

PROGRESS TOWARDS THE SDG LAND RIGHTS COMMITMENTS

**HALF WAY INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION:
WHERE ARE WE AT?**

2023



INTERNATIONAL
LAND
COALITION



IT IS 2023. WHAT HAVE MEMBER STATES ACCOMPLISHED?

FOR QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THIS BRIEF,
please contact us at dianaf@landesa.org or r.nanayakkara@landcoalition.org

FIND MORE HERE
<https://learn.landcoalition.org/en/learning-labs/how-to-report-on-sdg-land-targets-in-2021-introductory-session-for-government-partners/>
and <https://learn.landcoalition.org/en/learning-labs/how-to-report-on-sdg-land-targets-in-2021-introductory-session-for-cso/>



The world is now halfway towards implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Are governments on track with what they committed to deliver for their people? In 2015 we celebrated the recognition of the foundational and strategic role that secure land rights for all –women and men, regardless of ethnicity, religion, place of residence, or civil, economic, social, or political status— must play to achieve a world free of poverty, hunger, and systemic gender discrimination.

Yet Member States' ambitious commitments have not been followed with the necessary actions on the ground. Our previous reviews of the [2020 Voluntary National Reviews \(VNRs\)](#)¹ and [2021 VNRs](#)² found promising steps: some countries had localized these commitments into their national plans, allocated new resources, or advanced ambitious reforms. However, the majority had not prioritized land rights in their development agendas or undertaken significant action – casting serious doubts on their ability to achieve the 2030 agenda.

As Member States reconvene for the 2023 High Level Political Forum, we conducted a follow-up review on progress made on the SDG land rights targets.

This brief will focus on the many *important questions related to land rights*:

- » What can we learn from the information submitted through the SDG reporting mechanisms in 2022?
- » What have countries done to address their ambitious but critical cross-cutting commitments to ensure secure land rights for all, particularly for those who live on and from the land facing poverty, the vulnerable and the small producers.
- » What are countries doing to eradicate gender differences in these rights?

This assessment is particularly timely given that the 2022 High Level Political Forum reviewed progress towards SDG goal 5 on gender equality, which along with goals 1 and 2, is the third SDG goal which explicitly refer to land access and tenure rights.

¹ https://d3o3cb4w253x5q.cloudfront.net/media/documents/2020_9_sdg_5_years_later_1.pdf

² https://d3o3cb4w253x5q.cloudfront.net/media/documents/2022_6_progress_towards_the_SDG_land_rights_commitments_2021-2.pdf

PRIORITISE PEOPLE CENTRED DATA: WE ALL NEED TO DO OUR PART

Achieving tenure security for all warrants well-coordinated and well-funded concerted efforts. It is a long-term endeavour. The [SDG Land Momentum Group](https://www.landcoalition.org/en/explore/our-work/global-goals/sdg-land-momentum-group/)³ acknowledges and commends the steps that several countries have taken. As we do that, we must be clear: the current rate of progress is utterly inadequate to close the tenure security gap by 2030. Reaching the SDG land rights targets will require strong political commitment and dedicated resources in all countries in order to enact concerted, deliberate and multi-sectorial efforts.

The world is only left with 7 years to achieve the 2030 agenda. It is time for governments, development partners and civil society practitioners, experts and researchers to come together and pool their experience, expertise, resources and institutional reach to achieve what was envisaged in 2015. The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need for securing tenure rights of people everywhere to build sustainable local food systems, to protect the livelihoods and residences.

In parallel, it is essential for countries to invest in the data infrastructure needed to diagnose the challenges in reaching the land rights targets, provide guidance to policy makers and decision-makers, track progress or lack thereof, and hold those vested with authority accountable. This requires agreement on what data to gather, how to gather it, from whom and for whom. It also means deciding how to analyse it, report it and make it available, as well as resources and capacity for the data gathering, analysis and distribution.

A cultural shift is needed in the land rights sector so that we can:

- » make informed and sound decisions based on data;
- » consider data that is cantered on people rather than on farms, economic units, businesses or land plots;
- » acknowledge that data about the household head or provided only by the household head is insufficient and likely to be biased; and,
- » accept complementary sources of data that can fill important data gaps – including but not limited to global polls, research studies, and data collected from community based organizations or grassroots groups.

