

# Land governance to promote resilience in protracted crises and fragility contexts

RESILIENCE & ADAPTATION LEARNING FACILITY

MARCH 2026 | ANNA LOCKE

SAADIA, MEMBER OF THE WAYAMA JAPTA VILLAGE RANGELAND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE, WORKS TO RESTORE A PATCH OF RANGELAND IN KENYA.

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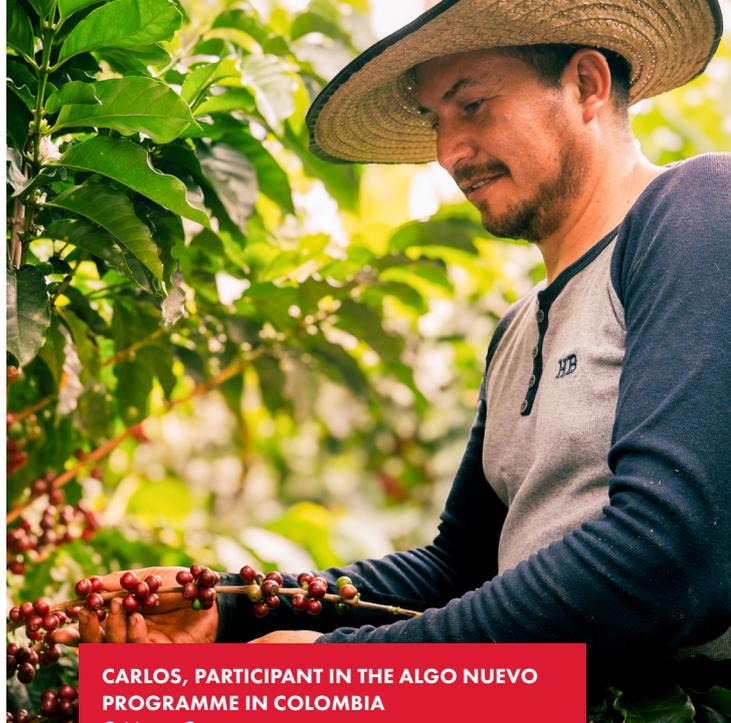
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# Acronyms

ASAL Adapts	Adaptation Services for Action and Learning Adapts
CCLAP	Climate Change Leaders Advancing for Peace
COCOVE	Comités de Colline Verte
COFO	Land Commissions
CRC	Conflict Resolution Committee
CSO	Civil society organisation
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EKISIL	Securing Peace and Promoting Prosperity
EWS	Early Warning Systems
FCAS	Fragile and conflict-affected settings
FCDO	UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
ICARR	Incentivizing Collective Action for Rangeland Regeneration
JASS	Justice and Stability in the Sahel
LAS	Land At Scale
LEGEND	Land: Enhancing Governance for Economic Development
LIFT	Land Investment for Transformation
LNRG	Land and Natural Resource Governance
MAST	Mapping Approaches for Securing Tenure
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territory
TEFOS	Territorios Forestales Sostenibles
TICE	Trauma-Informed Community Empowerment
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WDP	Ward Development Planning
WPC	Ward Planning Committee

# Executive summary

In fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS), governance and resilience are deeply interconnected. Conflict and climate change disrupt governance mechanisms and institutions, erode trust, and limit the ability of national and local systems to manage shocks or ensure equitable access to land and natural resources. Because land governance determines how land is accessed, used and controlled, and how disputes are resolved, weaknesses in these systems drive environmental degradation, reduce adaptive capacity and fuel land-related conflict – reinforcing instability and climate vulnerability.



CARLOS, PARTICIPANT IN THE ALGO NUEVO PROGRAMME IN COLOMBIA  
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Resilience programmes often invest in sustainable land use but overlook the governance systems needed to sustain those gains. Well-designed land governance interventions strengthen resilience by helping communities manage shocks and stresses, reduce conflict and lower future humanitarian need. Poorly designed interventions, by contrast, risk undermining both resilience and stability.

This review examines over 20 programmes in rural areas affected by protracted crisis and institutional and social fragility. It draws on experiences from Colombia, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Myanmar, Niger, Rwanda, Uganda and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). It highlights how land governance protects and builds household resilience in fragile settings and outlines practical approaches for designing and delivering effective land governance interventions that strengthen resilience, sustainable land use, peace and livelihoods. Gender, equity, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) considerations are integrated throughout.

## Lessons and factors for success

### 1. LAND GOVERNANCE IS CRITICAL TO BUILDING RESILIENCE AND MUST BE TAILORED TO DIFFERENT FRAGILITY CONTEXTS.

Foundational measures, such as conflict resolution, may be required before deeper reform in highly fragile contexts. More ambitious reforms are feasible where institutions are more stable.

### 2. LAND GOVERNANCE INTERVENTIONS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE WHEN TAILORED TO LAND USERS AND TENURE SYSTEMS.

Smallholders, pastoralists and forest communities require different governance approaches. Failure to account for these differences risks tenure maladaptation.

### 3. IDENTIFYING GOVERNANCE GAPS AND APPROPRIATE INTERVENTIONS REQUIRES A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF CONFLICT AND POLITICAL ECONOMY DYNAMICS.

Conflict analysis identifies land-related triggers and structural drivers. Political economy analysis reveals who controls land access and dispute systems, improving feasibility and sustainability.

#### 4. INTERVENTIONS TO STRENGTHEN LAND GOVERNANCE MUST BE CAREFULLY SEQUENCED AND GIVEN SUFFICIENT TIME.

Building trust and social cohesion over land issues may be prerequisites to tenure reform. Reforms require realistic implementation timeframes.

#### 5. STRENGTHENING LAND GOVERNANCE REQUIRES WORKING ACROSS A RANGE OF SCALES AND LINKING FORMAL AND INFORMAL SYSTEMS.

Effective programmes connect community-level mechanisms with sub-national and national-level state land administration and legal and policy frameworks.

#### 6. INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE GOVERNANCE IS KEY TO PROGRAMME LEGITIMACY AND SUSTAINABILITY.

The meaningful participation of women, young people and marginalised groups reduces the risk of conflict and strengthens trust and buy-in.

#### 7. ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY AND DATA CAN INFORM AND DEMOCRATISE THE DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF LAND GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS.

Participatory mapping, GIS and digital tools improve decision-making, documenting land rights and risk analysis.

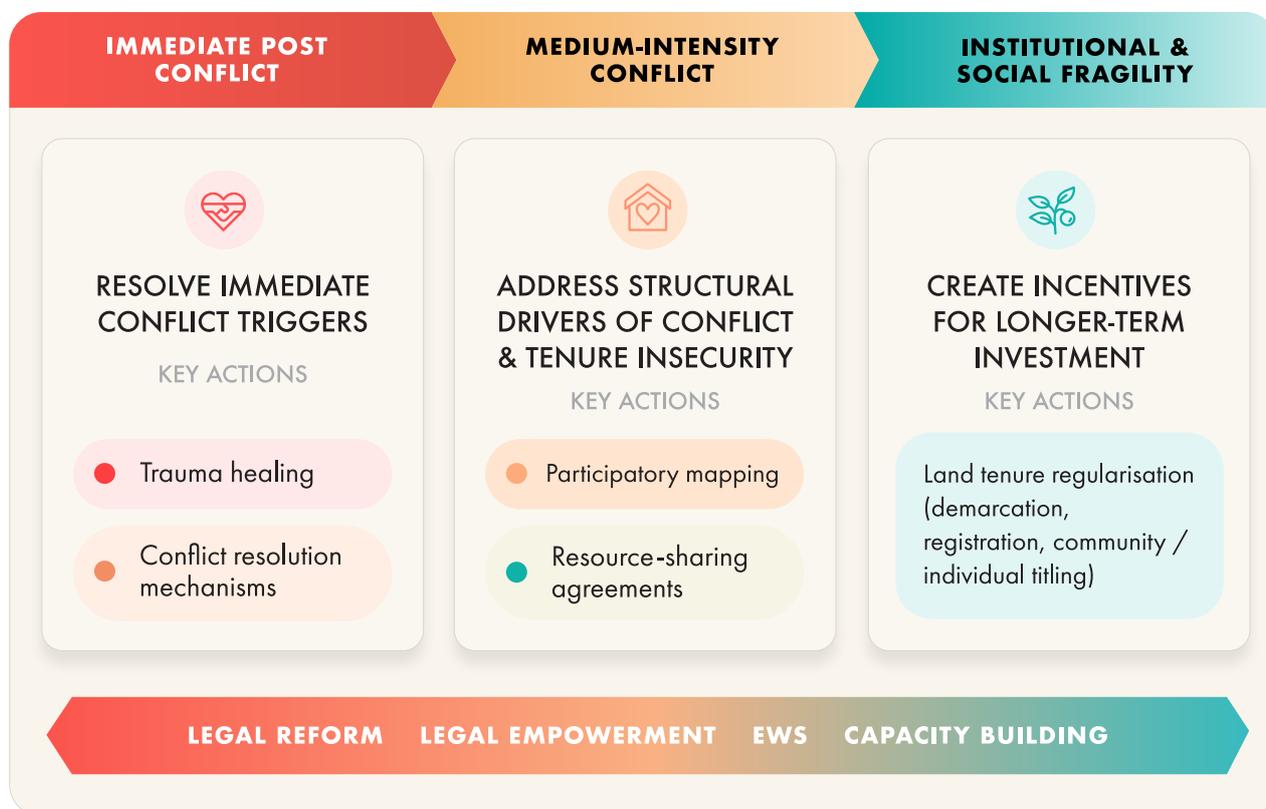


Figure 1: Possible land governance activities in different contexts.

