



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://feedthefuture.gov/article/why-strong-land-rights-advance-food-security>

Why Strong Land Rights Advance Food Security

The following is an excerpt from a blog post by [Eric Postel](#) and [Tjada McKenna](#) at USAID. [Read the full post](#) on the Devex website.

We hear from smallholder farmers around the world that they want to increase their productivity and earn greater income to feed their families, send their children to school, and pay for medicine and other life necessities—in short, they want a better life. But in many parts of the world, farmers lack the tools, technology and rights to achieve these aspirations.

To take advantage of new tools and technologies, farmers in all countries need strong property rights to be certain that they will have their land long enough to realize the benefits of their investments. They need to have confidence that their land and crops will not be seized by more powerful interests—particularly if they make productivity-enhancing investments, for example in soil and water conservation—without due process and compensation.

Strengthening property rights is even more important for women, who often have fewer and weaker property rights than men, yet play a larger role in agriculture in many countries where we work.

When property rights are clear and secure, all farmers are empowered to make better economic decisions, including whether to sell or lease their land, expand their production, recruit non-family labor, and plant long-term crops for local consumption and for the market.

With clear rights to land, farmers are more likely to make investments that increase crop yields, practice sustainable farming methods that improve soil quality, and better manage their resources. At the same time, transparent land rights provide those interested with the option to move out of agriculture—and encourage responsible investment for those who choose to stay.

The global community has recognized the critical role that property rights play in achieving food security for all and has recently increased its support for strengthening property rights. In 2012, African leaders, G-8 nations and private sector partners formed the [New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition](#). Its goal is to lift 50 million people in sub-Saharan Africa out of poverty over 10 years.

To realize this goal, nine New Alliance countries in Africa have committed to a number of policy reforms, including strengthening land governance, partnering with private firms and allocating a larger portion of their national budgets to agriculture. This is a breakthrough approach intended to deliver results at scale and transform economies.

The international community—including developing countries, donor countries, multilateral institutions, civil society and the private sector—have also worked together through the United Nations Committee on World Food Security to adopt [Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security](#).

These guidelines, which have gender equity as a guiding principle, may be used as a road map for countries to improve their land governance systems. In support of these guidelines and building upon previous New Alliance commitments, the U.S. government and the government of Burkina Faso launched a partnership at the 2013 G-8 Summit to improve land governance and increase transparency of land transactions.

USAID works in nearly 30 countries around the world to address weak land governance and improve the protection of land and resource rights. We also coordinate with the global donor community to increase and align investments in property rights programs and improve transparency. We believe that these efforts are a crucial step in increasing food security for a global population that will reach 9 billion by 2050.

Development practitioners can play a role in strengthening land rights and food security. Where appropriate, we should look for ways to address property rights issues within the context of our work.