

PRACTICE BRIEF

Insights from land evaluations

The Land Facility is a global programme funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) that partners with governments to strengthen land governance. The programme aims to advance effective and sustainable national land governance reforms and land administration systems. The Land Facility's learning partner, the Land Facility Decision Support Unit (LF-DSU), facilitates knowledge production and exchange within and beyond the programme to support adaptive decision-making.

This research, commissioned by the LF-DSU, takes stock of both the academic literature on land and evaluations of land programmes, covering the experience of the land sector over the last decade. The study analyses evaluation approaches across a range of land programmes and donors to draw out relevant lessons for evaluating interventions that support land governance reform. To inform our study, we have established a comprehensive database of 180 land programmes, 50 of which were short-listed for the analysis and categorised by intervention areas and evaluation approaches.

This Practice Brief aims to share insights, best practices and emerging trends from the research. By analysing academic research and evaluations, we have identified gaps that can be addressed and have gained an understanding of what works in evaluations of land programmes. Our hope is that development partners, evaluators and programme designers and implementers can use this work to strengthen land governance reform evaluations and, potentially, shape the field by pioneering new approaches to analysing and evaluating land governance reform processes.

High-level summary

We find that both the academic literature and the programme evaluation literature are extensive and span multiple strands of research and practice. They provide strong evidence on the mid- to long-term outcomes and impacts of land titling, with numerous rigorous studies demonstrating positive effects on perceived tenure security, agricultural investment and women's empowerment. However, the evidence base is comparatively thinner on analysing how political economy dynamics, institutional structures, and broader systems-level complexities shape the success of land governance programmes.

We find an impressive evaluation literature, with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), in particular, commissioning some of the most substantive evaluations, which have made significant contributions to providing evidence on the link between land titling, tenure security and social and economic outcomes at the community and household levels. With respect to land governance reform, we find that most programmes have a larger focus on land titling, with policy and regulatory reform components and interventions to improve land administration being more secondary. Evaluations appropriately mirror this structure and broadly focus on evaluating the effects of land titling, applying mostly quantitative approaches, often with a very rigorous research design that allows for the deduction of causality through robust control studies.

While the predominantly quantitative impact evaluation approach is appropriate to evaluate land titling focused programmes, it has meant less emphasis on analysing and contextualising land governance systems. While they are included in some evaluations of programmes with components focusing on land governance reform, we find that policy and regulatory changes and institutional adaptations are rarely systematically reviewed or evaluated. We also find that while quantitative evaluations provide more rigorous evidence on causality, such evaluations often yield findings and recommendations at pre-defined points in time (e.g. midline and endline), and as a result may not inform programme adaptations at the most advantageous moments.

Based on our findings, we believe that the Land Facility and the wider evaluation community can contribute to shaping the field of land evaluations by piloting and refining approaches for analysing and evaluating land governance reform processes. This includes proactive consideration of political economy factors and applying a systems lens to evaluation. In this Brief, we provide a set of emerging recommendations for development partners and funders, programme implementers, and evaluators to consider.

Our methodology

The analysis is based on an extensive review of over 230 research papers and evaluations. During the research process, 180 land programmes were identified, with a focus on a shortlist of 50 programmes that have available evaluations. The 50 programmes were further categorised using high-level classifications, including by programmatic focus in terms of outputs and activities. As shown in Figure 1, every programme had a focus on rights registration and formalisation, with most programmes also addressing land administration and service delivery.

Evaluations were categorised by three main types, as shown in Table 1.