Finally, the highly visible and powerful platform provided by the SDGs only works if it catalyses action. It must provide governments with incentives to act, it must offer effective advocacy levers to civil society organizations, and must help the broad array of stakeholders working on land rights remain strategically aligned.

³ <https://www.landcoalition.org/en/explore/our-work/global-goals/sdg-land-momentum-group/>

This requires clear and accessible information on what countries have done – what we should celebrate – as well as on what countries could and should be doing to fulfil their SDG land rights commitments. Quality reporting must come from governments, civil society, and community-based groups around the world.

To address this need, the SDG Land Momentum Group and numerous partners are encouraging and supporting governments and civil society organizations interested in leveraging the SDG land rights commitments through impactful and strategic reporting.¹

To register for upcoming webinars showcasing the SDG Land Momentum Group's reporting work on land rights, please email info@landesa.org.

2022 VNRS AND REPORTING ON LAND TARGETS

The following sections provide a detailed description of the analysis we have carried out to assess what progress countries have made toward their SDG land rights commitments (targets 1.4, 2.3, and 5.a) and what they have reported about the indicators that track these commitments (1.4.2, 5.a.1 and 5.a.2).

For the analysis that follows we have relied on two sources of publicly available information managed by the SDG platform:

- » the 43 publicly available [Voluntary National Reviews \(VNRS\)](https://hlpf.un.org/vnrs)⁴ submitted for the 2022 High Level Political Forum by Andorra, Argentina, Belarus, Botswana, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Dominica, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guinea Bissau, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lesotho, Liberia, Luxemburg, Malawi, Mali, Montenegro, Netherlands, Pakistan, Philippines, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Switzerland, Togo, United Arab Emirates, and Uruguay.
- » the [Global SDG Indicators Database](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/)⁵ which contains annual entries for each SDG indicator for each country.

⁴ <https://hlpf.un.org/vnrs>

⁵ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>

WHAT STEPS HAVE MEMBER STATES TAKEN TO ADDRESS THEIR SDG LAND RIGHTS COMMITMENTS?

While most of the 43 VNRs we reviewed included comments around land, land access, land use or land rights, frequently these mentions were limited to descriptions of the country's context, history, or challenges. To gauge the extent to which governments are moving toward fulfilling their SDG land rights commitments, we first screened for countries whose VNRs mentioned concrete actions such as a new or revised national strategy, legal or policy reforms, programmatic action, or similar measures.

Yet not all land-related actions align with the spirit of the SDG commitments. Thus, we further narrowed our focus to land-related actions that attempt to ensure secure land rights for all, especially the poor, the vulnerable and the small producers; or to eradicate gender differences in land rights.

Lastly, important as past actions might be, we look for actions that have taken place after the SDGs have been agreed upon and set in motion, since 2015.

Several countries report taking decisive action to strengthen land rights in an inclusive way:

- » **ARGENTINA** – reports that in 2021 the Ministry of Social Development reopened the National Registry of Popular Neighbourhoods Program (ReNaBaP) to expand its coverage to additional neighbourhoods and to include some rural settlements. One component of the program focuses on providing tenure security to residents of working-class neighbourhoods through the issuance of Family Housing Certificates. The government reports that 71,149 certificates have been issued to homes in poor neighbourhoods.
- » **BOTSWANA** – reports that in 2021 it revised the Botswana Land Policy to facilitate ownership of land by both men and women who married in community of property type marriages. As of 2019, the policy also grants both men and women the right to be allocated land, as opposed to earlier discriminatory treatment.
- » **GABON** – reports that in 2021 it amended the Civil Code (Law No. 004/2021) to strengthen inheritance rights protections for surviving spouses and children.
- » **GAMBIA** – reports that the Second-Generation Gambia National Agricultural Investment Plan (2019-2026, GNAIP II) includes work on land policy reform to secure farmers' land property rights.
- » **GHANA** – reports that it adopted a Land Act in 2020 which includes spousal protections to property.
- » **GRENADE** – reports that the country's Land Bank Project, currently with two pilot locations, encourages landowners to place unused lands into land banks

that the government monitors and manages. Land in the land banks is to be distributed for use, with youth and gender as key consideration for allocation.