# Conclusion

Land governance is a foundational pillar of resilience in FCAS. Secure, inclusive and equitable land systems shape how communities manage climate risks, sustain livelihoods and prevent disputes from escalating into violence. For this reason, land governance should be integrated from the outset of resilience, climate and stabilisation programmes.

Experience shows that land governance interventions can deliver meaningful results even in protracted crises and contexts of institutional fragility, acting as a bridge to longer-term reform and development gains. However, their impact depends on tailoring approaches to conflict dynamics and political economy realities, and sequencing interventions appropriately across phases of fragility (see Figure 1 above for illustrative pathways).

Maximising impact requires collaboration across resilience, peacebuilding and land governance communities. Programme managers, funders and technical experts should jointly shape design and delivery, drawing on conflict and political economy analysis and established tools for conflict sensitivity and adaptive management.



# Introduction and rationale

**In FCAS, governance and resilience building efforts influence each other.** The impacts of conflict and climate change can disrupt and overwhelm formal and informal governance mechanisms, which may be replaced by less legitimate, less equitable and less inclusive systems. This limits the ability of national and local systems to meet the needs of communities affected by those shocks, and undermines the equitable and inclusive access to, and use and control of, the natural resources upon which they rely.

**Between 2020 and 2015, land was at the heart of half of violent conflicts worldwide. It is often a root cause or major contributing factor where there is conflict.**

**Land plays a significant role in FCAS.** Weak, inequitable land governance and fragile, distrusted institutions contribute to natural resource degradation, poor adaptive capacity and resource conflicts. This increases climate vulnerability and deepens mistrust in institutions, fuelling grievances that escalate conflicts between communities and between citizens and the state. Consequently, communities are unable to adapt and climate impacts are intensified.

**Institutions and governance set the rules for how land is accessed, used and controlled – often described as a ‘bundle of rights’ – and how disputes are resolved when there are competing claims.** In FCAS, many climate adaptation and resilience programmes invest in sustainable land use and land restoration to improve livelihoods and adaptive capacity. However, these efforts often overlook the land governance measures needed to support and protect those investments over time.

**A well-designed mix of land governance interventions can deliver multiple resilience benefits at household, community and ecosystem levels, particularly if combined with actions to tackle other constraints.** Clear and enforceable land rights reduce disputes and provide tenure security<sup>1</sup>, creating incentives for long-term investment in sustainable land use. This can translate into improved peace and stability, livelihoods, food security and climate resilience, enabling people to remain on their land. Inclusive and equitable land governance approaches can address marginalisation of women and other vulnerable groups, leading to broader-based social and economic benefits. However, poorly designed interventions that fail to recognise and address land governance issues can undermine resilience and equity.

<sup>1</sup> Tenure security refers to the certainty, legitimacy and protection of a person’s or community’s rights to use, access, manage and control land or related resources. In practical terms, it means people are confident that their land rights will be recognised by others and protected from eviction, challenge or loss. This applies across both formal systems (e.g., legal titles) and informal or customary systems (e.g., community-recognised rights)

**SAADIA, PARTICIPANT IN THE ASAL ADAPTS PROGRAMME IN KENYA**

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# Scope

Our review includes over 20 programmes that reflect recent learning and evolving practice on land governance in rural FCAS.<sup>2</sup> These include different regions, land governance activities, users and tenure systems, including smallholder farmers, pastoralists and forest communities.

The analysis brings together lessons from across these programmes and identifies the actions needed for land governance to support resilience, sustainable land use, peace and livelihoods. It highlights GEDSI considerations, a critical component of people-centred interventions that recognise diverse experiences, needs and vulnerabilities – especially among marginalised groups.

The analysis drew on several additional sources:<sup>3</sup>

- › Academic articles on themes and conceptual frameworks on land governance for smallholders, pastoralists and forest communities in FCAS.
- › Key informant interviews with technical experts from FCDO, Mercy Corps, the [Land Facility](#) and other relevant organisations working at the intersect of resilience and land governance (see Annex 1).
- › Programme reviews, including FCDO’s LEGEND programme’s *Securing Land Rights at Scale*,<sup>4</sup> the UN’s *Lessons From the Field on Conflict Sensitive Land Governance and Peacebuilding*<sup>5</sup> and USAID’s *Land and Conflict Toolkit*.<sup>6</sup>

# Purpose

The purpose of this report is twofold. First, it seeks to clarify how land governance can protect and build household resilience, social cohesion and economic opportunity in FCAS. Second, it aims to provide a practical evidence base for action by identifying approaches that have proven effective – or show strong potential – in strengthening land governance in these challenging contexts.

By synthesising learning from a wide range of programmes, the report responds to a growing demand for clearer guidance on how to integrate land governance into broader resilience, peacebuilding and livelihood strategies. It highlights not only what can be achieved, but also the conditions, partnerships and design choices that make success more likely.

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2 For more detail on fragility definitions, glossary and core concepts see Reference Document. The review does not include urban programmes although land governance is a key element of urban resilience, especially in the context of climate change

3 The analysis does not assess the strength of evidence. It uses an inductive approach to identify practical lessons from programmes

4 [Securing Land Rights at Scale](#), June 2019

5 [Lessons From the Field on Conflict Sensitive Land Governance and Peacebuilding](#), 2018

6 [Land and Conflict Toolkit](#), October 2022



# Lessons and factors for success



## LESSON 1: LAND GOVERNANCE IS CRITICAL TO BUILDING RESILIENCE AND MUST BE TAILORED TO DIFFERENT FRAGILITY CONTEXTS

Even in FCAS, there is space for land governance interventions, tailored to specific conditions. In contexts of high conflict and very weak institutions, it is more effective to focus land governance interventions on foundational measures rather than deeper tenure reform. Programmes may need to prioritise conflict prevention and resolution. This is especially important where peace and security are the primary objectives. As stability and institutional capacity increase, more ambitious reforms become feasible and effective.

The [Ben ni Baara](#) programme in Mali addressed the drivers of persistent and escalating conflicts between farmers and pastoralists to prevent the spread of violence in central and southern Mali. It established participatory local Conflict Resolution Committees (CRCs) and Land Commissions (COFOs) with local stakeholders. The CRCs worked on broader conflict and operated an early warning system to identify credible conflict risks at village level, while COFOs focused on land disputes. These mechanisms strengthened social cohesion by building trust both within communities and between communities and conflict resolution institutions, facilitating negotiated settlements rather than conflict escalation.

**Deeper land governance reforms, such as land rights mapping or titling, may be possible where government institutions are reasonably present and stable, even where the country is affected by conflict or fragility.**

Ethiopia's Land Investment for Transformation ([LIFT](#)) programme supported the Government of Ethiopia to implement large-scale individual land certification for smallholder farmers through a systematic, low-cost and participatory approach. The programme

focused on issuing Second-Level Land Certificates, which recorded plot boundaries using spatial data and formally recognised landholders' use rights, including joint certification for spouses. Certification was embedded within strengthened rural land administration systems at woreda level, alongside capacity building for land officials and dispute resolution mechanisms. Evidence from LIFT showed that clearer and more secure land rights reduced boundary disputes and fears of expropriation, increasing farmers' confidence that they would benefit from long-term investments.<sup>7</sup>

**Resilience interventions that do not address underlying land-related constraints are unlikely to deliver lasting results.** Where land tenure is insecure, land is contested or land-related conflicts persist, investments in livelihoods, natural resource management or peacebuilding can easily be undermined.

