



25TH ANNIVERSARY IMPACT REPORT

25



Land Equity
International



Land Equity
International

Land Focus.

We do one thing and we do it well. Land is not part of our offer, it is the whole of it, and that depth is what generalist firms cannot match.

Built for complexity.

We do not avoid transitional and politically complex environments. We are built for them.

Honest brokerage.

We work with government, the private sector, civil society and communities. Our independence makes durable solutions possible and brings groups to the table who might otherwise never sit together.

Actionable outcomes.

Our work is made to be used: frameworks, tools and institutional capacity that advance equity and unlock investment.



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Managing Director message

Land is where everything begins

It is the foundation of a family home, the field that feeds a community near and far, and the floor of a forest that holds culture and carbon. It is also where many of the world's most complex development challenges quietly begin: questions of identity, security, livelihoods, investment, climate resilience, revenue raising, and governance. To all of us at LEI, land matters, and it has so for a long time.

Learning from 25 years in business

This year marks a special moment for Land Equity International as we celebrate 25 years in business. Twenty-one years since I left University and landed in Vientiane preparing GPS manuals with the Lao survey team and conducting focus group discussions with the Lao Women's Union.

In 2001, LEI was established around a simple but powerful observation that sustainable development depends on land systems that work. When rights are unclear, records are weak, governance is under-resourced, or communities are excluded from decisions, progress and development equality stall.

Within social, economic, environmental and political system challenges, LEI has worked to address the often hidden and complex land constraints. Across more than 40 countries, we have supported governments, development partners, communities, civil society and private sector actors to strengthen the systems that determine how land is owned, used, valued, protected and governed. It is not fast work. It is deeply human. It requires partnering with local champions, and focused and adaptive advisory to unlock policy, investments or institutional barriers. The contexts of our work have varied enormously, but the purpose has remained constant: to help build land policies and systems that are fairer, more reliable, and better able to support long-term sustainable development from the ground up.

This report shares a few samples of our work and reflects on how we have worked to make change happen over the last 25 years. The impact captured here has not come from LEI alone. It has been achieved hand in hand with national counterparts, project teams, consultants, associates, partners and communities who have brought their own expertise, courage and commitment to the work. I am deeply proud of the people who have shaped LEI's story — those who founded the company, those who have worked with us over many years, and those who continue to carry the work forward today.

Looking back, what stands out most is not only the number of projects delivered, or countries reached, but the relationships built and the foundations strengthened. Land governance reform takes patience. It requires technical discipline, political understanding, cultural respect, and the willingness to stay with difficult problems long enough for solutions to take root.

Looking forward

The need for this work is only becoming more urgent. Climate change, food security, urbanisation, responsible natural resource investments, biodiversity protection and the energy transition all depend on secure, well-governed land systems. If land is where everything begins, then getting land governance right is one of the most important foundations we can build for the next generation.

As LEI enters its next 25 years, we carry forward the belief that has guided us from the beginning: land matters. It matters to people, to economies, to the planet and to our future. Our ambition is clear — by 2050, we want all countries to have well-managed land systems where people's land rights are respected. Thank you to everyone who has been part of LEI's journey. This impact belongs to all of us.

Dr Kate Rickersey

Managing Director
Land Equity International



25
years

40+
countries

Our approach to land

The importance of land is rarely in question, but it *is* sometimes hidden.

It provides security and livelihood, and for many communities it shapes identity and belonging that is passed down to future generations. What is often invisible is how unclear or unrecognised rights quietly undermine the very outcomes (disaster resilience, food security, gender equality) that development programs are trying to achieve.

Poor land governance rarely announces itself. It shows up instead as a project that cannot break ground, an investment that stalls in due diligence, a climate programme that displaces the communities it was meant to protect, or a farm loan that cannot be secured because the family holds no title. Land-related risks are often the last thing discussed and the first thing to derail a project.

