



Land Rights: An Essential Global Indicator for the Post-2015 SDGs

September 2nd, 2015

Secure land rights for all are a critical component of a transformational agenda of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets. Leveraging decades of extensive expertise, a broad coalition of global and national organizations, civil society, and experts, including the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the Women’s Major Group (WBG), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network ([SDSN](#)), **recommends the following Land Rights Indicator.**

Universal and feasible, this recommended land rights indicator is vital to four of the sustainable development goals, including ending poverty (goal 1), ensuring food security (goal 2), achieving gender equality and empowering women (goal 5), and making cities and human settlements inclusive (goal 11).¹ This indicator, best placed under Target 1.4, would capture gender equality and progress of all people’s on-the-ground rights to land, property, and natural resources. This land rights indicator further aligns with priority indicators issued by the [Global Land Indicators Initiative](#), and supported by the [Global Donor Working Group on Land](#).

Recommended Land Rights Indicator:

Percentage of women, men, indigenous peoples, and local communities (IPLCs) with secure rights to land, property, and natural resources, measured by

- a. *percentage with legally documented or recognized evidence of tenure, and*
- b. *percentage who perceive their rights are recognized and protected*

The recommended indicator focuses on the twin aims of tracking legal and administrative progress by governments in recognizing secure rights to land (documentation) and of people-defined progress on the quality of land rights (perceptions). In doing so, this indicator fully tracks the agenda’s land rights content developed through months of inclusive negotiation and consultation and satisfies the request in the recently finalized [UN declaration](#) that global indicators maintain the level of ambition of the agenda (Para. 75).

The land rights indicator must capture the full scope of land rights included in the Post-2015 SDGs

Sustainable Development Goal 1 aims to “End poverty in all its forms everywhere.” One of the pillar targets to that end, Target 1.4, calls for “By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.” This target encompasses all people regardless of where they reside, their livelihood activities, or the assets they own. It covers both social and economic resources.

- a) **The land rights indicator must capture more than agricultural land:** Secure rights to land are key to accessing income, food, status, housing, credit, government services, and greater household- and community-level decision-making.

Indicators limited to agricultural land ignore the millions of women, men, indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) who live in the forest, practice nomadic or semi nomadic pastoralism, rely on plots too small to be considered agricultural holdings, live in rural areas but are not engaged in agricultural production, reside on communal land not designated for agricultural purposes, or rely on land for small businesses, as well as the urban and peri-urban poor.

- b) **The land rights indicator must extend beyond ownership:** The indicator should use “**tenure security**,” a widely accepted concept that encompasses more than ownership and is in line with FAO’s Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure. Using “tenure security” (or “secure land rights”) terminology would protect the rights of those who access land through a number of group- or individually-held tenure arrangements.

Indicators limited to those who “own” land ignore the millions:

- who live in countries, such as China and Vietnam, where the State owns all the land, and individuals have use rights.
- who reside in regions across the world on communally-held land not individually-owned, such as areas under customary tenure in Sub-Saharan Africa, indigenous territories in Latin America, and Tribal communities in India.
- who are unable to afford to own land but require secure use rights.

- c) **The land rights indicator must track both gender ratio and overall progress:** Indicators limited to tracking the gender gap among those who have secure rights fail to consider the millions of women, men and IPLCs who do not have secure rights to land. The recommended land rights indicator would track both absolute improvement *and* reduced gender inequality.

A transformational agenda should seek new data and not be constrained by already available data

While critical to inform policy and to track progress, there is no globally available, nationally representative, sex-disaggregated data on land rights. Thus, *any* indicator on land rights will require new data collection efforts. The post-2015 agenda presents a historic opportunity to push the data and evidence base forward, rather than having the available data control the framing of priorities.

The recommended land rights indicator is feasible, even in the short term. For a description of how the data void can be addressed through global polls and household surveys click [here](#).

For more information on the coalition’s proposal, click [here](#). For questions or suggestions, please contact us at dianaf@landesa.org

¹The cross-cutting nature of the recommended indicator, which can also track progress towards targets 2.3, 5.a and 11.1, makes it a powerful option if there is pressure to settle for a manageable set of indicators without sacrificing key components of the agenda.

