

Land for Life Toolbox

Approaches and Learnings from Multi-Actor Partnerships for People-Centred Land Governance

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Land for Life Toolbox: Approaches and Learnings from Multi-Actor Partnerships for People-Centred Land Governance

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Foreword

A world in which all people can exercise their right to a self-determined life in dignity and justice, free from hunger and poverty – that is our vision at Welthungerhilfe. In doing so, we recognize that hunger is not simply the result of insufficient food—it is often the consequence of inequality, exclusion, and a lack of access to vital resources. The lack of land is a highly relevant but often underemphasized driver of hunger, especially when compared to more visible or acute drivers like conflict and climate change. Land is more than a means of production; it is the foundation for livelihoods, food security, and the ability to lead a self-determined life, especially for rural communities.

Over the past years, Welthungerhilfe has made the Multi-Actor Partnership (MAP) approach a cornerstone of its work on land governance and responsible agricultural investment—two areas that are often complex and politically sensitive. The Land for Life initiative, implemented since 2017 in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, has been a pioneering effort to translate the MAP approach into impact. The initiative showed that progress in land rights is possible when government institutions, civil society, traditional authorities, communities, academia, and the private sector come together - on equal footing - to forge lasting, inclusive solutions.

The Land for Life Toolbox is a product of this experience. It captures the wealth of knowledge, methods, and lessons learned from years of experimentation, dialogue, and perseverance. For us at Welthungerhilfe - and, we hope, for many development practitioners worldwide - this collection is more than a documentation of good practice. It is a practical, field-tested guide for shaping collaborative mindsets and transforming the way we engage in systemic change.

In a world where power imbalances often prevent inclusive decision-making, the MAP approach helps level the playing field. It facilitates trust-building, shared ownership, and accountability among all actors involved. This is vital not only in the land sector but also in many other areas where development outcomes hinge on collective leadership and mutual respect. The toolbox demonstrates that working in partnership is not always easy, but when done right, it can lead to meaningful reforms, a change of attitudes, stronger institutions, and more resilient communities.

By providing actionable tools and principles, the toolbox is relevant to civil society organisations, governments, donors, and international institutions, the private sector and academia alike. We encourage all actors committed to the 2030 Agenda and the realization of the human right to food to explore and use this resource. May it inspire many more partnerships that are inclusive, effective, and grounded in dialogue - for land, for justice, and a world without hunger.



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Abbreviations

BMZ	Development and Economic Cooperation
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
CILGF	Community-Investors-Local Government Forum
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DMSPs	DMSPs District Multi-Stakeholder Platforms
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FPIC	Prior and Informed Consent
GIZ	German International Cooperation
GLAD	Green Love Appreciative Development
ILC	International Land Coalition
LfL LLA	Land for Life Liberia Land Authority Liberia
LRA	Land Rights Act
MAPs	Multi-Actor Partnerships/Multi-Actor Platforms
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSPs	Multi-stakeholder Platforms
NGOs	Non-governmental Organization
NLC	National Land Conference
PMAF	Plateforme Multi-Acteurs du Foncier
RAI	Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
VGGT	Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests
WHH	Welthungerhilfe

1. Introduction



Introduction to the Toolbox

We are delighted that you've found your way to the Land for Life Toolbox and are interested in learning more about our work with Multi-Actor Partnerships (MAPs). Whether you have previous experience with MAPs, are planning to embark on a MAP process, or want to gain a deeper understanding of the concept, we hope you find our collection of tools, experiences, and approaches valuable.

The Land for Life initiative began in 2017 in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Its goal is to establish or strengthen MAPs focused on people-centred land governance and responsible agricultural investment. By doing so, we aim to improve food security for rural populations and marginalised groups. The fight against hunger, poverty, and the sustainable management of natural resources is deeply connected to how people and communities gain access to land. In many countries, land governance is highly complex, with undocumented land titles and overlapping legal systems—statutory, customary, and religious—operating simultaneously. Legal frameworks are often inconsistent, incomplete, or poorly enforced, and many citizens are unaware of their rights. Additionally, local communities are frequently excluded from meaningful consultation on decisions concerning the land on which they live or work.

The MAP approach recognises that complex challenges, like those related to land governance, cannot be solved by one actor group alone. By bringing together diverse actors who combine their strengths and expertise, overcome their differences, and collaborate on shared solutions, we can sustainably address these issues. Such partnerships, e.g. between government, civil society, the private sector, traditional authorities, communities, academia, and others, can face obstacles, such as historical mistrust and unequal power dynamics.

The MAP approach is comparatively new, and the Land for Life initiative served as a pilot for Welthungerhilfe and others. Over the years, we have encountered both challenges and setbacks while also achieving significant progress, successes, and the first large-scale impacts. The initiative is primarily built on the Dialogic Change Model developed by the Collective Leadership Institute. Over time, the teams in each country, along with international support from Welthungerhilfe and the Civil Society Academy International, have adapted this model and developed and tested further tools and approaches.

Over time, structured platforms for long-term partnership between actors of different sectors were established. The Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) vary across countries but generally follow a structured governance model. The typical setup includes a Secretariat, composed of a MAP facilitator, a communication officer, and a finance officer. Hosted by a partner organisation or an independent MAP entity (if institutionalised), the Secretariat facilitates partnerships, organises workshops and advocacy events, and manages resources. A Steering Committee or Board, comprising representatives from civil society, government, the private sector, and academia, oversees the Secretariat and makes decisions on activity plans and budgets. Thematic Working Groups bring together experts to produce policy briefs, review policies, and organise advocacy initiatives. A General Assembly of all MAP actors may serve as the highest decision-making body, ensuring collective leadership and governance.