Figure 1: Programmatic focus across 50 short-listed programmes

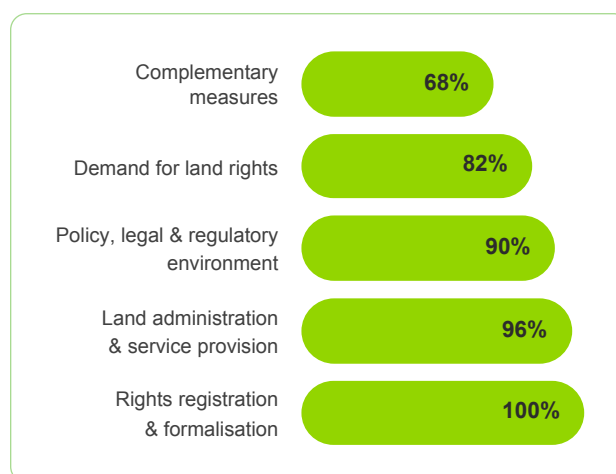


Table 1: Classification of evaluations included in our analysis

Type of evaluation	Aim	Methods	Practical considerations
Performance evaluation	Assess the extent to which a programme is achieving its intended targets and objectives via pre-defined performance indicators.	Typically conducted as part of standard programme reviews, with methods that may be less rigorous than those used in impact or process evaluations.	Conducted during implementation and at the end of the programme cycle.
Impact evaluation	Determine causality and attribute quantitative effects and changes to a particular programme.	Predominantly quantitative. The most robust employ randomised control trials (RCTs) or quasi-experimental methods (e.g., differences-in-differences, regression discontinuity etc.).	Often use panel-based approaches, collecting data at multiple points in time. When written up as academic studies, they often form the basis of systematic reviews of evidence.
Process evaluation	Examine whether a programme is being implemented as planned, focusing on the mechanisms of change.	Primarily qualitative, analysing factors such as the theory of change, quality of implementation and contextual factors influencing outcomes.	Typically conducted earlier in a programme. May use OECD-DAC criteria to frame evaluation questions and structure final reports.

The research began with a longlist of programmes worth USD 6 billion, all from the past decade. This was then reduced to a shortlist of 50 programmes worth just under USD 3 billion. This included programmes from USAID; MCC; the World Bank Group; the UK FCDO; and European development partners, including Germany (GIZ), the Netherlands (RVO) and Sweden (Sida). The findings were supplemented by key informant interviews (KIIs) with land governance experts, including key authors of land evaluations over the past decade.

Based on our analysis of evaluations and KIIs, we selected three case study countries to drill down further: Tanzania, Uganda and Mongolia. The case studies allowed us to confirm the gaps we identified in earlier stages of analysis and through the KIIs, and to provide concrete examples of what has worked and/or not worked in evaluating land programmes over the past decade. Insights from each case study are presented in Boxes 1–3 below.

Overview of academic literature: strengths and limitations

Our review of relevant academic literature (including more than 230 published research papers) found that most papers are country specific. However, the literature includes a small but important set of comprehensive, well-founded systematic reviews, which provide valuable overviews, particularly of the most rigorous, quantitative literature.¹ This includes studies that aim to provide estimates of the mid- to long-term outcomes and impacts of land titling on landholders, particularly farmers. The literature provides the land sector with a strong evidence base on the link between land titling and tenure security, and good but mixed evidence on other outcomes, such as investment, access to credit, environmental protection, and women’s economic empowerment.

We found the literature to be more limited regarding approaches to land governance reform that address political economy factors and institutional structures and incentives. This includes the political and other complexities of land governance and tenure, the contextual specificity of communal and individual land titling, and related issues such as institutional capacity and the perceived legitimacy of tenure reforms. This implies there is less evidence available on the best