### KEY ACTION 1 :

*Identify and address land governance-related constraints to resilience outcomes*

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The [Food Security Project](#) in the Democratic Republic of Congo aimed to strengthen the resilience of smallholder farmers and their farming systems to environmental and economic shocks by improving soil health and water management, reducing erosion and enhancing soil quality, through a Hill Approach.<sup>8</sup> However, insecure tenure of tenant farmers under absentee landlords, working in a protracted crisis context, had long discouraged farmers from investing in measures such as erosion control or organic soil improvements that only

<sup>7</sup> Source: [LIFT Project Completion Review](#), 2021

<sup>8</sup> An intervention which focussed on securing land tenure for tenant farmers on the hills, working with landowners, tenants, and local authorities to reduce conflicts over land, negotiate formal and longer-term tenure contracts, and develop local capacities for collective action

pay off over time. The programme incorporated measures to secure more favourable and equitable tenure arrangements for sharecroppers over the long term through establishing a forum to negotiate longer-term, formalised tenure contracts, with a potential reduction in tenure fees. This aimed to

foster a mutually beneficial arrangement between sharecroppers gained fair and stable access to land, landowners benefited from improved soil and water management on their land, and overall agricultural production increased.



**PARTICIPANT OF THE JASS PROGRAMME IN MALI AND NIGER**  
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## PROGRAMME EXAMPLE

### An “Integrated Stability” approach

‘Integrated Stabilisation’ describes the UK government’s approach to reducing violence and strengthening stability in FCAS by coordinating diplomatic, development, security and political tools. UK programmes aim to reduce violence and insecurity, protect basic survival needs, support political processes and lay the foundations for longer-term stability.

The JASS programme applied this approach to conflict prevention in stable but at-risk areas of Mali and Niger by addressing structural drivers of conflict, with a particular focus on contested land governance. Secure and equitable access to land and land use – especially for marginalised groups – was central to strengthening the resilience of land-dependent livelihoods and reducing conflict risks.

The programme established or strengthened local institutions to manage and resolve land-related disputes, including COFOs in both countries, CRCs in Mali and early warning systems (SCAP/RUs) in Niger. These mechanisms supported negotiated solutions such as consensual transhumance corridors, local land-use agreements, and systems for monitoring and responding to emerging conflicts.

Institutional and governance measures were complemented by interventions to reduce pressure on land and water and build climate resilience. These included cash transfers to meet immediate humanitarian needs, support to improve agricultural and pastoral productivity at village level, and facilitation of access to markets.<sup>9</sup>

9 Sources: The UK Government’s Approach to Stabilisation, 2019; JASS Business Case, 2021; Breaking Cycles of Violence, 2025; JASS Annual Review, 2025



## LESSON 2: LAND GOVERNANCE INTERVENTIONS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE WHEN TAILORED TO LAND USERS AND TENURE SYSTEMS

Programme designers need to be clear about who to target in each FCAS setting and the tenure system that operates. For smallholder farmers with individual tenure, clearly defined individual rights can encourage productive investment, improve access to credit and enable more efficient land markets, provided that markets and financial services are developed and accessible. This can increase productivity, reduce the need to defend land claims and free labour for other activities.

### KEY ACTION 2:

*Clarify intended beneficiaries*

For **pastoralists**, resilience depends on tenure systems that support mobility and flexible, overlapping access to land and water. Effective land governance can require measures to clarify grazing rights, delineate mobility corridors and establish resource-sharing agreements. This can strengthen livelihoods, social cohesion and sustainable rangeland management. **Forest-dependent communities** may need clearer recognition of communal boundaries and stronger community governance to protect their land from encroachment by loggers or miners and ensure that communities protect and restore their forests. Achieving these outcomes requires strong legal frameworks, inclusive governance and fair benefit sharing.

### KEY ACTION 3:

*Understand participants' tenure systems*

**Failing to account for these differences can result in tenure maladaptation, where interventions intended to strengthen tenure security actually undermine livelihoods and resilience.** For instance, individual land titling can improve security and investment incentives for smallholder farmers (such as in Ethiopia's LIFT programme). However, in pastoral contexts, an approach that prioritises rigid boundaries and individualised tenure can create trade-offs, restrict movement, weaken customary tenure arrangements and disrupt rangeland management practices. In such settings, more appropriate approaches include recognising and formalising communal grazing areas and mobility corridors, alongside strengthening communities' capacity to manage resource-related conflict.

The **EKISIL** programme brought different groups together across social and territorial divisions to address underlying tensions that risked fuelling conflict.



## LESSON 3: IDENTIFYING GOVERNANCE GAPS AND APPROPRIATE INTERVENTIONS REQUIRES A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF CONFLICT AND POLITICAL ECONOMY DYNAMICS

Understanding and responding to differential risks in crisis-affected communities is fundamental to delivering effective and accountable programming. This requires analysing both the drivers of conflict and the power structures that shape how resources and decisions are managed. Conflict analysis identifies the factors that generate or exacerbate instability. This includes the role that land can play as a conflict trigger through boundary disputes, inheritance disputes or contested claims following displacement. Land can also operate as a structural driver of conflict with roots in longstanding structural discrepancies and inequalities in land distribution, control and access, contributing to deep-seated grievances.<sup>10</sup> Political economy analysis (PEA) reveals who determines access, use and control of land locally and influences dispute resolution mechanisms.

This combined approach is essential for a “do no harm” framework,<sup>11</sup> ensuring land governance interventions do not unintentionally reinforce exclusion, elite capture or existing tensions. However, its value goes beyond risk mitigation. By grounding programme design in a clear understanding of conflict dynamics and local power realities, interventions are more likely to be politically feasible, locally legitimate and sustainable.

### KEY ACTION 4 :

*Apply conflict and political economy analysis to identify conflict drivers, map power dynamics and pinpoint gaps in land governance*



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### PROGRAMME EXAMPLE : Using conflict and political economy analysis to inform programme design and implementation

JASS used conflict analysis to shape both programme design and adaptive implementation. Through a Climate and Conflict Resilience Assessment,<sup>12</sup> a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) analysis,<sup>13</sup> a Political Economy Analysis<sup>14</sup> and a large-scale mid-term survey of 3,687 respondents, JASS examined how economic hardship, climate shocks, governance perceptions, marginalisation and social cohesion interact with local power dynamics to influence conflict dynamics and vulnerability to violent extremism.

10 For more detail, see [Conflict Sensitivity in Land Governance, 2022](#) and [Perceived tenure security and conflict, 2021](#)

11 [Conflict Sensitivity in Land Governance, 2022](#)

12 [Climate and Conflict Resilience Assessment](#) in Mali and Niger, February 2024

13 [Gender Equality and Social Inclusion \(GESI\) analysis](#), December 2023

14 [Political Economy Analysis](#) of Land and Natural Resources, February 2024

The conflict analysis identified key risk factors, including climate-related livelihood shocks, grievances related to justice and natural resource governance, exclusion of women, young people and minority groups from decision-making, and tensions between livelihood groups such as farmers and herders. Regression analysis showed that climate shocks were associated with a higher likelihood of individuals turning to armed actors to resolve disputes, while positive perceptions of local justice institutions and inclusion were associated with lower perceived support for violence.

The PEA and GEDSI analysis added critical insight into who holds power in land and natural resource systems and why. It mapped the influence of different actors, assessed the functionality of land commissions, and highlighted how status, economic power and socio-cultural norms shape decision-making. It also revealed that formal mechanisms were often viewed as legitimate but not inclusive, and that women and young people face structural barriers to meaningful participation.

These findings directly informed programme design. JASS strengthened inclusive land and conflict resolution institutions to improve trust, transparency and participation. Climate adaptation and livelihood activities were prioritised to reduce economic vulnerability linked to conflict risk. Ongoing sensemaking and security analysis allow the programme to adapt activities to evolving conflict and power dynamics.



## LESSON 4: INTERVENTIONS TO STRENGTHEN LAND GOVERNANCE MUST BE CAREFULLY SEQUENCED AND GIVEN SUFFICIENT TIME

**In FCAS, deeper land governance reforms are unlikely to succeed in contexts of intense conflict if they are introduced too early or without addressing underlying social and political conditions.** In many contexts, peacebuilding and social cohesion activities around land-related conflict are a necessary first step. Experience from peace and stability programmes shows that reducing land disputes often requires going beyond dispute resolution mechanisms commonly used in stand-alone land governance programmes. In post-conflict and protracted crisis settings, deeply embedded grievances, trauma from displacement and violence, and ruptured social relations can undermine trust and cooperation around land.

Communities can revert to violent conflict unless those tensions are addressed.

Establishing conflict resolution mechanisms in JASS<sup>15</sup> was an entry point for addressing the immediate triggers of conflict related to land in Mali. This provided the foundation to initiate longer-term work on structural factors driving fragility and provide a bridge to deeper land governance reform and development activities.

