realizing the right to access to justice by mainstreaming ADR, recognizing paralegals, and funding mobile legal aid services, all with gender-responsive design.

These steps will help the Government of Sierra Leone to realize tenure security for its citizens and fulfil its duty to progressively realize human rights, particularly for people in vulnerable and marginalized situations.

Added value of a human-rights-based approach and the Rights4Land assessment for LfL and HRCSL

In general, the Rights4Land assessment creates a common understanding of how human rights and land governance intersect. It also provides a common language for human rights and land advocates that enables them to engage in joint advocacy for land rights. This gives the assessment the potential to forge non-traditional alliances between the land and human rights sectors, as well as between state and non-state actors, which can contribute to mutual trust and open up new pathways, networks, and platforms for (joint) action for responsible land governance. LfL and HRCSL combined efforts for the first time when conducting this assessment.

The Rights4Land assessment helps HRCSL and LfL realize their mandates in four ways. First, it connects voluntary guidelines to binding human rights, strengthening the legal footing and language of policy recommendations and advocacy for responsible land governance.

Second, it exposes land governance policies and practices that violate the human rights of vulnerable land users, providing LfL and the HRCSL with proof for evidence-based advocacy and sound policy recommendations. This data can also be used to hold the Government of Sierra Leone accountable for taking corrective measures to avoid land-related human rights violations in the future. In addition, it can be used as a benchmark to assess progress in terms of responsible land governance in Sierra Leone over time.

Third, the documented cases of land-related human rights violations provide admissible inputs for regular human rights monitoring and reporting, such as HRCSL's annual report on the human rights situation in Sierra Leone and reports that can be submitted by national human rights institutions (such as HRCSL) and CSOs (such as LfL) to international human rights treaty bodies, such as the upcoming state report on gender equity to the CEDAW in the country.

Fourth, the Rights4Land assessment increases the visibility of HRCSL staff at a decentralized level (including in multi-stakeholder platforms) and can directly support dispute resolution for land conflicts that were revealed in the survey.

Added value of the Rights4Land Monitoring tool at global level

Finally, the Rights4Land Monitoring tool has global utility beyond Sierra Leone. It is unique as it connects an analysis of the legal framework with outcomes for land users in practice, providing a comprehensive picture of the land governance reality and aiding understanding of potential discrepancies between laws and lived experience.

As the Rights4Land tool maps voluntary guidelines (VGGT) to binding human rights and uses standardized, indicator-based questionnaires at national and local levels, it enables comparisons across countries and years. This makes it suitable for periodic re-assessment (e.g. to benchmark the progressive realization of tenure security) and for aggregating evidence towards a global picture of VGGT uptake and impact. In contexts where reform is advancing but practice lagging behind, this approach supplies exactly what land and human rights actors need: a common language, comparable metrics, and actionable entry points to hold governments accountable for turning normative alignment into lived rights.

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