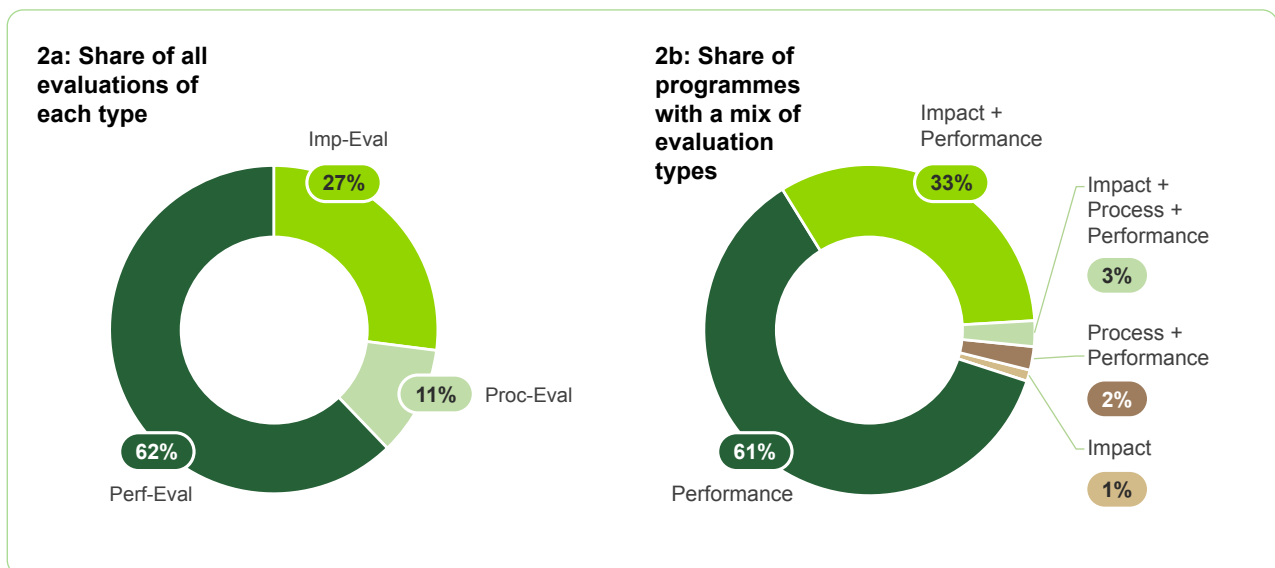
implementation strategies for development partners and governments to pursue. For example, identifying which approaches are best suited to achieving successful reform, whether through decentralisation, improved implementation, certification, or the use of information technology. This gap was subsequently confirmed in our analysis of available evaluations and KILs.

Evaluations of land programmes: approaches, trends and gaps

The research analysed evaluations for the 50 land programmes that met our selection criteria.² All of these programmes had at least one evaluation. Most of the evaluations (62%) identified could be categorised as *performance evaluations*; about a quarter (27%) were *impact evaluations*; and only one in 10 (11%) were *process evaluations*.

We identified 20 out of the 50 programmes with multiple evaluation types, with the most common combination being an impact and a performance evaluation, while three programmes included all three evaluation types. Based on the programmes analysed, the most frequent evaluation approach was a standalone performance evaluation. See Figures 2a and 2b for more details.

Figure 2: Types of evaluation identified for 50 programmes



1 Systematic reviews on land tenure: Lawry et al. (2014), Higgins et al. (2018) and Tseng et al. (2021). Systematic reviews on key themes: Hajjar et al. (2021) and Childress et al. (2025) (forests); Murken & Gornott (2022) (agriculture and climate); Strusi & Balestri (2025) (women).
 2 We shortlisted programmes using the following selection criteria: (1) Programme size: focusing on larger programmes, including those with >GBP 5 million budget. (2) Date: finishing in the period 2015–2026. (3) Evaluation reports available, including either performance, process or impact evaluations (or a combination of the three). (4) Thematic relevance to the Land Facility.

Findings and emerging themes

Overall, the evaluation landscape for land programming is quite mixed, linked to the preferences of each development partner. Many programmes receive neither impact nor process evaluations, limiting learning potential. We summarise our findings from the analysis below:

Evaluations place greater emphasis on high-level outcomes than on contribution pathways

Evaluations tend to focus on outcomes such as tenure security, investment, income, and women's empowerment, with comparatively less attention to implementation processes or causal mechanisms. However, some USAID/MCC 'deep dive' studies have further explored these dimensions, including those reviewed in the Tanzania and Mongolia case studies.

Evaluations include limited assessment of national-level land governance reforms

Where impact evaluations exist, they more commonly assess outcomes at household or community level, with fewer examining institutional or national-level reforms. As noted in the MCC Mongolia evaluation, such higher-level interventions can be difficult to assess rigorously due to challenges in establishing counterfactuals. Empirical analysis of land administration systems and related financial data also appears limited.

