

POVERTY, TENURE SECURITY, AND LANDSCAPE GOVERNANCE: EXPLORING INEXTRICABLE INTERDEPENDENCIES FOR SCIENCE, POLICY, AND ACTION

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Countries of the global South have rich natural ecosystems, but many poor people. Africa south of the Sahara, for example, contains about half of the earth's uncultivated land. Forests cover approximately 22 percent of Latin America. In Central Asian countries, overall pastureland was estimated, 10 years ago, at about half of the total land area (ADB 2010). Four of the world's 10 largest lakes and 7 of the 10 rivers with the largest catchment areas – including the Amazon, Parana, Nile, Congo, and Niger rivers – are in the global South. These examples represent a small sample of the richness of these natural ecosystems.

Socially and legally, tenure regimes shape rights of access, use, and ownership of land and landscape resources. If these resources are in good ecological conditions, accessible to the people who depend on them most, and well governed, they and the landscapes supporting them have the potential to improve rural people's livelihoods while also reducing poverty, financial precariousness, undernutrition, and hunger, and improving quality of life. This ideal is far from reality, however. Hundreds of millions of people living in such vast lands and rich ecosystems remain poor and without strong and secure rights. Even for human communities that have lived for hundreds of years in these rich natural landscapes, the statutory land regimes in effect, do not provide strong ownership rights.

KEY MESSAGES

- Of the nearly 1 billion rural poor people in the global South, a high proportion do not hold legally secure tenure rights.
- Such tenure conditions do not help enable the inclusive, socially equitable, economically viable, and ecologically sustainable governance of natural landscapes, nor do they help significantly reduce multidimensional poverty.
- Research should fill important gaps in understanding and knowledge, and should foster transformational change and innovation through better science-policy linkages and ongoing monitoring and assessment.
- Governance is a collective effort that needs processes for mutual and adaptive learning.

Research has a key role to play in supporting productive pro-rural-poor efforts in policy and practice. This brief summarizes the scientific knowledge on the interdependencies between poverty, tenure security, and landscape governance. The discussion shows: how and why the possession and exercise of secure tenure rights, as well as inclusive governance, can help reduce multidimensional poverty (Di Gregorio et

This brief is one of seven briefs produced by Flagship 5 on Governance of Natural Resources under the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets reviewing topics at the core of our work, to contribute to the broader wealth of literature and serve as a forward-looking assessment of the potential for CGIAR research to add value on the key role of poverty to addressing tenure security and landscape governance of natural resources.

al. 2004; Ellsworth 2004; Bird and Busse 2006); how tenure insecurity and undemocratic landscape governance are likely to aggravate poverty; and how poverty can further undermine the social conditions necessary for tenure security as well as improved landscape governance. The final section outlines a research agenda.

Transcending narrow views of poverty

The World Bank defines poverty as a pronounced state of deprivation in well-being (Haughton and Khandker 2009), particularly low household income and non-satisfaction of consumption needs. Extreme poverty – which can be transient or chronic – is assessed using an income-based “line,” currently set at US\$1.90 a day (at 2011 international prices) for low-income countries. Using the poverty line as a measure, the number of poor people in the world was roughly 710 to 730 million in 2020, of which an important share live in immense areas of arable land and landscapes of exceptional natural wealth (Snow 2013; Sanchez, Seperh, and Keck 2019; Wong 2021). This population includes Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants, farmers, pastoralists, migrants, and many other marginalized groups (Benson, Epprecht, and Minor 2009; RRI 2020).

The conventional understanding of the concept of poverty does not take into consideration either the whole universe of human needs or the social and moral aspirations of human beings. A more holistic perspective (Bray et al. 2019) would include more than income, encompassing lack of education, hunger, malnutrition, poor health, social insecurity, exclusion, powerlessness, weak social identity, discrimination, low self-confidence, fragmented moral economy, lack of rights, and inequalities (see Carter and Barrett 2006). A broader understanding of poverty points to clear links to tenure and governance.

Tenure security and poverty

About 75 percent of the world’s poor live in rural areas and rely on primary economic activities that include agriculture, pastoralism, gathering, hunting, and fishing. These activities depend largely on secure access to land and resources. Yet hundreds of millions of people lack secure land tenure (Alcorn 2014; FAO

2016). Since colonization, the customary lands of Indigenous Peoples and local communities have been conquered and transformed, resulting in the territorial exclusion of millions of people (land dispossession by force) and the disqualification or erosion of customary tenure regimes.

Ongoing processes of land dispossession are more sophisticated. Called “land grabs” by “rural dispossession” (Haughton and Khandker 2009), they contribute to the making of new “landless people.” In 2013, the 10 biggest targets for land investors – South Sudan, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Mozambique, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Argentina, Sierra Leone, and Madagascar – were all in the global South (Magdoff 2013). Recent data indicate that the current waves of large-scale land acquisitions in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia respectively amount to 9.8 million hectares, 13.5 million hectares, and 15.9 million hectares (Land Matrix 2021). Such operations very often swallow the customary land of the poor and jeopardize their food security.

Without alternative livelihoods, the growing landless population together with shrinking farm sizes may increase the number of poor people. In Africa, for example, more than 500 million people are living with insecure tenure: 5 African countries are on the list of top 10 countries where the land and forest rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples are least recognized (Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Central African Republic, and Madagascar [see RRI 2020]). The rural populations of three of these countries are also among the poorest in the world (Central African Republic, Madagascar, and Democratic Republic of Congo). The lack of secure rights is synonymous with subordination for poor populations, such as, for example, Indigenous Peoples in South America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, local communities in Africa, lower castes in India, Afro-descendants, and others.