### KEY ACTION 5 :

*Identify sequencing of activities to address conflict and drivers of tenure insecurity and a realistic timeframe for each activity*

15 [JASS Business Case](#), June 2021



## PROGRAMME EXAMPLE: Trauma healing and psychosocial approaches to resolving conflict

EKISIL implemented three separate trauma-related initiatives: (i) open, community-wide trauma-healing groups; (ii) Trauma-Informed Community Empowerment (TICE), which built leaders' understanding of trauma and its effects; and (iii) Rising Sun, a targeted, multi-layered community trauma-healing approach for specific groups of men, women and young people in conflict "hotspot" areas.

A review found Rising Sun to be particularly effective in strengthening individual agency and increasing civic engagement. Participants demonstrated improved inter-community social cohesion and greater confidence engaging

with government, contributing to stronger state–society relations. The approach focused on addressing past trauma, shifting conflict-related mindsets, and equipping community members to continue trauma-healing and reconciliation activities.

The programme was grounded in Karamoja's clan systems and was tailored to address region-specific shocks, stressors and cycles of violence at individual and community levels.<sup>16</sup>

Trauma healing and psychosocial support can be a critical precursor to effective land governance interventions in post-conflict areas.

The EKISIL programme in Uganda tackled conflict-related trauma that had eroded trust, normalised adversarial behaviour and fuelled fear around land ownership and access. Without first addressing these issues, land interventions such as mediation, documentation of rights or new legislation were unlikely to be taken up or sustained. Group counselling and facilitated dialogue helped rebuild social trust, strengthened the participation of survivors – particularly women and young people – and reduced the risk of communities relapsing into violent conflict. This created the social and

psychological conditions needed for tenure security interventions to work.

**Early sequencing should assess and clarify both historical and current land rights, especially in contexts shaped by past conflict and ongoing crisis.**

The [LAND-at-Scale](#) programme in the West Bank sought to improve tenure security for a targeted group of Palestinian farmers by surveying land parcels and documenting historical land rights for registration with the Israeli Civil Administration. Establishing this historical evidence base was a necessary step before formal registration could be pursued.

<sup>16</sup> Source: [Mitigating Conflict Through Psychosocial Support](#), November 2023

**Where government institutions are reasonably present and stable, land governance reforms can provide the foundation for, or be implemented alongside, interventions that aim to improve access to markets, agricultural inputs or credit.**

In Ethiopia, the LIFT programme highlighted the importance of establishing tenure security before expecting farmers to engage with input markets or take on credit. The programme showed that land tenure security needed to be accompanied by improved access to markets and financial services for landholders to realise tangible economic benefits that support resilience.

**TEFOS** in Colombia also adopted a phased approach, first focusing on building state capacity to enforce land rights and environmental responsibilities before scaling up support for alternative livelihoods. It recognised that land governance reforms would be most effective in reducing deforestation if people were supported to shift away from activities driving forest loss, such as illegal logging and cattle ranching. It identified – and aims to pilot – new sustainable economic opportunities appropriate for conflict-affected forest regions, such as agro-forestry systems and non-timber forest products.<sup>17</sup> Where government undertake large-scale stand-alone land programmes to achieve systems change with economies of scale, these could be leveraged with additional programmes to catalyse improvements in livelihoods and sustainable land management.

**It is important to allow sufficient lead-in time for land governance interventions within wider resilience programmes.** Land tenure reform is rarely quick.

Interventions such as the Hill Approach show that meaningful land governance change often requires longer time horizons than those typically built into resilience programming. There was limited success in securing longer-term tenure contracts for tenant farmers or reduced rental fees, one of the programme’s key objectives. This undermined the sustainability of technical interventions to improve soil and water management beyond the project lifetime. The project underestimated the challenges of changing tenure arrangements over the four years of the programme, particularly in a situation of rapid population change and instability. More time was needed to navigate the political and social dynamics between tenant farmers and landlords, and embed changes that were starting to emerge.

In Colombia, the **Algo Nuevo**<sup>18</sup> programme was able to map land parcels and create digital shapefiles as part of its support to farmers to move from producing coca to coffee. Helping farmers through the complex procedure of obtaining formal land title was fundamental to removing a layer of insecurity that created incentives for coca production. However, administrative delays within the National Land Agency – including frequent leadership changes and staffing shortages – meant that most submitted files were not validated or approved within the programme timeframe.

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17 Source: [Evidence Review: Sustainable livelihood options for the Territorios Sostenibles \(TEFOS\) programme](#)

18 Source: [Howard Buffett Foundation, 2025](#)



## LESSON 5: STRENGTHENING LAND GOVERNANCE REQUIRES WORKING ACROSS A RANGE OF SCALES, AND LINKING FORMAL AND INFORMAL GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS

**The most effective programmes connected formal and informal governance across a range of scales, aligning state and community action to enable systemic reform.** Legal and policy frameworks reinforced local interventions, while conflict-sensitive land administration sustained and enforced land rights.

This formed the backbone of large-scale land tenure regularisation programmes, such as FCDO’s programme in [Rwanda](#)<sup>19</sup>, working with national government, which demarcated 11.4 million parcels and issued 8 million titles in a process that took around 15 years. This included a first USAID phase that passed new land laws in 2005, and subsequently detailed the laws and procedures required.

Different programmes in Myanmar helped to build a national legal and policy framework that supported customary tenure and ongoing capacity to influence and implement that framework. This evolved to adapt to a changing political and social situation after the military coup in 2021.

JASS helped to connect locally legitimate dispute resolution mechanisms and formal legal and justice institutions.<sup>20</sup> It did this by building capacity of formal and informal actors, promoting dialogue between state actors, traditional leaders and civil society, and creating pathways for local dispute resolutions to be recognised by the state. By contrast, the Algo Nuevo programme in Colombia was undermined by weak state land administration capacity at national level.

**Programmes may also need to work across national boundaries to address regional issues.**

The EKISIL programme established two cross-border resource-sharing agreements between Karamoja (Uganda) and neighbouring communities in Kenya and South Sudan. These areas are historically important for pastoralists’ seasonal migration routes and access to water and grazing.

**Linking and aligning formal and informal governance systems is important at all levels, especially where strong power imbalances or inconsistencies across systems are present.**

In Northern Kenya, the Ward Development Planning (WDP) process used in [ASAL ADAPTS, ICARR](#) and related programmes<sup>21</sup> placed strong emphasis on engaging county governments throughout each stage. This engagement helped to ensure that the WDP process was seen as legitimate by county authorities – a critical factor given that the process was consultative rather than binding, and depended on persuasion and advocacy. It also helped translate locally agreed priorities into formal policy decisions, creating a pathway for county budget allocations.<sup>22</sup> The ASAL ADAPTS programme<sup>23</sup> collaborated with county governments in Garissa and Wajir to integrate rangeland management and climate adaptation priorities into County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs), annual work plans and draft rangeland bills to facilitate rangeland management plans.<sup>24</sup>

**Where informal institutions and social cohesion are strong, informal governance structures may function adequately with little need for recourse to formal systems.**

The Ben ni Baara programme drew on government officials mainly to clarify legal rights and responsibilities, relying on social pressure and

19 Source: Securing Land Rights at Scale, May 2019

20 Source: [Justice, Climate, and Stability in the Sahel: Evidence and Learning Series](#), December 2025

21 Source: [Unlocking the Potential of Participatory Planning](#), December 2023

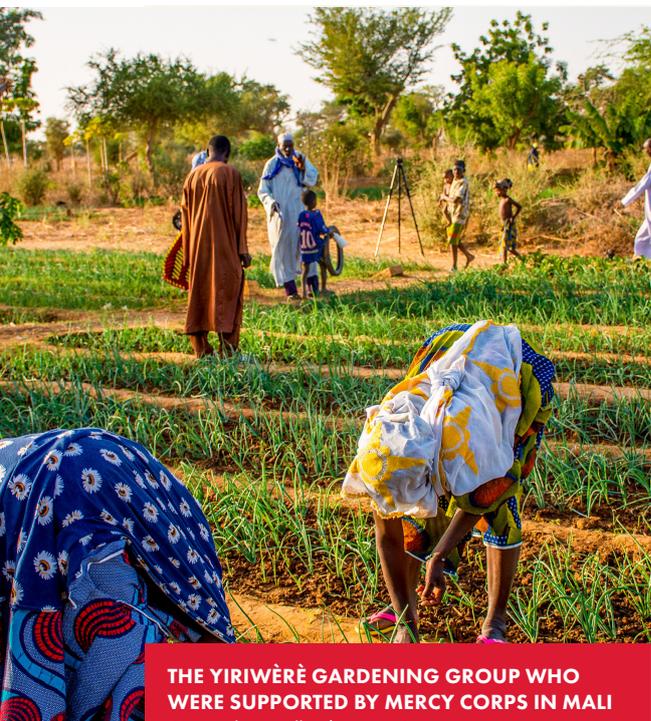
22 This does not ensure that budget will be allocated but it is a prerequisite for this to happen.