Evaluation rigour is difficult to assess but appears to vary across development partners

The impact evaluations reviewed varied in the level of methodological detail provided. World Bank evaluations were often relatively brief, with limited information on methodology, which can make it difficult to assess the robustness of findings. In contrast, MCC and USAID have developed a substantial body of evaluation work over the past decade, generally characterised by extensive documentation on methods used and analyses conducted. This has contributed significantly to the evidence base in land programming.

Contextual and political economy factors receive limited attention

Compared to the evaluation of outcomes such as tenure security and investment, there is less evidence of evaluations explicitly examining political economy dynamics, governance reform processes, or cross-sector linkages (e.g., finance and land markets). Process evaluations in these areas appear to be uncommon.

Thinking and Working Politically (TWP)

The TWP approach involves conducting strong political analysis to obtain insights and improve understanding; a detailed appreciation of, and response to the local context; and flexibility and adaptability in programme design and implementation. See Burns et al. (2023) for more on this approach.

Adaptive management

Adaptive management is an approach to managing projects that tries to be evidence-based and iterative. It is particularly suited to areas of complex programming, or when operating in uncertain environments. Learning is built into programming, and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems should therefore provide information on a regular basis, to provide a feedback loop into programme design and adaptations to activities and outputs undertaken.

What this means for development partners, implementers, and evaluators

Our analysis concludes that there is a gap in the reviewed literature in regard to evaluations of land governance reform that systematically consider and analyse the complexities of political economy, institutional structures, and incentives. In some programme contexts, evaluation actors are having to adapt to a new funding context in which international development programming will focus more on partnerships and programming that aims to leverage incremental changes in systems, rather than having larger amounts of resources to fund service delivery directly.

This may lead to a bigger focus on reform more broadly, with evaluations having to pivot towards understanding and evaluating systemic changes and possible trickle-down effects of governance reform. In this context, we make the following recommendations, based on our analysis:

For development partners and funders:

- **Recognise the limits of quantitative impact evaluations:** While they provide the needed rigour for assessing household-level outcomes of land titling, quantitative impact evaluations are less suited to complex, context-dependent governance reforms. Theory-based, realist, and mixed-methods approaches may be more appropriate for such reforms, particularly if programming aims to influence policy rather than subsidise direct service delivery (such as funding land titling directly).
- **Commission evaluations that can support adaptive programming:** Large impact evaluations often provide feedback only at fixed intervals. More frequent, learning-focused, and collaborative approaches (e.g., developmental, theory-based, or realist approaches) can better inform adaptive delivery and inform programmatic decision-making, which are key elements of a TWP delivery approach.

For programme implementers:

- **Embed PEA throughout design and implementation:** Technical interventions are unlikely to succeed without accounting for power, incentives, and institutional dynamics. Ongoing integration of PEA supports effective programming and offers opportunities for shared learning.

- **Strengthen adaptive MEL through developing theories of change that consider PEA and systems thinking:** Theories of change should unpack intermediate steps, explicitly articulate behaviour and practice-change assumptions, integrate PEA and systems thinking, and test assumptions through monitoring, while maintaining clear impact goals.

For evaluators:

- **Design adaptable evaluations that provide timely learnings:** Evaluations should go beyond high-level outcomes to examine contribution pathways and provide timely, practical learning. This can be done via process evaluation methodologies such as contribution analysis, in particular by mapping and tracking intermediate mechanisms of change.
- **Embed political economy and systems thinking in evaluation design:** PEA and systems thinking should also shape evaluation questions, methods and interpretation across both process and impact evaluations. This is crucial as land reform can be a highly contested space, with competing interests, and potential winners and losers, as well as involving a wide range of institutions with whom partners need to work in order to achieve positive change.