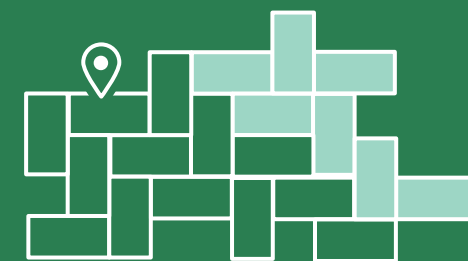
These are not rare or isolated cases. Across low- and middle-income countries, issues of land rights and governance systems are a persistent drag on equity, resilience, empowerment and investment that few funders or governments have the specialist expertise to address. Our work spans more than 40 countries across Asia, the Pacific, Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Our partners include

the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the UK, US, and Australian governments, as well as national governments in sectors including agriculture, forestry, land, planning, energy and urban development.

LEI works at the meeting point of technical rigour and stakeholder trust. Our technical analysis is grounded in the realities of the systems and communities our solutions must serve. It means working within local political economies, understanding who holds power over key decisions and what drives them, and bringing them along as solutions are built together. And it means staying in a region long enough to see change thrive, in a participatory manner.

Our people are our strength. We are proud and grateful to have a strong network of land and international development professionals as part of our LEI family who contribute to the success of our work. Thank you to our LEI staff, consultants, associates and government counterparts for your faith and hard work over the past 25 years together.

Rural land identification in Lesotho during the Market Driven Irrigation Horticulture Land and Gender Activity. Image credit: LEI.



35%
of the world's land
is properly documented

Building the foundations for success

In many low- and middle-income countries, the land administration and registration systems that deal with land records don't function properly. Only 35% of the ownership, tenure, or use rights of the world's land is formally documented. Many are fragmented across different ministries or levels of government with inadequate funding and resources, poor operating processes, and records that are simply out of date. Or, important records sit in paper files at risk of damage. Customary tenure rights holders occupy 5.5 billion ha (42%) of the world's land, but only 1 billion ha are documented with recognised ownership rights. And in rapidly urbanising cities, official records and services just can't keep up. The result is a system that quietly fails the very people it is meant to serve.

For a farmer, it means the land they work often can't be used to secure a loan. For women more broadly, not being considered as heads of households, it means being automatically left off the ownership papers altogether. For governments, it means they are unable to collect property taxes or land rent – revenue that might have paid for schools, clinics or roads. Improving these systems is valuable work – in Lao PDR during the Lao Land Titling Project, where in excess of 120,000 land parcels were registered and more than 175,000 adjudicated, LEI introduced a transparent manual and computer-based Valuation Information System which provided the government with a 450% increase in revenue over a five-year period in the country's capital municipality.

Improving registration systems takes more than new technology. It means working hand in hand with governments, building skills over time, and finding a way through tangled laws and politics. It takes relationships and human decisions to set the path of reform, and to establish new routines and behavioural patterns.

At the core of our business, LEI responds to every part of land reform challenges, be it codesigning a country's land laws and policies, walking the land alongside communities to map and record their interests, or bringing stacks of paper archives into the digital age. Whatever the task, we aim to leave every institution we work with stronger than we found it.

Participatory land registration in Tanzania

Over three years, the Land Tenure Support Program team worked with 127 villages across three districts, helping each one prepare a plan for how its land would be used, while mapping and recording individual plots one by one – 301,246 in all. Each plot was backed by a formal certificate confirming the holder's customary right to occupy and use their land. Implementing Tanzania's Village Land Act achieved something rarely accomplished: the complete registration of land rights across three whole districts, the first time this had been done at district scale in the country.

Many communities had long recognised land rights socially, but without documentation, those rights offered no legal protection and no economic leverage. By the time the program ended, that had changed: certificate holders began using their titles as collateral to access finance from banks, thus improving investment and reducing poverty.

Technology helped to make this possible at scale. The introduction of mobile data tools cut the cost of registering each plot from US\$24 to \$10, setting a new benchmark for a systematic titling program in Tanzania. But trust mattered as much as technology. At the outset, community confidence in the process was low; it grew as people saw that participation was genuine and the procedures were simple.