23 Source: [Enabling Adaptation](#), October 2025

24 ASAP-ADAPTS endline evaluation – available on request

influential individuals to resolve more difficult disputes. By contrast, the Hill Approach failed to achieve its goal of getting written tenure agreements between landlords and tenant farmers

in a situation of much greater power of (absentee) landlords, weak social cohesion and lack of formal government support.



**THE YIRIWÈRÈ GARDENING GROUP WHO WERE SUPPORTED BY MERCY CORPS IN MALI**

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## **PROGRAMME EXAMPLE:** **Evolving governance support across different fragility contexts and scales in Myanmar**

Several programmes in [Myanmar](#), funded by USAID and the Swiss government, sought to strengthen land reform and recognition of community land and customary tenure by engaging across different levels of government. The nature of support evolved after the military coup in 2021 disrupted central governance mechanisms and weakened government presence at local level. Prior to the coup, they supported the development of a National Land Use Planning Law, piloted community land recognition to inform the future National Land Law and advocated for stronger safeguards around the acquisition of customary land.

Programmes also focused on building the capacity of communities and civil society organisations (CSOs) to engage meaningfully in land and natural resource policy processes. The support to CSOs enabled them to continue to influence policy formulation and implementation in a volatile context, working with ethnic armed organisations and emerging governing structures at local level. The programme also supported the new governance structures to inclusively develop and implement policies.<sup>25</sup>

25 Sources: [USAID Burma Land Tenure Project](#); [LIFT Myanmar](#); [Swiss Government Strengthening Land Governance](#); [Land and Natural Resources Governance \(LNRG\) program](#)



## LESSON 6: INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE GOVERNANCE IS KEY TO PROGRAMME LEGITIMACY AND SUSTAINABILITY

**Effective participatory governance mechanisms can bolster social cohesion, programme legitimacy, equity and social justice, leading to more broad-based and sustained resilience outcomes.**

Across both JASS and non-JASS communities in Mali and Niger, respondents to a survey on different governance models<sup>26</sup> consistently expressed higher trust that land issues would be handled fairly and transparently by an inclusive governance model.

Positive perceptions of governance by local authorities and the broader legal system – based on perceptions of fairness, belonging and government responsiveness – can also reduce the risk of supporting the use of violence in fragile contexts, lowering the risk of a return to violent conflict.

Evidence from JASS in Mali and Niger suggests that such perceptions are closely linked to lower tolerance for violence.<sup>27</sup> Establishing and supporting Conflict Resolution Committees (CRCs) and early warning/early response bodies was one of the core ways that JASS addressed the underlying causes of instability and violent extremism. These locally led structures provided spaces for community members to express themselves, share their concerns and find peaceful, mutually beneficial solutions to shocks and tensions. JASS combined community-driven selection, explicit inclusion targets for women, young people and marginalised groups, sensitisation, training, transparent procedures and adaptive monitoring to make CRCs and early warning bodies more inclusive.

By contrast, the TEFOS programme in Colombia showed the limits of insufficiently inclusive governance.<sup>28</sup> Unclear land-use agreements proposed to indigenous communities led them to perceive risks to their tenure security, resulting in low uptake in forest reserves in the Amazon. This shifted the programme activities toward conservation

agreements in National Natural Parks, leaving key drivers and areas of deforestation largely unaddressed.

### KEY ACTION 6:

*Create the enabling conditions for inclusive, participatory governance mechanisms to ensure diverse representation*

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**Governance gaps may exist both in the design and implementation of different land governance mechanisms.** For example, land laws may not recognise or provide equitable rights to women, girls, persons with disabilities or young people (among others). In these cases, supporting legal drafting and multi-stakeholder consultations can increase inclusion. Even where laws and regulations provide equitable rights, governments may not have the capacity to enforce them effectively, or customary institutions and norms may skew their implementation. Resolving this implementation deficit requires support to governments or measures to empower marginalised groups in customary settings.

The TEFOS programme in Colombia combined land tenure regularisation and improvements to land registries with measures to strengthen the justice system's capacity to enforce environmental law. This included building the ability of courts and prosecutors to address illegal logging as an environmental crime. In other cases, the governance gap lies in a lack of effective conflict resolution mechanisms at local level, driven by social tension and mistrust in institutions.

**Inclusive and participatory governance does not emerge automatically and depends on several enabling conditions.** Evidence from Ward Development Planning (WDP) in Northern Kenya

26 Source: [Pathways to Stability](#), November 2025

27 Source: [Perceptions of justice actors and conflict resolution mechanisms](#), November 2025

28 [Colombia: Forests, Communities & Sustainable Growth](#)

under ASAL ADAPTS, ICARR and other programmes illustrates the key factors that need to be in place.

- 1. Participatory mechanisms are most effective where they fill a genuine governance gap at community or national level.** In Northern Kenya, ward-level government and civic institutions had limited capacity to coordinate collective action or represent community priorities. Ward Planning Committees (WPCs) were able to fill this gap by acting as legitimate representatives at ward level and by strengthening communication between county authorities and village communities. WPCs and Rangeland Management Committees mediated disputes over rangeland access and use. Their participatory structure resolved land-related issues at the ward level before escalation to county authorities.<sup>29</sup> This reduced dependence on powerful intermediaries and lowered the risk of elite capture.
- 2. Participatory governance works best when it is rule-based and aligned with local social realities.** Varying levels of social cohesion and ethnic homogeneity can affect approaches. For example, the delegated representation model used in WDP relied on strong pre-existing social cohesion and dense village-level civil society. In relatively ethnically homogeneous wards, social norms and the threat of social sanction reinforced accountability between WPC members and their constituent villages. Equal geographic distribution of committee members prevented domination

by any village, as each member represented distinct local interests, and violations of collective agreements – such as grazing plans – risked social ostracism or loss of trust.<sup>30</sup>

- 3. Programmes need to actively prevent elite capture by supporting the meaningful participation and empowerment of diverse and marginalised voices.** This often requires practical measures, such as scheduling dialogues at times when women can attend, bringing meeting venues closer to the village and/or covering travel-related costs so that poorer or more remote community members can attend. Sustaining these practices beyond the lifetime of the programme can avoid reverting to pre-existing power dynamics. In contexts involving shared natural resources, such as forests or rangelands, it can also require equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms.
- 4. Participatory governance requires room for discretionary adaptation by frontline implementers to adapt to evolving factors.** In the case of Kenya's WDP process, ground-level staff needed the flexibility to respond to local dynamics and to balance broad participation with meaningful deliberation. This depended on implementers having strong local knowledge, motivation and an intuitive understanding of empowerment as a process that combines inclusion with dialogue and negotiation.

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29 ASAP-ADAPTS endline evaluation – available on request.

30 Source: Unlocking the Potential of Participatory Planning, December 2023



**SAADIA, PART OF THE WAYAMA JAPTA VILLAGE RANGELAND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE, WHO WERE SUPPORTED THROUGH THE ASAL ADAPTS PROGRAMME IN KENYA**

© Ezra Millstein / Mercy Corps

## **PROGRAMME EXAMPLE:** **Increasing women’s participation and agency in land governance**

Strengthening women’s participation in land governance requires action across both formal and informal systems. Formal governance mechanisms need to actively enable women’s effective involvement in land-related discussions and decision-making. This starts with legal and policy frameworks that recognise women’s land rights and ensure access to justice when those rights are challenged. Setting clear and ambitious targets or quotas for women’s participation in land governance bodies can also help accelerate change. Under ICARR,<sup>31</sup> women’s representation on Village Rangeland Committees increased, and intervention areas saw a higher proportion of women exercising sole control over income derived from rangelands.

However, formal mechanisms alone are not enough. Informal governance systems and customary norms often shape who speaks, who is heard and who ultimately influences decisions. Patriarchal norms can limit women’s effective participation even where they are formally included. Experience from Ben ni Baara<sup>32</sup> shows that while women participated widely in Village Savings and Loan Associations, social norms sometimes constrained their influence in decision-making. Addressing these barriers requires complementary approaches, such as engaging influential men as champions, strengthening women’s support networks and livelihoods, and empowering women through greater awareness of their legal rights.