Political Economy Analysis (PEA)

Three main questions that a PEA will usually address:

- **What is the underlying issue or problem that a team wishes to address (which may lie beneath the more obvious consequences of those problems)?**
- **Why does this situation persist in this form (such as insecurity or gender inequality)?**
- **How can change come about?"**

“Applied PEA consists of a set of concepts, questions and tools that provide a clearer picture of the political context in which development assistance is provided. It does this by systematically exploring the underlying reality of policy, contestation and decisions, including those elements that are counter-intuitive. [...]”

Extracted from Whaites et al. (2023), p. 5

Box 1. Case study: Tanzania

Tanzania has been a focal point of development partner programming in land tenure reform for over two decades. This is largely due to the gap between the country's 'progressive legislation' on the issue, such as the Land Act (1999) and the Village Land Act (1999), and the slow pace of implementation of this legislation. Programmes have aimed to address the causes of slow roll-out, for example by tackling political challenges or via funding provincial and district-level pilots of land tenure regularisation, including the use of digital tools to drive down unit costs.

We identified four programmes in Tanzania that met our criteria, although only three were included in our review, as the fourth was still ongoing at the time of our research. These are the following:

- Private Sector Competitiveness Project, World Bank (2005–2018).** This project covered a broad range of private sector development challenges. The work on land systems fell within the component on strengthening the business environment, providing legislation support, developing an Integrated Land Management Information System (ILMIS) and supporting the roll-out of rural and urban land certificates.
- Feed the Future Tanzania Land Tenure Assistance Activity, USAID (2015–2019).** This programme sought to clarify and document land ownership, support local land use planning efforts, and increase understanding of land use and land rights. It particularly focused on issuing Certificates of Customary Right of Occupancy (CCROs) in a limited geographic area, piloting a model that could later be scaled up.
- Tanzania Land Tenure Support Programme (LTSP),** supported by the Governments of the UK, Sweden and Denmark (2014–2021). This programme operated in the Southern Agricultural Corridor. It too piloted an approach for the roll-out of CCROs in selected districts.

The Tanzania case study demonstrates that evaluations vary across development partner. Neither the World Bank project nor the UK/Sweden/Denmark programme had an impact evaluation, and performance evaluations reported quantitative findings without providing clarity on the methods or rigour of the estimates (World Bank, 2019; FCDO, 2019). The USAID programme, however, had a rigorous impact evaluation (Persha & Patterson-Stein, 2021), which employed an RCT with 30 treatment and 30 comparison villages, randomly assigned in Iringa district.

Box 2. Case study: Mongolia

Mongolia implemented market-based land reforms in the early 1990s in which urban land was privatised. However, rangelands and pasturelands remained under state control. These areas are collectively used and managed by local herder communities, creating contrasting systems of individual and collective rights in the country. This dual system is further shaped by complex land administration systems, degradation of communally used lands, and rapid migration towards urban areas.

Within the programme analysis for this review, one major programme in Mongolia was identified: the **MCC-funded Property Rights Project (PRP), implemented between 2008 and 2013** in Ulaanbaatar and eight regional centres. PRP had three components. Based on the availability of programme documentation, only two components were included in our analysis:

- Improvement of Land Privatisation and Registration System Activity (RS).** This introduced institutional strengthening measures in two land-related agencies, GASR* and ALAMGaC**, to address the complex land registration process. Focus areas included capacity building, infrastructure, policy and legal reform, and information management.
- Peri-Urban Land Leasing Activity (PURP).** This combined land-related activities with other direct support to incentivise households to reduce over-grazing on common grasslands. Activities included mapping rangelands, drafting legislation and issuing exclusive-use leases to groups of herder households.

Impact evaluations for the PRP were rigorous (IPA, 2016; Marple-Cantrell & Huntington, 2020), in line with the general approach for MCC programmes, which included conducting robust impact assessments. The evaluations contextualised programme interventions but did not conduct a formal political economy analysis (PEA). The PURP evaluation (IPA, 2016) investigated differences between contexts, particularly between the town of Kharkhorin and the city of Choibalsan. In the RS case (Marple-Cantrell & Huntington, 2020), contextual challenges were highlighted, including political and legal constraints, challenges with reform timelines and institutional dynamics.

