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Strategic Partnership to Improve Geospatial Information on Community Lands

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Abstract

Through a partnership between IFAD, the Secretariat of the International Land Coalition (ILC) and two of its members, Cadasta Foundation, and World Resources Institute, this initiative explores innovative approaches to improving GIS data on local communities' lands in three countries—Tanzania, India, and DRC—and to foster their inclusion through a data platform called LandMark. This initiative acknowledges the importance and the transversal nature of secure tenure of land and natural resources for inclusive rural development and poverty eradication. Several outcomes of this collaboration will be discussed in this paper. First, the paper provides an analysis of sociocultural and land tenure assessments and stakeholders' engagement in development projects. Second, it demonstrates the potential of innovative geospatial interventions to recognize and secure collective tenure rights. Third, it promotes strategic partnerships to facilitate the access to and the collection of validated data in an innovative and inclusive manner while ensuring their dissemination.

Strategic Partnership to Improve Geospatial Data

Identifying and recognising local communities' land and tenure rights provides significant benefits to communities and their development interventions. Although the approach is commonly accepted, a lack of precise and accessible data— validated by all stakeholders— persists, jeopardizing the recognition of land and resource rights and integration of communities' lands into development programming. IFAD, ILC and two of its members, Cadasta Foundation and World Resources Institute, have joined forces to explore the benefits of strategic partnerships to facilitate innovative geospatial-based approaches and solutions to collecting and sharing data on local communities' lands for the purposes of advancing tenure security and development.



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Secure and equal access to land is fundamental to reducing vulnerability and ensuring the legal recognition of collective tenure rights for local communities. Identifying and promoting the land tenure security of these communities is conducive to a variety of positive social, economic, and environmental impacts. In order to improve equitable access to land and to secure rights and enable relevant development programming, there is a need for accurate data and sufficient land maps recognised by governments and the communities themselves. As tenure security is also a matter of perception, the direct participation of communities in land mapping and validation is integral to achieving inclusive and sustainable development activities.

Community Land Data Platform

Acknowledging the importance of secure tenure of land and natural resources for inclusive rural development and poverty eradication, the IFAD Land Tenure and in close collaboration with the Secretariat of the International Land Coalition¹ (ILC) are exploring innovative approaches to capturing GIS data on communities' lands and fostering community inclusion. Through a strategic partnership with an open land mapping platform named LandMark,² the initiative will integrate LandMark data into IFAD's corporate GIS platform, thanks to on-the-ground data collection by local NGOs and the communities themselves. This approach improves and systemizes the land assessment and community consultation³ processes.

The partnership with LandMark offers opportunities for support and scaling while fostering inclusion and direct engagement at the country level. If applied correctly, it opens up prospects for identifying community-held lands and for improving policy engagement

¹ Hosted by IFAD since its foundation in the mid 90's, the International Land Coalition is a global alliance of civil society and intergovernmental organisations working together to put people at the centre of land governance.

² LandMark is the first online, interactive global platform to provide maps and other critical information on lands that are collectively held and used by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs). *"As of today, the indigenous and community land maps on LandMark cover 12.4% of the world's land, out of an estimated 50% or more that is held by Indigenous Peoples and communities globally."*

³ IFAD No-Harm policy and mandatory process to seek Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)



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on tenure issues. To secure communities' tenure rights, boundary demarcation and recognition by all stakeholders are fundamental. This strategic partnership aims to strengthen collaboration and synergies with ILC members and IFAD via LandMark to include a bottom-up approach that makes agreed-upon community land rights visible on a broader platform.

Building on IFAD Operations in Three Countries

In several countries, local communities' maps are either not available or are insufficient. With the goal of ensuring the security of tenure among IPLC land, there is a need to strengthen geographic data collection (geo-targeting) and communities' consultation in IFAD operations. This initiative provided an opportunity to consolidate and complement existing IFAD and country-level information with the collaboration of key stakeholders. Ultimately, the data collected will inform local communities, LandMark, IFAD's corporate GIS database, and government and other stakeholders who will benefit from having information more readily available on land, resources, and their related issues. The initiative is taking advantage of IFAD's long-standing operations and ILC Members' presence in three countries—Tanzania, India, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Country selection was based on key programmatic and contextual factors, including building on existing IFAD investments.⁴

In Tanzania, the initiative capitalises on the IFAD-funded Sustainable Rangeland Management Project (SRMP) embedded in the ILC National Engagement Strategy (NES) and the Rangeland Working Group. Under SRMP, a number of community village land maps and livestock routes were registered with the government-led National Land Use Planning Commission (NLUPC) which established a database of maps.