31 ICARR Phase 2 endline evaluation – available on request

32 Source: [Building Bonds of Trust: The Relationship Between Conflict Resolution Committees and Social Cohesion in Mali](#), May 2025



## LESSON 7: ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY AND DATA CAN INFORM AND DEMOCRATISE THE DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF LAND GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS

**Better use of data and technology can strengthen land governance by improving decision-making, widening participation and increasing transparency.** One important role of data is to inform risk analysis and scenario planning.

In programmes such as ASAL ADAPTS, access to information on climate and resource pressures helped assess whether existing land governance structures and decision-making processes could respond to emerging risks.

In Myanmar, the OneMap Myanmar initiative brought together map-based geospatial data from multiple government departments into a single, open-access platform. This included data on land use, census information, deforestation and customary tenure boundaries. It has been used to support discussion with policymakers on how land might be reallocated or managed, based on documented land use patterns and community claims.<sup>33</sup>

It also contributed to a land use assessment process on oil palm plantations in the Tanintharyi Region.

**Mobile and digital tools can strengthen tenure security through participatory mapping, improving the ability of land users to document their land and grazing rights.** Programmes in countries including Burkina Faso, Mozambique and Myanmar have deployed mobile applications and web-based data management platforms to help communities document land rights quickly and at low cost. Using open-source software and low-cost tablets, these initiatives developed and piloted modules for mapping and validating household land rights, community boundaries, shared resources and land disputes. A critical factor in their success was government recognition of the outputs, including the integration of community-generated maps into formal land registries, supporting more systemic reforms at state level.

### PROGRAMME EXAMPLE:

## Information services for land-use and land-management decision-making

ASAL ADAPTS supported better land-use and land-management decisions in two districts in northern Kenya by embedding GIS systems in county governments and linking them to community planning. These systems combined climate and environmental data – such as rainfall, drought, vegetation, flood risk and land-cover change – to support early warning and climate-informed planning. Tools for pastoral areas mapped grazing routes, fodder, livestock movement and water points, helping guide grazing decisions and reduce overgrazing and conflict.

Participatory mapping improved the relevance and legitimacy of decisions, while shared dashboards strengthened coordination across county departments. Climate advisory councils that combined scientific and indigenous knowledge further supported inclusive land-use decision making.<sup>34</sup>

33 [OneMap Myanmar: Spatial data for empowerment](#), March 2018

34 Sources: ASAP ADAPTS learning briefs

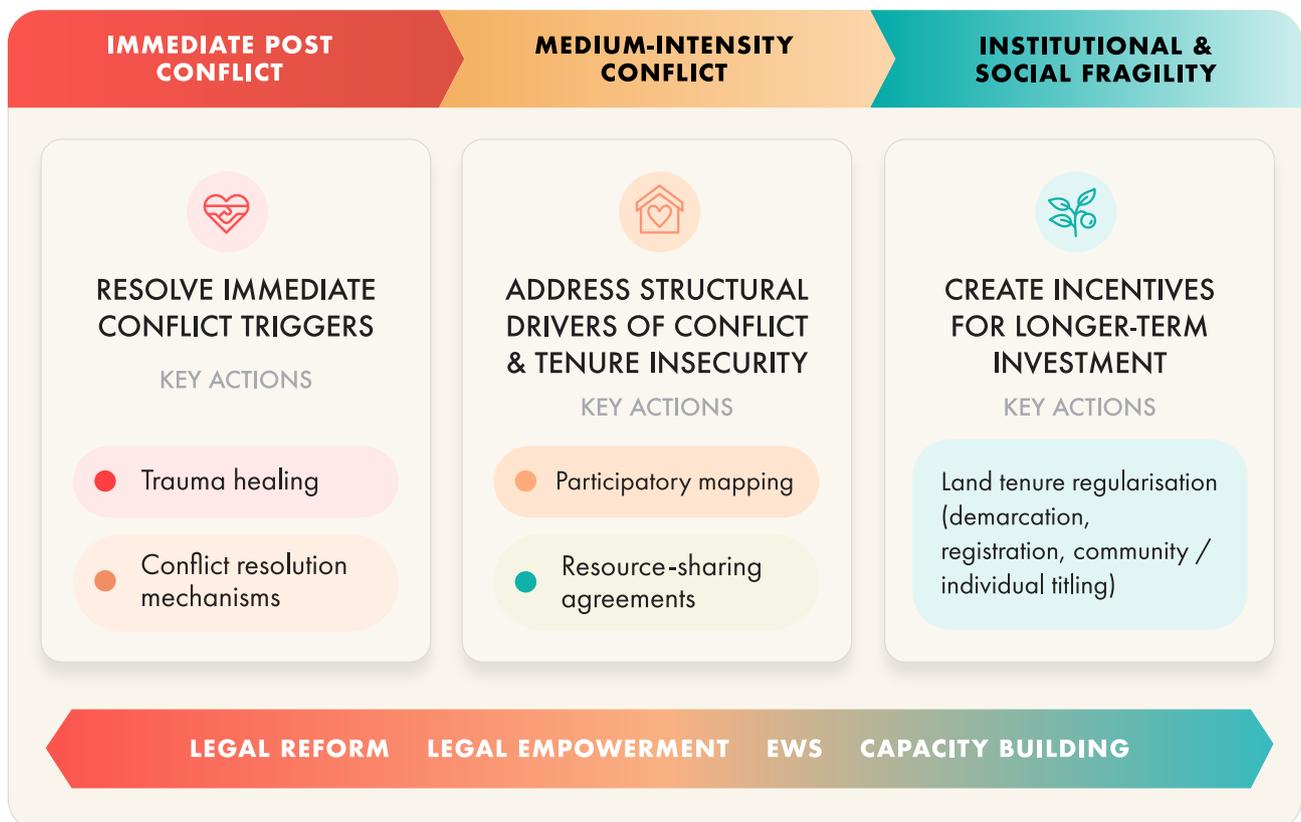
# Recommendations

Programme funders and designers can follow a series of steps to guide conflict-sensitive land governance interventions that support climate resilience outcomes. Based on the lessons drawn from the programme review, the table below summarises recommended steps. It provides examples of questions that can be asked in the planning and design phase to choose the best course of action. It also suggests examples of programmes and resources that programme designers can use.

## Conclusion

This review demonstrates that land governance is a foundational element of resilience building in FCAS. Inclusive and equitable land governance shapes how households and communities cope with climate shocks, manage natural resources, resolve disputes and sustain livelihoods over time. Programmes in FCAS should explicitly recognise land governance as central and integrate measures to strengthen it, from the outset, with climate resilience, livelihoods and peacebuilding objectives. Such measures need sufficient time to mature and provide the necessary foundation for other interventions.

Programme experience shows that land governance interventions can be effective even in contexts of protracted crisis and institutional fragility, forming a bridge to longer-term sustained land governance reform and development activities. However, they need to be tailored to different entry points and sequenced across phases of fragility. In many post-conflict or highly polarised contexts, trust-building, conflict resolution and trauma-healing around land-related issues are necessary precursors before deeper land governance reform can gain legitimacy or traction, especially at community level. At government level, early interventions may need to focus on capacity building and the design of appropriate legal and policy frameworks.



**The design of appropriate and feasible land governance interventions needs to be guided by robust analysis of conflict dynamics, political economy and drivers of tenure insecurity in each context.**

This can ensure that approaches align with the needs of different land users, local tenure systems, mobility patterns and social institutions. Interventions that fail to recognise these differences risk tenure maladaptation, undermining the livelihoods and social systems they are intended to support.

**Such analysis can also inform how programmes can promote inclusive and equitable land governance to address power imbalances, prevent elite capture and enable meaningful participation of women, young people and marginalised groups.**

Effective programmes link community-level mechanisms with formal legal, policy and administrative systems, and adapt engagement as political and institutional conditions evolve, including across borders where resources are shared. Such an approach is more likely to generate legitimacy, compliance and durable outcomes.