Ensuring positive results for women was built into the program. In more than half of all certificates issued, women held the land either in their own name or jointly. The program also trained officials and community representatives in how to use a practical manual and a set of tested methods that could be sustained once the project concluded, showing that registering land in a way that is participatory and rooted in the community can work at scale, and be equitable, and affordable.

Sustainable impact comes when technical assistance is built on local capacity, strengthening of institutions, and tools and methods that government can continue using after the project has ended.

Rajab Hassan Rajab

Policy and Institutional Specialist
on the Land Tenure Support Program

Left: A field visit to Kilombero during the 2017 Annual Review of the Land Tenure Support Program in Tanzania. Image credit: LEI.



Tanzania | 2016 – 2019

Technical assistance for support to
the Land Tenure Support Programme

For Tanzania's Permanent Ministry of Lands,
Housing and Human Settlements Development

Land Equity International
25th Anniversary Impact Report

Spanning the urban-rural divide in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one of the fastest-urbanising countries in the world, and that growth brings real opportunities. Realising these opportunities depends on something easy to overlook: clear, reliable land records and information systems. Adding to the challenge, 77% of people reside in rural areas, meaning that our work has had to span both urban and rural scenarios.

LEI has worked with the Government of Ethiopia on land sector reform since 2008. We began by helping the government take stock of existing land administration reform efforts and then shaping these into a costed, long-term plan for the rural land sector that adequately addressed the population's needs. In the years that followed, we collaborated closely with key Ethiopian officials and practitioners and contributed to a study on corruption in the land sector that united government, donors, and other stakeholders around the evidence. While the contents of this publication were quite sensitive, it led to LEI being invited back to undertake a major review and to strengthen the groundwork underpinning the government's reforms in both urban and rural areas. As the cities grew, LEI helped design an approach to mapping and registering urban land that could be scaled from local pilots to a national level.

What connects these engagements is not a single project but a sustained working relationship. Rather than offering one-off fixes, we worked inside Ethiopia's own institutions over more than a decade, returning with our committed staff and quality consultants to support the Government's own capacity to carry the reforms forward.



Top: The World Bank team visiting the Land Rights Registration Bureau in Hawassa in 2023. Image credit: LEI.

Bottom: Visiting a land records archive in Addis Ababa in 2016. Image credit: LEI.

Right: A view of urban Addis Ababa on a World Bank Urbanisation project in 2016. Image credit: LEI.



Moving beyond technical tools to co-create solutions that last

We work on land governance but it's the people that are at the heart of this work and the most effective solutions are rarely purely technical. Instead, they require cultural shifts and person-to-person conversations to best understand what each community, country or region wants and needs, and how to get there.

In this way, LEI's work on land is catalytic. We've spent years working in complex geographies, gathering evidence, building trust and understanding, and helping put in place the institutions and rules that turn secure land into lasting opportunities for the people who depend on it. The result is a mass shift in behaviours and an environment where inclusive economies can take root and communities are empowered to

shape their own future. LEI's role in facilitating more open work on land systems and a resulting shift in attitudes and behaviours towards better land tenure recognition and governance over time is best demonstrated in one of our longest running projects, the Mekong Region Land Governance project.

Changing conversations about land in the Mekong

For more than 15 years, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam's forests and farmlands have been under growing pressure. As demand for agricultural commodities and commercial interests have increased, millions of smallholder farmers (many from ethnic minority communities whose rights to land had existed in custom but had never been recognised in law) have been left economically vulnerable when companies or governments laid claim to their land.

For more than a decade, LEI worked with our implementation partner Gret to lead three consecutive phases of the Mekong Region Land Governance project. LEI was well-placed to take it on. Twelve years of earlier work in Laos had already built the relationships and credibility needed to pursue reform at this scale within the region's complex political context. The project successfully created a lasting change to conversations about land. Our team helped build the policy frameworks, evidence base and multi-stakeholder alliances that moved the work onto a collaborative, long-term and more equitable footing.