⁴ IFAD Strategic Country Program (COSOP), programmatic operations and the Indigenous Peoples Facility Fund



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In India, IFAD supports the Odisha Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups Empowerment and Livelihoods Improvement Programme (OPELIP). This program builds on the experience of the now-closed Orissa Tribal Empowerment and Livelihoods Programme (OTELP). Working with Cadasta Foundation, this new intervention aimed to inform the OPELIP project and to collect more data to strengthen tenure and land governance for five forest communities in Jharkhand and Odisha with the support of a local, on-the-ground non-governmental organization called Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) using Cadasta's Platform—an innovative suite of technology tools and services for documenting land and resources information.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the newly launched IFAD-funded *Projet d'Appui au Secteur Agricole dans la Province du Nord Kivu* (PASA-NK)— in collaboration with the National Commission for Land Reform and other ILC members—focuses on improving the cadaster in rural areas while ensuring inclusion of indigenous communities suffering from poor land and resources access and recurrent land-based conflict, especially in forest areas.

Participatory, Cost-effective, and Efficient Technology-based Land Data Collection

IFAD partner country offices in Tanzania, India, and DRC—with the support of ILC members and other local and national partners—implemented technology-based data collection approaches to cost-effectively and efficiently strengthen land claims for indigenous peoples and local communities and address various technical, contextual, and institutional challenges. The exercises were conducted in a participatory manner and in accordance with Free, Prior, Informed Consent (FPIC) policies and the operational principles of IFAD's Corporate Social, Environmental, and Climate Assessment Procedures (SECAP).

In Tanzania, the initiative collected over 200 existing maps made available by various actors with the contribution of local communities, the Government, and other land sector actors. In India, field data collection of 4,555 individuals resulted in strengthened tenure



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and land governance for five forest communities in Jharkhand and Odisha states. In the DRC, the indigenous lands mapped represent 125 villages covering a total surface of 566,835 hectares and an estimated population of 7,250. All data and maps, under appropriate privacy and security protocols, will be shared on LandMark's platform, IFAD's Geonode, and in the case of India, on Cadasta's Platform.

In India, the initiative used the Cadasta Platform, a fully integrated geographic information system (GIS) for on- and offline participatory mapping of Community Forest Rights (CFRs) and Individual Forest Rights (IFRs). Cadasta provided training of the local implementing partner, PRADAN, on data collection tools and methodologies. Community data collectors captured the necessary household and geospatial data for the issuance of formal government-recognized land rights. The initiative's technical solution provides for monitoring and evaluation to address land disputes and ad-hoc challenges. Data are shared with the local governance bodies for verification and with government revenue and other departments for the issuance of the rights documents. Data, maps, and community attribute information are collected in accordance with government application procedures and shared with the entire community. The communities themselves are using the data to develop their own forest and community management plans and to identify their own development needs and opportunities.

Project Learning

These case studies have demonstrated that there is a demand from IFAD Country Offices for; 1) geographic data (GIS system) collection capturing attributes linked to communities lands (and rights to land); and 2) land tenure assessments to strengthen inclusion and consultation of targeted communities in the projects and COSOP design. Additionally, the use of online dashboards for Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Knowledge Management can be helpful for IFAD Headquarters, in-country level offices, and implementing partners. Regular review, experience sharing, and lesson-learning meetings, workshops, and presentations at the district, and state levels could address local primacy,



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support FPIC, and cultivate community participation. Impact assessments, which should be a part of M&E and learning activities, should include the use of dashboards. Development programming should include the adoption of an open standards system; inclusion of capacity-building to ensure inclusive and participatory approaches and to close the gaps around the political context of maps; training on the use of technology; and increased knowledge-sharing through the ILC member network.

Through these experiences, the team demonstrated that strategic partnerships on the ground and at the country and institutional levels have proven to be an effective solution to avoiding duplication of effort and consolidating data—while safeguarding community data through government and community participation and consent. The coordinated engagement of a broad range of actors and partners benefited IFAD country offices and other stakeholders to access ground-level, verified information more readily while ensuring national partners' consensus and ownership from the local to the national levels.