* GASR = General Authority for State Registration.

** ALAMGaC = Mongolian Government Implementing Agency for Land Administration and Management, Geodesy and Cartography.

Box 3. Case study: Uganda

Uganda operates four tenure systems: a freehold system in the west and southwest, the 'mailo' (hybrid tenure) system in the central and southern areas, leasehold primarily in Kampala, and customary tenure throughout the rest of the country. The 1995 Ugandan Constitution decreed that "*Land belongs to the people*" and recognised all four systems. The 1998 Land Act formally acknowledged customary ownership, and in 2013, the Uganda National Land Policy (NLP) and the Land Sector Strategy Plan (LSSP-II 2013–2023) were adopted, with the aim of increasing land tenure. The NLP and LSSP-II provide a framework for implementing the Land Act and emphasise the need for systematic demarcation.

We found four significant programmes in Uganda:

- **Competitiveness and Enterprise Development Project (CEDP), World Bank (2014–2024).** Component 1 of this programme focused on land administration reform. This was aligned with LSSP-II and supported the government's Systematic Land Adjudication and Certification (SLAAC) programme, the national Land Information System (UgNLIS), and the creation of zonal land offices (MZOs).
- **Financing for Land Administration in Uganda (EUFLA), European Union (2022–2026).** This was developed to complement activities under the Land Administration Reform Component of the CEDP project by developing the capacity of local land institutions, increasing the demarcation and registration of land parcels, and reducing the number of land disputes.

- **Responsible Land Policy Uganda (RELAPU), GIZ (2021–2026).** This country-level initiative under GIZ's global programme aims to enhance livelihoods through ensuring there is secure and equitable access to land in rural areas. RELAPU supports implementation of the NLP and the systematic mapping of land and documentation of land rights across 11 districts.
- **LAND-at-Scale Uganda (LAS), RVO (2021–2025).** This is part of RVO's demand-driven global programme that supports structural reforms in land governance and the scaling of effective interventions across 12 countries. In Uganda, LAS aims to develop a sustainable approach to customary land registration and climate-smart land use planning.

Each programme included in our analysis for Uganda received at least two evaluations. Evaluations of all three types were found in Uganda, although an impact evaluation was only identified for CEDP. The evaluations often acknowledged contextual factors, but explicit and systematic PEA was found to be lacking. The exception was the impact evaluations under CEDP (Cherchi et al., 2019; Poulin & Pierotti, 2025), which explicitly integrated political economy dimensions into analysis, examining how gender norms and social structures shape programme impacts.

Few evaluations offered in-depth analysis of land governance reform. For LAS Uganda, the mid-term review addressed land reform, but as a process evaluation conducted during implementation, evidence on long-term impacts was inherently speculative (Mokoro, 2023; UN-Habitat, 2023). For RELAPU, performance evaluations (Rettner et al., 2019; Seelaff et al., 2021) discussed governance reform, but primarily in descriptive terms.

This Practice Brief was written by Joseph Holden (Foresight Associates) and Nicole Naysmith and Enrico Neumann (Cadmus). It was produced by the Land Facility Decision Support Unit with funding from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

© 2026 Abt Britain Ltd. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. You are free to share and adapt the material with appropriate attribution.

For more information and to access the full research on which this Brief is based, please contact Enrico Neumann (enrico.neumann@cadmusgroup.com) or Dr Robin Bloch (robin.bloch@abtglobal.com)



CADMUS



Selected bibliography

Systematic reviews on land tenure

Higgins, D., Balint, T., Liversage, H., & Winters, P. (2018) "Investigating the impacts of increased rural land tenure security: A systematic review of the evidence." *Journal of Rural Studies*, 61, 34–62.

Lawry, S., Samii, C., Hall, R., Leopold, A., Hornby, A., & Mtero, F. (2014) "The Impact of Land Property Rights Interventions on Investment and Agricultural Productivity in Developing Countries: A Systematic Review". *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 2014, 1.