The approach was deliberate: bring governments, communities, civil society, researchers and the private sector together around shared evidence, then use that coalition to shift policy and practice from within. In Laos, this meant working with government ministries to see legislation passed that recognises customary tenure in state forest areas, land that had been legally ambiguous for decades, where millions of forest-dependent families lived without protection. And regionally, the programme supported the adoption of ASEAN Guidelines on the Recognition of Customary Tenure in Forested Landscapes – a landmark framework giving communities a recognized basis for asserting their rights across borders.

The project also sought to mainstream efforts towards gender equality, building women's participation and rights recognition into land documentation, policy reform and capacity building – with tangible results. In Vietnam, gender equality was written directly into the Land Law 2024, including provisions prohibiting discrimination in how land is used and managed. In Cambodia, women made up the majority of participants in community resource-mapping (two-thirds in some processes), shaping how land was documented and how benefits were shared in 118 villages. In Laos, a women's land rights toolkit was piloted, joint land titling promoted, and women appointed to local land-governance bodies.



Above: A group photo from a reform actor mapping workshop in Vietnam in 2014. Image credit: MRLG.

Right: Nyod Piang tea farmers in Xiengkhouang, Lao PDR, in MRLG Phase III, 2024. Image credit: MRLG.



Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam | 2014 – 2025
Mekong Region Land Governance Project
Phase I, Phase II, Phase III

For the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, co-funded by Luxembourg and Germany

Co-implemented with Gret

Left: Participants from across the Mekong joined the MRLG team in Luang Prabang, Laos for workshop on forest carbon and responsible agricultural investment in 2025. Right: A field trip to Preah Vihear, Cambodia in 2019. Image credit: MRLG.

38.5 million smallholder farmers

benefit from adopted legal opportunities and policy improvements for improved access to land and/or tenure security

50% men

50% women

4,063 women

trained or had their capacity built on customary tenure and responsible agricultural investment

29 options

for improved, evidence based policies and practice developed, fully documented, and utilised

201 knowledge products



The project also worked directly on how investors engaged with landowners and facilitated locally grounded action. With companies in the rubber sector, it supported responsible investment standards that protected smallholders' land and set fairer terms for sharing benefits. In Laos and Cambodia, the project helped governments draft contract-farming rules which gave smallholders clearer protections when dealing with agribusiness. A grant was used to mediate one of the region's most significant land disputes, a decade-long conflict between an international rubber company and vulnerable people from Bunong Indigenous community in Cambodia, reaching a settlement that restored rights and set a precedent for resolving such cases.

By the end of its three phases over 11 years, the project had benefited 38.5 million smallholder farmers through improved legal frameworks and directly supported the documentation of rights for more than 149,000 farmers across the region.

Land work is climate action

Climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience have become defining global priorities, shaping how governments, development partners and communities plan for a more secure and sustainable future. Secure land tenure and climate resilience are inseparable: the most durable climate outcomes occur where communities have recognised rights to land, meaningful participation in decision-making, and access to the benefits of climate-related investment. As climate finance, carbon markets, biodiversity funding and emerging regulatory frameworks converge around principles of legality, safeguards and community rights, clarity of tenure have become fundamental for effective climate action and is a prerequisite for rural and coastal transformation.

Climate change is reshaping where people live, how land is used and who holds rights over it. Yet most climate finance and adaptation planning still treats land tenure as a side issue. The result is climate adaptation and resilience work that

that looks sound on paper but is socially fragile: plans drawn up without clear rights end up contested, stalled or quietly abandoned, while the communities already most exposed are left more vulnerable.

LEI brings land tenure into climate action, so that interventions are socially legitimate as well as environmentally sound. Be it relocating populations to higher ground to protect them from sea level rise or using innovative approaches to spatial planning to reduce deforestation, our work is supporting those who are implementing important climate action strategies and building the resilience of their communities.

Ensuring responsible relocation of communities due to sea level rise in Nauru

Facing the irreversible damage of decades of critical mineral mining and the mounting threat of inundation and sea level rise, the Government of Nauru launched a generational effort to move some people, homes and infrastructure away from a vulnerable coastal fringe and onto higher ground inland. Most Nauruans live on a narrow coastal strip on one of the most densely populated islands in the Pacific, so this managed migration is nothing less than a plan for the country's long-term survival.