The results showed that having strong and effective partnerships, not only between organizations, but also with the communities themselves can be beneficial, especially when it comes to sharing information, achieving results, and avoiding duplication of efforts. IFAD, ILC, and other collaborators have a real opportunity for significant impact by investing more in securing communities' lands, using innovative technologies, and engaging in more inclusive and participatory land mapping processes to promote land tenure recognition and protection. Collaborations have the potential to achieve greater impact at the local level but to be effective, these investments must be accompanied by a significant capacity development in the use of GIS technology.

Addressing Challenges through Engagement and Trust

One of the key challenges with sharing maps is the security of data and related abuses of the maps shared. Existing data on land is often politically sensitive; access to these data often involves lengthy bureaucratic processes or can raise questions around privacy and



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security of data and community protection. Sharing shapefiles can be risky, especially in places where communities have not formalized their ownership and control over the land and where companies have faster access to land ownership than rural communities do. Oftentimes, there are few maps that are widely recognized and accepted by indigenous and community members and other stakeholders. A considerable number of maps are not shared for a variety of reasons, including political sensitivities, concerns around privacy, fear of misuse of data by outsiders, and a lack of transparency and stakeholder participation in mapping processes. Engaging in collaborative initiatives that build trust with and among local stakeholders—such as the ones promoted in this initiative—enables communities to document and secure well-developed maps and to follow safeguards like FPIC.

Approaches to addressing these sensitivities included strong community involvement during various project phases, clear advocacy alignment, and previous and ongoing project consultations that considerably improved stakeholders' willingness to share maps and other data. Mapping processes need to be inclusive, ensuring participation of a broad representation of stakeholders and decision-makers, including community and government authorities at various levels, civil society, women and other vulnerable groups, and in some contexts, the private sector.

According to the country consultations, IFAD Country Offices regularly rely on external support or a “broker” to access information or facilitate contacts with a third party. Though pertinent, this practice is particularly effective when it taps into multi-stakeholder platforms that represent broad stakeholder engagement, including from grassroots and community voices.

In Tanzania, such an approach gave IFAD an opportunity to interact with non-traditional development partners and to connect with remote communities. An analysis of the partner's comparative advantages resulted in strategic partnerships that efficiently



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overcame existing technical, political, and institutional barriers that previously prevented the completion of local community land mapping and data collection.

In all three projects, training at the local level was critical. Training community members, local data collectors, CSO partners, and local government personnel facilitated not only the generation of maps, but also their potential integration into other initiatives such as IFAD operations, government cadasters, or global platforms whose intent is to advance community land and resource rights.

Conclusion

Overall, the three-country initiative demonstrated that building effective, strong, and sustainable partnerships between UN agencies such as IFAD, other development partners, governments, civil society organizations including the ILC, and communities themselves offers a trust-building, cost-effective, and sustainable solution to the current lack of accessible data and maps for indigenous and local community lands. It established a positive relationship between IFAD operations and community mapping efforts on platforms like LandMark and Cadasta, demonstrating how more efficient technologies and methodologies for documentation and mapping can benefit communities and the stakeholders that support them. Tools like LandMark and Cadasta also support the recognition and publication of targeted communities' maps as an advocacy and lobbying tool for the promotion of community land and resource rights nationally and globally.

In addition to the intended contribution of these projects toward advancing land tenure and resource rights for thousands of families in the target communities, the initiative contributed to IFAD learning on effective participatory practices and how to more inclusively serve vulnerable groups, including indigenous people, by securing communities' lands as a critical strategy to combatting poverty, exploitation, and conflict in rural areas.



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Investments in ensuring secure and equal access to land are fundamental to reducing vulnerability, ensuring legal recognition of collective tenure rights for local communities, and promoting positive social, economic, and environmental impacts. Data collection and map creation must be participatory and inclusive, and insistent on protecting livelihoods and respecting cultural norms and customs. Any efforts must value and engage local and traditional knowledge of land and natural resources, respect sensitivities, build trust, and promote tenure security that creates more sustainable and vibrant communities.

Key Words:

#Strategic partnership

#Securing land rights

#Indigenous and local communities' lands

#Geo-spatial technology

#Inclusive mapping