Tseng, T.-W.J., Robinson, B.E., & Bellemare M.F. et al. (2021) "Influence of Land Tenure Interventions on Human Well-Being and Environmental Outcomes." *Nature Sustainability* 4(3), 242–251.

Systematic reviews on key themes

Childress, M., Kukkonen, M., Berning, C., Huntington, H., Lisher, J., Lindsay, J. & Setyowati, A.B. (2025) "Good Practices for Strengthening Land Rights Recognition in Forestlands of the East Asia and Pacific Region". The World Bank, Washington D.C.

Hajjar, R., Oldekop, J. A., Cronkleton, P., Newton, P., Russell, A. J., & Zhou, W. (2021) "A Global Analysis of the Social and Environmental Outcomes of Community Forests". *Nature Sustainability* 4 (3), 216–224.

Murken, L., & Gornott, C. (2022) "The importance of different land tenure systems for farmers' response to climate change: A systematic review". *Climate Risk Management* 35, 100419. DOI: 10.1016/j.crm.2022.100419

Strusi, V., & Balestri, S. (2025) "Land, Women and Development: A Systematic Review of Causal Evidence". Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5179851>. DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.5179851

Thinking and working politically

Burns, A.F., Rajabifard, A., & Shojaei, D. (2023) "Undertaking land administration reform: Is there a better way?" *Land Use Policy* 132, 106824. DOI: 10.1016/j.landusepol.2023.106824

Whaites, A., Piron, L-H., Rocha Menocal, A., & Teskey, G (2023) "Understanding Political Economy Analysis and Thinking and Working Politically". FCDO and Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice. Available at [Understanding political economy analysis and thinking and working politically](#)

Tanzania case study

FCDO (2019) "Tanzania: Land Tenure Support Programme (LTSP). Project Completion Review". Available on DevTracker.

Persha, L., & Patterson-Stein, J. (2021) "Impact Evaluation of the Feed the Future Tanzania Land Tenure Assistance Activity: Endline Evaluation Report". USAID. E3 Analytics and Evaluation Project.

Stein, H., Odgaard, R., Askew, K., & Maganga, F. (2024) "The World Bank and Rural Land Titling in Africa: The Case of Tanzania". *Development and Change* 55(6), 1150–1181. DOI: 10.1111/dech.12866

World Bank (2019) "Tanzania: Private Sector/MSME Competitiveness Project. Implementation Completion and Results Report." Report No: ICR00004564

Mongolia case study

Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) (2016) "Millennium Challenge Account of Mongolia (MCA-M) Peri-Urban Land Leasing Activity. Interim Report for Phase II Areas."

Marple-Cantrell, K., & Huntington, H. (2020) "Millennium Challenge Account of Mongolia Property Rights Project. Registry Systems Process Study: Final Report". Cloudburst, for MCC.

Uganda case study

Cherchi, L., Goldstein, M., Habyarimana, J., Montalvao, J., O'Sullivan, M., Udry, C., & Gruver, A. (2019) "Empowering women through equal land rights: Experimental evidence from rural Uganda". *Gender Innovation Lab, Policy Brief Issue 33*. The World Bank. DOI: 10.1596/31513

Mokoro Ltd. (2023) "Mid-term review of the LAND-at-scale programme" Commissioned by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO). Final Report." August 2023

Poulin, M., & Pierotti, R.S. (2025) "Joint Land Titles and Women's Status in Uganda". World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11241

Rettner, H., Schilling, F., Odur, A.T., & Lange, A. (2019) "Mid-Term-Review des Vorhabens "Verantwortungsvolle Landpolitik in Uganda"". PN: 2015.0124.6-004.00 und 2015.0124.6-005.00

Seelaff, A., Eilu, T.A., Schramm, A., & Struck, A. (2021) "Responsible Land Policy in Uganda (RELAPU) Project Progress Review Report". GIZ.

UN-Habitat (2023) "Scaling up community-based land registration and land use planning on customary land use in Uganda: Consolidation Phase (2021-2023)". Mid-term Project Evaluation. Author: Hugo Navajas. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), Nairobi, Kenya.