

SOLUTIONS PATHWAYS

Empowering Communities for a Just Transition

6 Pathways for Integrating Tenure Rights in Land Degradation Neutrality Programmes

Empowering communities, bridging divides, and advocating for land tenure rights

UNCCD's land tenure decision

UNCCD's landmark decision 26/ COP 14 on land tenure was groundbreaking. It explicitly calls on Parties to ensure that measures to combat desertification/land degradation and drought are implemented in a non-discriminatory and participatory manner in order to promote equal tenure rights and access to land for all, in particular for vulnerable and marginalised groups, in the national context. However, at the implementation level, a rights-based approach, and in particular the recognition of communities' legitimate tenure rights, is rarely considered in land and landscape restoration projects and programmes, even as many countries heighten efforts to meet their environmental commitments, often based on the protection of forests and land resources.

TMG's work on land tenure and restoration

Against this background, TMG Research has initiated a transdisciplinary research process in four countries (Benin, Kenya, Madagascar and Malawi) to analyse the impact of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) initiatives and programmes on land governance. This is part of the Global Soil Week Project, supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development – BMZ.

Our research shows that while LDN programmes are crucial for conservation, they often overlook critical land tenure issues. In Kenya and Benin, TMG Research has shown that LDN programmes focus primarily on protecting forests but neglect the fundamental rights of communities adjacent to these forests. These communities are falsely labelled as agents of forest degradation, resulting in their legitimate rights not being recognised and protected.

In the four countries we analysed, the impact of national LDN and forest protection policies on community tenure rights varies widely. The common denominator, however, is the legitimacy of these rights. The livelihoods of countless communities are inextricably linked to forest resources, which emphasises the importance of involving them in decision-making processes.

Based on our experiences over the past three years, we have proposed a structured and systematic set of actions, strategies and steps aimed at integrating legitimate tenure rights into LDN programmes (our solutions pathways).

Six Solution Pathways

In order to identify solution pathways for the integration and monitoring of legitimate tenure rights within LDN programmes and to support the implementation of the UNCCD land tenure decision, our research focused on specific case studies to identify solution pathways. The below framework of solution pathways was developed based on thorough analyses in [Benin](#), [Madagascar](#), [Malawi](#), [Kenya](#), and [Kenya II](#).

The figure below shows a schematic representation of the different steps taken in the countries to explore practical solution pathways to successfully integrate and monitor legitimate tenure rights in LDN programmes. A solution pathway in this context refers to a specific measure or approach taken to integrate and monitor legitimate tenure rights in LDN programmes and to support the implementation of the UNCCD land tenure decision. Together, the different solution pathways represent a structured and systematic set of actions, strategies and steps to achieve the integration of legitimate tenure rights into LDN programmes.

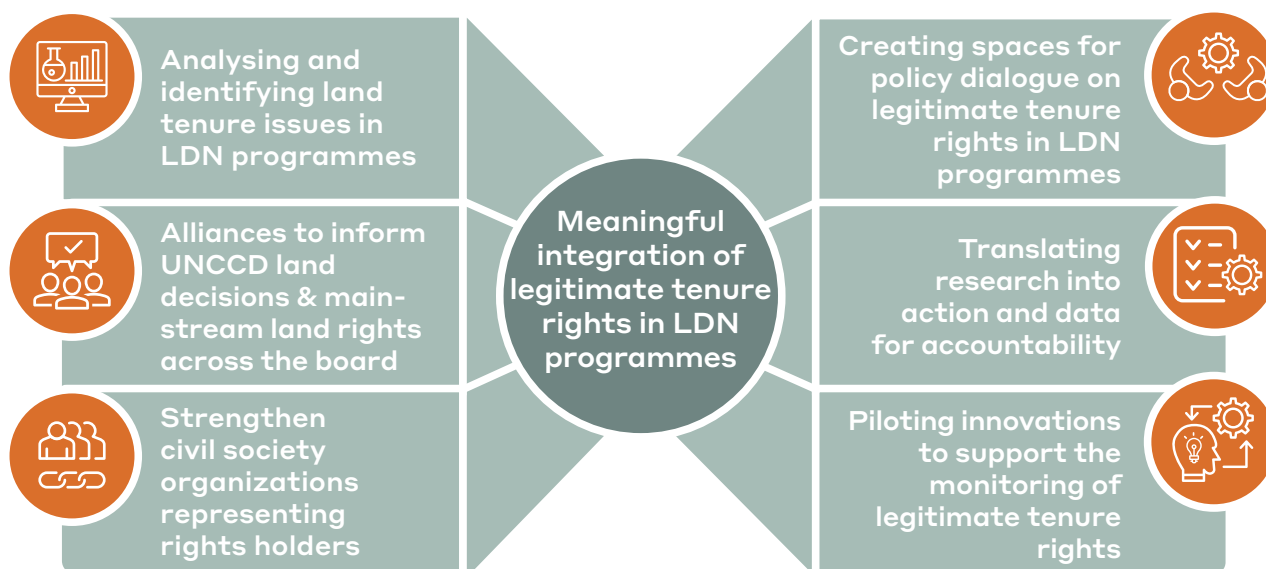


Figure: Framework of 6 solution pathways for integrating legitimate tenure rights in LDN programmes: Schematic representation of actions to support the recognition and protection of legitimate tenure rights in partner countries.