**Adaptive management, accessible technology and better use of data can strengthen transparency, inform decision-making and help programmes respond to evolving fragility and climate risks.**

**Bringing together resilience, peacebuilding and land governance communities can align and strengthen practice through integrated programme design.**

Land actors can learn from inclusive governance and sustained local mechanisms developed in resilience and peacebuilding, including psycho-social support activities, such as trauma healing. In turn, resilience and peacebuilding programmes can draw on lessons from large-scale land tenure regularisation and land administration efforts, particularly on realistic timeframes and the need for systemic reform to strengthen land governance across scales

KEY STEPS	EXAMPLE QUESTIONS	SELECTED RESOURCES/ PROGRAMME EXPERIENCES
Identify and characterise the fragility and conflict context and key risks and opportunities.	<p>What are the root causes and key driving factors of the conflict?</p> <p>What flash points or trigger events could most easily or most likely bring about violent conflict?</p> <p>Who is involved in the conflict?</p> <p>What are the power relationships?</p>	<p><a href="#">Mercy Corp’s Building Conflict-Sensitive Interventions Toolkit</a></p>
Conduct land-specific conflict and political economy analysis to identify land governance gaps and their contribution to conflict and weak resilience.	<p>Does the legal and policy framework related to land and property matters provide for equitable access, use, ownership and ability to benefit for women and men?</p> <p>Are there longstanding grievances rooted in earlier displacements and land expropriation?</p> <p>Do the government and customary institutions relevant to land function effectively for all stakeholders?</p> <p>Are people able to negotiate and enforce informal access or use rights to land and natural resources based on customary or existing social norms and practices that exist outside statutory processes?</p>	<p><a href="#">USAID’s Land and Conflict Toolkit</a></p> <p><a href="#">Do No Harm in Land Tenure and Property Rights CDA</a></p> <p><a href="#">Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict</a></p> <p><a href="#">Land and Conflict Prevention Handbook</a></p> <p><a href="#">Defueling conflict: Environment and natural resource management as a pathway to peace (Section 5)</a></p>

KEY STEPS	EXAMPLE QUESTIONS	SELECTED RESOURCES/ PROGRAMME EXPERIENCES
Clearly identify intended beneficiaries and objectives.	<p>Smallholders: Is the main need to encourage investment, productivity and sustainable land use?</p> <p>Pastoralists: Are communities coming into conflict with other land users over shared resources?</p> <p>Forest communities: Are community forests experiencing deforestation?</p> <p>Conflicts between user groups: Do they exist and are they understood?</p>	<p>LIFT Ethiopia</p> <p>EKISIL</p> <p>TEFOS</p> <p>Ben ni Baara, JASS</p>
Understand local tenure systems, including customary and informal arrangements to identify key needs for inclusive and equitable land rights and possible actions.	<p>Smallholders: Individual tenure? Do farmers have clearly defined individual rights?</p> <p>Pastoralists: Flexible, communal, mobility-based tenure? Do communities have access to seasonal grazing and associated water sources?</p> <p>Forest communities: Collective tenure? Do communities have demarcated community boundaries?</p>	<p>LIFT Ethiopia</p> <p>EKISIL</p> <p>TEFOS Colombia</p>
Identify complementary actions to land governance given programme objectives.	<p>Smallholders: What constraints to investment, productivity and sustainable land management exist outside of tenure reform, e.g., markets?</p> <p>Forest communities: Do communities have alternative livelihoods to activities that drive deforestation?</p>	<p><a href="#">Securing Land Rights at Scale</a></p> <p>LIFT Ethiopia</p> <p>TEFOS Colombia</p>
Assess appropriate sequencing and realistic timeframe.	<p>What needs to happen before tenure reform is viable (e.g. trust-building, dispute resolution)?</p> <p>How long is needed to secure land rights and establish the foundation for subsequent activities?</p>	<p><a href="#">Mitigating Conflict Through Psychosocial Support</a></p> <p>The Hill Approach</p>
Identify the scales needed to achieve change, including transboundary, and need to link and align formal and informal governance mechanisms.	<p>Can local governance gaps be addressed without tackling those at national (e.g., legal and policy frameworks) or transnational levels (e.g., seasonal grazing rights)?</p> <p>Are formal and informal land governance aligned or inconsistent, e.g., are customary rights recognised formally?</p> <p>Do State land administration institutions have the capacity to implement and enforce tenure reforms enacted at local level?</p>	<p><a href="#">Unlocking the Potential of Participatory Planning</a></p> <p>ASAL ADAPTS</p> <p>ICARR</p> <p>JASS</p>

KEY STEPS	EXAMPLE QUESTIONS	SELECTED RESOURCES/ PROGRAMME EXPERIENCES
<p>Ensure meaningful participation of women and marginalised groups, identifying how to prevent elite capture and translate representation into decision making.</p>	<p>What groups living in this area are often excluded from decision making (i.e., what socio-economic, ethnic, religious, gender-based groups)?</p> <p>Are they excluded by formal or customary barriers to participation?</p> <p>Do these households or members of marginalised groups also face barriers to land or property ownership?</p> <p>What is the source of power or influence of individuals/groups?</p>	<p><a href="#">USAID’s Land and Conflict Toolkit</a></p> <p>See political economy analysis in Ben ni Baara and JASS</p>
<p>Identify opportunities to use accessible technology and data to inform decisions and monitoring.</p>	<p>What information would most enable more transparent, evidence-based decisions, e.g., rights allocations, grazing patterns, weather trends?</p> <p>What access to mobile (networks) do communities have?</p> <p>Are there opportunities to establish fora to integrate traditional knowledge and modern technology?</p>	<p><a href="#">Mapping Approaches for Securing Tenure (MAST) Learning Platform - Tenure Security: Protecting Land, Rights, and Livelihoods</a></p> <p><a href="#">Building Fit For Purpose Land Administration Systems Guiding Principles</a></p> <p><a href="#">Digital tools help restore rangelands and adapt to a changing climate   Mercy Corps</a></p>
<p>Build in adaptive management and learning mechanisms.</p>	<p>What signals would indicate the intervention is doing harm or failing?</p> <p>Who has the authority to change course, pause or redesign activities?</p> <p>How often will assumptions about tenure, markets or governance be tested?</p> <p>What is the capacity of implementers to proactively identify need for change and the course correction?</p>	<p><a href="#">What makes Adaptive Management actually work in practice?</a></p>

# Annex 1: Pathways to resilience for different land users and tenure regimes

The key assumption underpinning land governance interventions is that secure access to, use and control of land – ensured and maintained through inclusive, equitable land governance – is fundamental to protecting and building resilience. Clear and enforceable land rights provide tenure security, reduce disputes and create incentives for long-term investment in land, supporting outcomes of peace and stability, improved livelihoods, and more sustainable land management. This enables people to stay in their homes and on their land over the longer term. However, the way that land governance is strengthened also has the potential to undermine resilience if not tailored to the needs of each community and tenure regime, creating tenure maladaptation.<sup>35</sup>

The pathway to these outcomes varies, depending on the type of tenure regime, land user and resource – smallholder farmers, pastoralists and forest communities – and the objective.

## Smallholder farmers

For smallholder farmers with individual tenure, evidence and practice emphasise objectives of inclusive economic development and resilience. There are three main channels through which tenure security can contribute to these objectives: (i) promoting productive investment; (ii) improving credit access; and (iii) increasing land market activity.

Insecure land rights are widely seen as a barrier to higher agricultural productivity and investment. When farmers are unsure whether they will keep access to their land, they are less likely to invest time or money in improving it. This limits livelihoods and weakens economic resilience. Strengthening land rights for smallholder farmers – for example, by clearly marking land boundaries and formally recognising who holds which rights – can give farmers greater confidence that they will benefit from their investments. This is especially important for long-term improvements such as better soil management, installing irrigation or terracing. However, these benefits depend on farmers having access to markets for agricultural inputs and for selling any increased production.

In theory, secure land rights can also allow land to be used as collateral for loans, helping households invest in farming, education or other livelihood activities. In practice, this depends on the availability of financial services and whether lenders are willing and able to accept land as collateral.

Strengthening land rights serves to promote more active land market activity for renting or selling/buying land by providing a secure legal basis for transactions and reducing a landlord's risk that tenants or other parties will assert ownership claims. Efficient land markets can provide mechanisms to reallocate underutilised land to more efficient uses and increase productivity. Secure land rights can also reduce the need for farmers to spend time protecting their plots, freeing up labour for other productive activities.

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35 A process where actions taken to help communities e.g. adapt to climate change by reducing vulnerability, have unexpected consequences resulting in increased vulnerability.

## Pastoralists

Nomadic pastoral systems characteristically face harsh climatic conditions in arid and semi-arid environments, with variable and unpredictable rainfall, and many areas experiencing significant degradation. Secure tenure enables economic resilience by supporting livelihood diversification, market access and investment to increase livestock production and herd sales. Socially, tenure security strengthens community cohesion and traditional institutions while reducing conflicts. Although, wealth and social status mediate who benefits. Environmentally, secure tenure supports a longer-term perspective on sustainable resource management and enables the mobility essential for climate adaptation. However, these benefits depend on tenure systems accommodating collective, overlapping and seasonal access to and use of land (and associated water sources) often derived from mobility and flexibility rather than imposing rigid boundaries on communal grasslands.