LEI led the land tenure and social safeguarding work underpinning Nauru's Vision and Feasibility Master Plan. We assessed Nauru's land tenure and administration system, where a legal framework built around mining leases and a colonial history had weakened customary tenure. LEI set out practical options for securing and clarifying a previously complex tapestry of rights on the rehabilitated land where new housing is planned. Drawing on our experience in the Pacific, LEI showed how reformed tenure and careful land use planning could deliver fairer access to housing for low-income Nauruans.

Situations like this will only become more common as climate change-induced sea level rise continues. According to the UN, rising sea levels caused by climate change are already threatening the lives and livelihoods of 1 billion people worldwide. The people living in threatened communities need to have a workable system to adapt to their changing coastline while maintaining secure land and sea access.



Left: Nauru faces a high risk of coastal inundation due to most of its population, homes, and vital infrastructure sitting on a narrow, low-lying coastal strip just a few metres above sea level. Image credit: LEI.

Above: Nauru is looking to relocate its vulnerable low-lying populations to the heavily mined Topside. Image credit: LEI.

Nauru | 2021 – 2023

Vision & Feasibility Master Plan in support of the Higher Ground Initiative

For Metrocology/Government of Nauru



As part of the Papua Spatial Planning project, a mobile app was developed to enable monitoring of land compliance by government and communities. Image credit: Fakhurrrazi.

Reducing deforestation through improved spatial planning

The Sustainable Use Zone is the very first time that such duality of use – protection and sustainable use – has been accommodated in Indonesia's spatial planning system.

Project Final report

Papua Spatial Planning

Deforestation and land use change account for as much as 80% of Indonesia's emissions, which makes how land is planned and protected in places like Papua a matter of global climate significance. In Papua and West Papua, LEI led a 3.5-year programme to revise current provincial spatial plans and implement new ones that reduce deforestation while opening a path to low-carbon development.

By embedding Indigenous land rights in the plans that govern Papua's forests, LEI contributed to climate goals and indigenous empowerment. More than 8 million hectares of customary (adat) territory were integrated into approved spatial plans, and over 3 million hectares of forest were safeguarded, including through an innovative classification of Sustainable Use Zones that protect forest while allowing communities to use it sustainably. While 18,000 forest dependent people had access to spatial planning consultations, the programme trained 2,500 people, helping the government build sustainable systems to meet its international climate commitments.

3 million ha of
forest
safeguarded

2,500
people trained in
spatial planning.

Indonesia | 2019 – 2023

Reducing Deforestation Through Improved Spatial Planning in Papua Provinces

For the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office



**By 2050, all countries
will have well-managed
land systems where people's
land rights are respected**

Looking ahead

For 25 years, one belief has run through everything LEI does: that secure, well-governed land is the quiet foundation that underpins resilience, equity, and prosperity, and that getting it right is worth the patience it demands.

Land is rarely simple. It demands technical excellence, trusted partnerships and the patience to deliver solutions that endure long after a project ends. These values have guided LEI across more than 40 countries over the past 25 years, and they will continue to guide us into the future. To everyone who has been part of that journey – our staff, associates, consultants, partners and clients – thank you. Together, we remain committed to our ambition that by 2050, all countries will have well-managed land systems where people's land rights are respected.

Pressures on the world's land systems are only intensifying. Climate change is reshaping where people can live and farm; demand for food, energy and housing continues to grow; and public and private investment is increasingly looking to engage in places where land risk has long constrained development. None of it can be navigated without getting land right.



LEI staff, left to right: Naia Webb, Rebecca Palmer, Renée Chartres, Kate Fairlie, Kate Rickersey, Nicole Nicholson and Tony Burns.

Meeting these challenges will require clear land rights, coordinated institutions and practical solutions that work in the real world. Whether in climate finance, carbon markets or the energy transition, secure, well-governed land systems remain the foundation.

Land matters. You know. Communities know. Governments and Investors know.

The next 25 years of land governance work has already begun