1. Data as the Backbone: The Need for Comprehensive Information

Collecting and managing standardised data is essential to monitor tenure rights and support decision-making. This includes collecting data on community participation and involvement in forest management strategies, mapping land areas that support community livelihoods, and analysing tenure rights and power relations in access, use and control of land and policy decisions. The lack of sufficient data makes it difficult to assess the impact of LDN and land restoration programmes on the legitimate rights of dependent communities.

2. Empowering Communities through Participatory Mapping

We emphasise the benefits of participatory mapping as a means of empowering local communities, incorporating indigenous knowledge and promoting transparency and accountability in land use and resource management. While participatory mapping is a powerful tool, it is important to consider the power dynamics and technical limitations to ensure that the maps are meaningful and relevant to all stakeholders.

3. Creating Spaces for Dialogue and Learning

Conflicts between forest officials and forest-dependent communities are a critical issue. Creating spaces for dialogue is crucial to bridging these divides. Such dialogues allow stakeholders to understand and appreciate each other's perspectives, while promoting a balanced approach to protecting forests and communities' land rights.

The [Regional Exchange Workshop on Mainstreaming Legitimate Tenure Rights in Land Restoration](#) is one example of the solution pathways TMG Research uses to empower communities, bridge divides and advocate for land tenure rights at national and global levels.

4. Turning Research into Action to Holding Governments Accountable

Collecting data on land rights and mismanagement is not just a research exercise. It is a crucial step for civil society organisations and communities to hold governments accountable. Data-driven action is crucial to shed light on social injustices, advocate for change, and dismantle structural barriers that impede land rights.

Innovations such as digital grievance mechanisms and integrated conflict resolution initiatives are central to helping communities gain confidence and claim their legitimate rights to land and forest resources. Small pilot programmes allow us to analyse their effectiveness and optimise their implementation. However, they need to be integrated into national LDN programmes.

Examples such as the 'Haki Ardhi' tool, which allows women to report their land rights, show how access to justice can be [facilitated through digital tools](#) that are integrated into local community structures.

5. Strengthening Civil Society as the Catalyst for Change

Capacity building of civil society organisations (CSOs) on land rights principles and frameworks is crucial. This is not only about empowering communities, but also about promoting cooperation, alliances and learning mechanisms within these organisations.

6. Creating National, Regional and Global Alliances

We recognise that building networks of partners at both national and international levels is fundamental to the enforcement of legitimate land tenure rights. Collaboration with stakeholders such as civil society organisations, grassroots organisations, UNCCD, FAO and international organisations is crucial for translating UNCCD decisions into meaningful action at local and national levels. Similarly, an effective partnership between organisations supporting the implementation of UNCCD decisions and national civil society organisations is crucial to harness data and realities on the ground and further inform meaningful UNCCD decisions and policies. We are currently working with a group of CSOs in Benin to form a CSO alliance that can bring together diverse experiences and amplify the voices of legitimate tenure rights holders at national and global levels.

TMG's Vision for Land Tenure as a Safeguard for Land Restoration Initiatives:

Our commitment to these solutions pathways will make 2024 a pivotal year in our pursuit of responsible land governance and the recognition and protection of the rights of communities in LDN target areas. Land tenure is a complex issue intertwined with power dynamics and community identities. However, we believe that smart partnerships with key stakeholders at different levels and sectors can drive progress. Collaboration between UNCCD National Focal Points (NFPs) and CSOs plays a critical role in aligning national climate action, land management and restoration efforts. Bridging communication gaps between NFPs, CSOs and communities raises awareness of land tenure security and responsible land governance.

TMG Research is dedicated to fostering momentum for a comprehensive land tenure and climate agenda, culminating in the anticipated COP events in the year 2024. Of particular significance is the Desertification and Drought Day 2024, [hosted by Germany](#) and the UNCCD COP16 in December 2024 in Riat, Saudi Arabia.



Photo: Participatory mapping of land rights and community engagement in Loita Forest.
Photo credit: Kenya Land Alliance 2023.

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