## Forest communities

Strengthening forest community tenure rights can contribute to resilience, and climate change adaptation and mitigation via four short-term outcomes: (i) increased community tenure security over forested land; (ii) better access by communities to support for forest management; (iii) strengthened community self-governance; and (iv) weaker rights and power to convert community forests by external actors.

These mean that over the longer term, communities can maintain or improve sustainable forest management and external actors no longer convert community forest resources. For these outcomes to be achieved, strong governance mechanisms need to be in place, including: a coherent and enforced legal and policy framework; community organisation at sub-national or national level to influence policy; and inclusive community governance. It also relies on equitable benefit-sharing to minimise the risks of elite capture, internal conflicts and inequality that can undermine the management of forests for social and environmental benefits.

## Peace and stability

Another focus of thinking and practice is where disputes or conflicts over land and related natural resources arise between farmers and pastoralists, within or between families and communities, between communities and external investors, or between governments and individuals or communities, particularly in contexts of protracted crisis. Without clear tenure arrangements, such disputes and small-scale conflicts can escalate to cause both social and political instability.

In these cases, land governance interventions seek principally to prevent and resolve land disputes and promote different elements of social cohesion – trust, belonging, shared identity, attitudes towards other groups, collective action norms and civic engagement – to foster peace and stability. If done in an inclusive, participatory way, interventions to strengthen land governance can resolve these issues through clarification of boundaries and access rights, negotiation and mediation. This relies on increasing participation, voice and agency of different groups in resource governance decisions to promote legitimacy, buy-in and compliance with decisions taken.

# Annex 2: Programmes reviewed

Table 1 lists the programmes reviewed. They span multiple regions, with a strong focus on Africa and Asia and more limited coverage in Latin America. All operate in contexts of protracted crisis or institutional and social fragility.

The portfolio includes both resilience programmes that incorporate land governance components and programmes primarily focused on land governance that contribute to resilience outcomes. Interventions cover both formal and informal approaches, including legal and policy reform, land titling and administration, legal empowerment around land rights, dispute resolution mechanisms and psychosocial support to address long-standing, deeply embedded grievances.

Programme objectives include strengthening livelihoods and economic resilience by encouraging investment and productivity; improving tenure security to support sustainable land use; and reducing land-related conflict by promoting dispute resolution and social cohesion.

**TABLE 1: PROGRAMMES REVIEWED AND SELECTED**

PROGRAMME NAME	COUNTRY	DATES	IMPLEMENTER	SUMMARY
<a href="#">Algo Nuevo</a>	Colombia	2018 – 25	Mercy Corps	The programme supported coca-producing farming families to replace illicit crops with legal livelihoods, secure rural land rights and improve employability and entrepreneurship opportunities.
<a href="#">Territorios Forestales Sostenibles (TEFOS)</a>	Colombia	2021 - 26	World Bank and UNODC	The programme aims to help reduce deforestation in conflict-affected areas in Colombia by strengthening land rights, improving state capacity to prosecute environmental crimes, and helping land users to develop more sustainable livelihoods to reduce wider pressures that lead to deforestation.
<a href="#">Food Security Project “Hill Approach”</a>	DRC	2016 - 23	Mercy Corps	The ‘Hill Approach’ was developed to address the interrelated challenges of land degradation, low crop productivity, and insecure land tenure on hills in the Food Security Project’s operating area in South Kivu.
<a href="#">Land Investment for Transformation (LIFT)</a>	Ethiopia	2013 - 21	DAI	This land administration programme supported the Government of Ethiopia to issue Second Level Land Certification (SLLC) and to implement digitalised Rural Land Administration Systems (RLAS) to improve land tenure security for rural landowners, encourage investment and improve rural incomes.

<b>PROGRAMME NAME</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>DATES</b>	<b>IMPLEMENTER</b>	<b>SUMMARY</b>
<a href="#"><u>Adaptation Services for Action and Learning (ASAL) Adapts</u></a>	Kenya	2022 - 25	Mercy Corps	The programme aimed to strengthen climate resilience by empowering local governance structures, enhancing access to digital climate information and integrating geospatial tools into rangeland management and adaptation planning.
<a href="#"><u>Incentivizing Collective Action for Rangeland Regeneration (ICARR)</u></a>	Kenya	2023 - 26	Mercy Corps	The programme aimed to address systemic rangeland degradation, weak governance and gender inequities among pastoralist communities by strengthening inclusive, community-led governance and incentivising sustainable land use and restoration practices.
<a href="#"><u>Ben ni Baara</u></a>	Mali	2020 - 24	Mercy Corps	The programme had the objective of strengthening human security by addressing the root causes of conflict, improving economic and climate resilience, and enhancing inclusive governance.
<a href="#"><u>Justice and Stability in the Sahel (JASS)</u></a>	Mali, Niger	2021 - 26	Mercy Corps	The programme works to strengthen equitable, inclusive land and resource governance and conflict resolution systems, targeting communities affected by insecurity and climate stress. JASS uses a locally led, adaptive approach—supporting community-level institutions and promoting social inclusion, climate resilience, and peaceful dispute resolution—to reduce conflict and improve justice outcomes for marginalised groups.
<a href="#"><u>Strengthening Land Governance Phase 3</u></a>	Myanmar	2022 - 24	Not identified	The programme aimed to safeguard small-scale land users of different ethnicities in Southeast Myanmar right and access to land, thereby contributing to more sustainable livelihoods and natural resource use.
<a href="#"><u>Land and Natural Resources Governance (LNRG) program - Phase 1</u></a>	Myanmar	2025 - 27	Not identified	The programme aims to strengthen ethnic and community-based systems for better land and natural resources governance in the Southeast region through empowered local civil society organisations and accountable ethnic Service Departments.

PROGRAMME NAME	COUNTRY	DATES	IMPLEMENTER	SUMMARY
<a href="#">Burma: Land Tenure Project - Tenure Security: Protecting Land, Rights, and Livelihoods</a>	Myanmar	2013 - 18	[unknown]	Under the global Land Tenure Programme, the Burma Land Tenure Project's objectives focused on contributing to the goals of broad-based economic development, improving livelihoods in rural areas, promoting sustainable land use management and achieving resilient community development. Specific goals included supporting the development and implementation of a National Land Use Policy and related laws that clarify rights and encourage sustainable use of land and natural resources; strengthening the land tenure, resource, and property rights of rural individuals, households and communities, with particular attention to women, ethnic minorities, smallholder farmers and other vulnerable groups, and increasing consultation among government, civil society and business on issues of broad public concern related to land tenure and land use.
<a href="#">Support for Land Tenure Regularisation</a>	Rwanda	2010 - 13	HTSPE Limited	The programme registered all land in Rwanda for the first time. This required a community-based Land Tenure Regularisation process over five years. It also supported the design and implementation of the new Land Administration System, providing capacity building support, training, expertise in land administration and equipping and refurbishing District Land Offices.
<a href="#">Securing Peace and Promoting Prosperity in Karamoja EKISIL</a>	Uganda	2017 - 23	Mercy Corps	The programme used people-to-people and systems approaches to address the root causes of inter-ethnic conflict, support trauma healing and promote reconciliation. It aimed to strengthen individual agency, fostering civic engagement, enhancing both horizontal (community-to-community) and vertical (state-society) social cohesion, increase women's and elders' roles in land and resource dispute mediation and reduce violence through community-based interventions and improved natural resource governance.
<a href="#">Land-at-Scale Palestine</a>	West Bank, OPT	2021-24	Land Research Centre	<a href="#">LAND-at-scale</a> (LAS) is a global land governance support programme. This project aimed to improve security of tenure for Palestinian farmers in Area "C" of West Bank, with a strong focus on women's access to land, using inheritance rights as an entry point for improved land tenure security for women.

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## **About Mercy Corps**

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.

## **About The Resilience Learning Facility**

While evidence and analysis of “what works” in resilience building has grown in recent years, much of it remains fragmented and hard to operationalise, particularly in dynamic and politically complex contexts.

With the support of FCDO, Mercy Corps undertook a six-month project, the ‘Resilience Learning Facility’ to provide practical, actionable evidence to support donors and delivery partners to identify opportunities to link immediate crisis response with long-term resilience in a range of settings. Four reports focus on the following themes:

1. Markets based responses to build resilience in FCAS where conflict risks and climate intersect;
2. Land and natural resource governance to increase household resilience;
3. Getting finance to actors and affected populations who need it most;
4. Integrating a ‘systems change’ element into programmes and approaches.

Each report draws on existing research and case studies from multiple FCAS and has been developed in consultation with FCDO staff and a range of external experts. Together, they explore what is feasible and appropriate across different contexts, considering levels of conflict and fragility, the functionality of existing systems, and the range of resilience outcomes that different approaches can deliver.

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