In contrast, when their rights are secured, the poor have the means to significantly improve their monetary income, increase assets, and enhance food security (Meinzen-Dick 2009; Ghebru et al. 2019). Several studies have shown that exercising secure rights also empowers women and migrants, who therefore can capitalize on land and improve productivity (PIM 2020; Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019; Pradhan, Meinzen-

Dick, and Theis 2019). In addition, research shows that tenure security among young people helps protect against the erosion of human capital – through rural outmigration, for example – necessary for agricultural production and rural prosperity (Ghebru et al. 2019).

Granting land titles to Indigenous and local communities can reduce encroachments, illegal occupation of protected areas, and illegal logging, thus not only improving tenure security but also generating significant climate benefits (Veit 2020). Participatory mapping of village and Indigenous territories is one way to enhance recognition and empowerment. In Tanzania, for example, the government recently adopted joint village land use planning to increase tenure security for livestock keepers (Flintan et al. 2019). In addition, tenure security contributes to Sustainable Development Goals 1 (Target 1.4, Indicator 1.4.1), 2 (Target 2.3), and 5 (Target 5.a, Indicator 5.a.1) (UNSDG 2021). By securing tenure for rural peoples, countries can align their rural development and human well-being objectives.

Landscape governance and multidimensional poverty

If soundly implemented and enforced, pro-poor landscape governance policy and law can contribute to poverty reduction, primarily by mitigating inequalities in access to natural assets and enabling the poor to enhance agricultural systems. Public participation and inclusive decision-making are also fundamental to landscape governance (Calderon and Butler 2019): their contribution to the fight against poverty can be assessed by their potential to enable the poor to affect the decisions related to their well-being needs and aspirations. In contrast, the exclusion of poor people from decision-making processes reduces opportunities to consider their needs and is likely to amplify poverty in rural areas.

Landscape governance thus intersects with the issue of rights and representation (Oyono and Ntungila 2015). If tenure security can lead to poverty reduction – since land and resource rights are the basis for the creation of cash income and the consolidation of livelihoods in rural areas – then local representation must defend the interests of the poor as a central tenet of good governance.

Other aspects of good governance, such as trans-

parency and the flow of information, are channels for accountability and feedback mechanisms that can generate corrective measures in a policy arena more likely to work for the poor. For example, transparency on national benefits generated by the commercial exploitation of natural resources can build trust between decision-makers and rural beneficiaries, including a clearer accounting of how tax revenues are used, and encouraging their allocation or investment to fight poverty.

Equity in access to benefit sharing, a pillar of governance, generates enabling conditions for social and environmental justice – that is, when marginalized groups and poor people are considered in the distribution of benefits from natural resources. Equitable access to natural resource wealth can ease social tensions and alleviate violence (Maphosa 2012). This principle of equity in access and benefit sharing is established by the Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as other international conventions, and commonly affirmed in national development tools. This approach to governance facilitates social recognition, fosters healthy ecosystems, and is likely to improve quality of life.

Poverty as impact, poverty as driver

Just as tenure security and landscape governance can reduce poverty and improve the lives of the poor, so can insecure tenure and poor governance – which are mutually reinforcing – fuel poverty. Poverty, for its part, reduces human aspirations and expectations for well-being. When rural people live in deep poverty, they may put more pressure on natural resources in order to survive. As noted by Braradwaj (2016): *“Poverty among people puts stress on the environment whereas environmental problems cause severe suffering to the poor.”* It is an extremely vicious circle. Poverty provides “moral weapons” – meaning “reasons and arguments” – to the poor to expand their footprint on natural landscapes. Poverty reflects and deepens social and economic inequalities, which can generate land and resource tenure conflict and aggravate tenure insecurity. As long as hundreds of millions of people remain in poverty, landscape governance will always be seriously compromised (Robinson and Kagombe 2018).

Priorities for research in a highly complex arena

The links between poverty, tenure security, and landscape governance have been established and explored by numerous studies, but these complex interrelationships require further research to support pro-poor policy development and intervention.

- Intensify and deepen social, economic, policy, and ecological research on the poverty-tenure security nexus, the poverty-landscape governance nexus, and their intersections.

Such research exists under the auspices of a broad spectrum of organizations. This effort should be intensified and translated into options for transformational change, with explicit attention to identifying links between poverty, tenure security, and landscape governance that are measurable and solutions that are achievable. In addition, while the way in which tenure security and landscape governance affect poverty is relatively understood, how poverty determines tenure security and landscape governance needs more exploration.

- Solidify and sustain the science-policy interface.

To address the challenges posed by the nexus of poverty, tenure security, and landscape governance, scientists and policymakers, together with other actors, should strengthen their relations and develop institutional arrangements likely to channel scientific knowledge into policy development and implementation.

- Support the development of strategies for enhancing land and resource rights, ideally those focused on poverty reduction.
- Reducing multidimensional poverty requires strong collaborative and synergistic efforts. Research will be important at first, but it should be followed by strategies that convert tenure security into a package of actions for intervention, enlightened by both upstream and downstream research.
- Help strengthen pro-poor landscape governance through more focused research on indicator development and ongoing assessments.

Significant policy and legal innovations are needed in the global South to link landscape governance with poverty reduction, specifically to improve landscape governance and enhance its contribution to poverty reduction.

- Define, implement, and monitor equitable and robust institutional arrangements in landscape governance through evidence-based collaborative research.

Governance does not “fall from the sky.” It is a policy, social, and institutional construction. It requires collective efforts – involving research, central and local governments, sectoral administrations, local communities, Indigenous populations, customary authorities, the private sector, and others – to develop proven visions and scenarios for pro-poor governance through processes based on mutual and adaptive learning.

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