- » **JAMAICA** – reports commencing the Systematic Land Registration project, which adjudicates land rights resulting in the issuance of titles. The project is supported by amendments to the Registration of Titles, Cadastral Mapping and Tenure Classification (Special Provisions) (Amendment) Act of 2020 and the Registration of Titles (Amendment) Act, 2020. Similarly, the Urban Renewal and Development Programme is increasing the delivery of titles and regularize informal communities across the country.
- » **JORDAN** – reports in 2019, it amended the Personal Status Law to increase the potential share of inheritance that wives can receive.
- » **LESOTHO** – reports it is taking steps to eliminate discrimination of women as detailed in its National Gender and Development Policy (2018-2030) and is in the process of amending the Inheritance Act to ensure equal inheritance rights for both women and men.
- » **LIBERIA** – reports launching its Country Gender Equality Profile, which included analysis of women's access to resources and property rights.
- » **MALAWI** – reports it is rolling out a customary land registration process to allow more careful management and land use planning for customary land.
- » **MALI** – reports that it is carrying out land surveys, has established Unique National Cadastral Identification Numbers (NINACAD), and is implementing a Land and Property Title Information System (SITFI). It is not stated whether and how these activities take gender, customary rights, or marginalized groups into account.
- » **SRI LANKA** – reports that the Ministry of Justice initiated legal reform programs, including updates to religious personal laws to remove gender discriminatory provisions. It also includes removing gender discriminatory provisions within the Land Development Ordinance regarding inheritance and ownership of land.
- » **SUDAN** – reports drafting an agenda for women's land right that was approved by the Minister of Social Development in 2021. It also drafted an action plan for implementation that includes a commitment to remove obstacles facing women to land rights, inheritance, and to their participation in land management institutions.
- » **TOGO** – reports that in 2018 it approved the Law on Land and State Land Code to enhance tenure security in housing and in urban areas. In 2019, it created a "single land window" to streamline and ease the process of receiving land titles. And in 2021, it trained 162 members of women's and mixed gender groups in leadership techniques on how to advocate for women's access to land.

PROMISING, YET INSUFFICIENT STEPS

While these are all promising steps, considerably more work is needed for these laws and strategies to translate into changes on the ground, for the programs to reach the scale needed and, ultimately, to fulfil the commitment of not leaving anyone behind. Only some of these efforts have made explicit references to women and even fewer refer to indigenous peoples, pastoralists, ethnic minorities, IDPs or other vulnerable groups.

Other countries who submitted VNRs in 2022 made no mention of actions to grant or protect land rights, and when they did report on land rights, the activities they described either started before 2015 or contained narratives which lacked details on the scope and timing of the actions to determine if they serve to advance the SDG land commitments of secure land rights for all. These countries are Andorra, Belarus, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Dominica, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Eswatini, Greece, Guinea Bissau, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Luxemburg, Montenegro, Netherlands, Pakistan, Philippines, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Somalia, Suriname, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, and Uruguay.

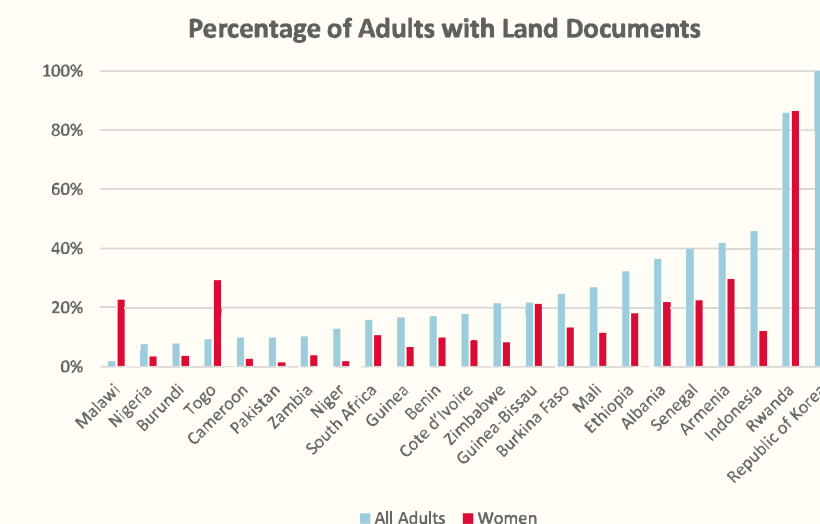
Going forward, it will be critical to know what steps governments are taking to grant and protect secure tenure rights for all, especially for women, small producers and those who are poor or vulnerable:

- » What legal gaps in tenure rights have they addressed? How did they do it? Why was it important to address this policy gap?
- » How are they ensuring that these legal reforms translate into real change on the ground?
- » What programmatic actions have they started, expanded, or adapted to close the gap in the tenure rights?
- » How many people among those targeted by the SDGs have benefited from these measures?
- » What else will they do to achieve their land rights commitment of secure tenure rights for all by 2030?

WHAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE SO FAR?

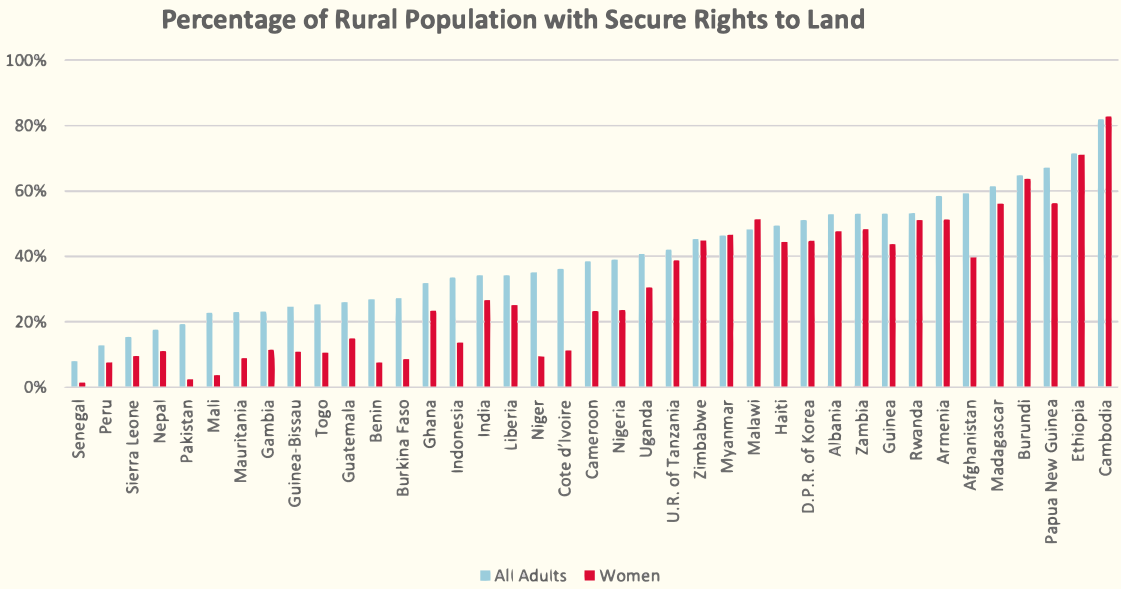
The SDGs includes several indicators to track Member States' progress on their land rights commitments. Under **GOAL 1, SDG 1.4.2** tracks progress towards ensuring *secure tenure rights for all*: countries agreed to report (a) the percentage of their adult population who have documents to prove their rights to land; and (b) the percentage of the adult population who perceive their rights as secure. A look at the SDG Global Database reveals that:

- » **No data has been added after 2018.** This means that there is no publicly available official data to determine what progress, if any, has been achieved in the past 5 years—1/3 of the extraordinarily ambitious agenda and a period in which economies around the world have had to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating effects on land inequality, land grabbing and criminalisation of land defenders.
- » **The uptake for these indicators has been worryingly slow.** Only 12% of the countries who agreed to the SDGs, have ever reported on land documentation. This dismal level of reporting precludes data-informed assessments of the magnitude of the challenge. Furthermore, among the 23 countries who ever reported on land documentation, only 7 have submitted data for more than 1 year. It is therefore impossible to use this data to identify any trends in tenure rights.
- » **Most adults lack government-recognized land documentation.** As the graph below illustrates, with the exception of Rwanda and Korea, countries who reported on SDG 1.4.2 indicated that at least half of their adult population lacks documentation to prove their land rights. In fact, 14 of the 23 countries who have ever reported indicate that at least 75% of their adult population lacks documentation in their names.



- » *Women are considerably less likely to have land documents in their name.* Except for Malawi, Togo, Guinea-Bissau and Rwanda, the percentage of women with documents is considerably lower than the average for the adult population.
- » *Reports on perceptions of tenure security are noticeably higher.* Malawi reports that 70% of its population perceives that their rights to land are secure. This percentage jumps to 88% or above for Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bisseau, Mali, Niger, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Senegal and Togo. To the extent that these numbers do indeed capture people's perceptions, they suggest that documentation is not perfectly correlated with tenure security: one can be feel tenure secure despite lacking documents to protect their land rights.

Under **GOAL 5, SDG 5.A.1** tracks progress towards ensuring *secure tenure rights for the agricultural population, paying special attention to gender equality*. Reporting on 5.a.1 has been more robust, but it is still quite low: only 20% of the countries who agreed to the SDGs have reported and most of them have reported only once.



- » *Much of the agricultural population lacks secure rights to land.* At least three-fourth of the agricultural population lacks secure rights to agricultural land in Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Only slightly better, more than half of the agricultural population lacks secure rights in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Liberia, Malawi, Myanmar, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.
- » *Among the agricultural population, there is a gender gap in who has secure land rights.* This is the case for all but 6 of the 39 countries who reported on indicator 5.a.1. The gender gap is particularly stark in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Pakistan, Senegal and Togo.

Finally, under **GOAL 5, SDG 5.A.2** tracks progress towards ensuring that countries' legal frameworks guarantee women equal rights to land. This indicator ranges from 0 to 6 with the number increasing depending on how many types of protections for women's land rights are enshrined in law.⁶

As the table that follows indicates, many of the countries who committed to the SDGs and have reported on this indicator lack legal provisions that are foundational to granting and protecting women's land rights. This is particularly the case for countries whose 5.a.2 indicator is less than 4.

SDG 5.A.2	COUNTRIES
1	Ghana, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Myanmar, Qatar, Santa Lucia, Sierra Leone, State of Palestine and Yemen
2	Chile, Guyana, Madagascar, Niger, Pakistan, Senegal and Suriname
3	Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Central African Rep, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Moldova, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe
4	Armenia, Chad, Italy, Liberia, Mongolia, Montenegro, Nepal, North Macedonia, Slovakia, Switzerland, Thailand, Togo, Uruguay and Viet Nam
5	Benin, Bolivia, Georgia, Guatemala, Hungary, Kenya, Namibia, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Serbia, Sweden, Tanzania, Uganda
6	Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lithuania and Rwanda

6 Degree to which the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control (1=No evidence to 6=Highest levels of guarantees)



THE SDG LAND MOMENTUM GROUP is a coalition of civil society and multi-lateral organisations geared towards monitoring the progress of the SDG land targets and conducting advocacy to meet the same end. Currently the secretariat of the group is coordinated by the International Land Coalition Secretariat. Members of the group include Asian NGO Coalition, GLTN, Huairou Commission, IPAR, IWGIA, Land Portal, Landesa, Natural Resources Institute - University of Greenwich, Oxfam, Rights and Resources, TMG Think Tank, Transparency International and World Resources Institute



dianaf@landesa.org



www.landcoalition.org



landrightsnw#

**INTERNATIONAL
LAND
COALITION**

INTERNATIONAL LAND COALITION SECRETARIAT C/O IFAD

Via Paolo di Dono, 44 , 00142 - Rome, Italy
tel. +39 06 5459 2445 fax +39 06 5459 3445