Three of the four national MAPs have been institutionalised as independent entities: Land for Life Ethiopia, Land for Life Sierra Leone, and Plateforme Multi-Acteurs du Foncier (PMAF) in Burkina Faso. In Liberia, the MAP Secretariat is hosted by the Rights and Rice Foundation and co-facilitated by the Liberia Land Authority (LLA).



Decentralised MAP structures were established in all countries to strengthen local land governance, improve access to land rights, and ensure that grassroots voices are integrated into national MAP processes. For this, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, and Liberia developed regional or district-level MAP structures, while Burkina Faso deployed paralegals to several communities.

Outcome harvesting exercises revealed a positive impact of the MAP processes in all countries, such as influence on policy reforms in Sierra Leone (2022 Customary Land Rights Act), Liberia (regulations for the 2018 Land Rights Act), and Burkina Faso (review of Law 034-2009 and reform of Real Estate Law in 2022). It has also detected behavioural changes in land rights discussions. In Ethiopia, state governments now engage in regular dialogues with communities and investors. In Sierra Leone, the MAPs united civil society to push for the Customary Land Rights Act despite opposition from paramount chiefs. In Liberia, the government collaborates with civil society on policy regulations. In Burkina Faso, accountability was strengthened through national land days and media sensitisation. At the same time, common challenges such as maintaining continuous actor engagement and collective leadership, ensuring financial sustainability, and engaging certain actor groups, including women and the private sector, remain a challenge for many MAPs.

This toolbox is the result of a collaborative effort involving all the country facilitation teams. It aims to document and reflect on the tools and lessons learned from the Land for Life initiative. We hope this collection will complement the growing body of knowledge on MAPs and be useful not only to our team and Welthungerhilfe but also to other development partners and MAP practitioners worldwide.

The toolbox is organised around seven key principles identified by Land for Life as essential to the success of Multi-Actor Partnerships (MAPs). Each principle includes an introduction to the core concepts and approaches, followed by a set of key learnings drawn from the Land for Life initiative. These are complemented by practical case studies from the four participating countries, along with valuable tools to support implementation.

The result is a comprehensive document that can serve as both a high-level overview and a practical guide, depending on the reader's needs. Those seeking a general understanding of the approach and Land for Life's overall experience will find value in the introductions and key learnings on the first 18 pages. At the same time, readers with a deeper interest in specific principles can explore the detailed cases and tools provided.

This is a living document. Land for Life will continue to update the toolbox as new insights and experiences emerge.



Introduction to MAPs and the Seven Principles

“

Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success.

Henry Ford

Multi-actor partnerships (MAPs) are collaborative processes that involve a diverse range of actors working together to address complex problems. Such multi-actor partnerships, multi-actor processes, or multi-stakeholder partnerships have gained increasing importance over the last two decades. They acknowledge the vast complexities and interconnectedness of issues. Many problems exceed the capability of any single actor to control, and are dubbed "messes" or "inherently wicked problems" (Dewulf 2007).

Such "messes" include issues related to poverty and hunger, as well as the overall social well-being of people. Just think about land rights issues, where diverse actors have conflicting interests, often devastatingly affecting communities and their ecosystems. Or refer to the exploitative working conditions of people that constitute the weakest link in many international value chains, for instance, in tea production in India and Sri Lanka, the textile sector in Bangladesh, or the mining of cobalt in Congo. Arguably, such issues require the collective efforts of key actors from the state, private sector, and civil society to progress towards a common goal.



Definition: Multi-Actor Partnerships

We forge influential partnerships with diverse stakeholders from the state, private sector, academia, and civil society to address complex challenges collectively.

Currently, many multi-actor partnerships are being implemented, and this approach has also gained popularity among government agencies, the European Union, and the United Nations. Some of the most prominent MAP examples include the [Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil](#), [Scaling Up Nutrition](#), [Partnership for Sustainable Textiles](#) and [Sanitation and Water for All](#). While those MAPs are large and multinational, there are also many national and local MAPs.

Notably, the application of multi-actor partnerships is promoted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In Sustainable Development Goal 17, which aims to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development, the following targets are formulated:

17.16 Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilise and share knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources to support the achievement of sustainable development goals in all countries, particularly developing countries.

17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.

On land rights, a particularly complex issue, there are now various national Multi-actor Partnership processes, most of which are supported by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the International Land Coalition, or Welthungerhilfe.

How can we apply Multi-actor Partnerships?

For civil society organisations (CSOs), collaborative multi-actor partnerships can be an effective engagement and advocacy strategy, complementing other approaches such as evidence-based advocacy, legal action, or mass mobilisation to advance change and influence policymaking. For development NGOs, the multi-actor partnership is an innovative approach to engagement that yields a higher potential impact. Nevertheless, it also means that the organisation must take up a new role, which is inherently different from conventional partnerships with other civil society organisations. Hence, this must be carefully considered.

HIVOS has been assessing its engagement in five multi-actor initiatives, ranging from a partnership for renewable energy in Sumba, Indonesia, to the Malawi Campaign against Child Marriage. They concluded that "HIVOS underestimated the practical implications, and the extent of changes needed within the organisation for active engagement with multi-actor initiatives. These changes run the gamut, from changes in mindset and organisational culture to changes in staff competencies, procedures, and systems" ([HIVOS, 2015](#)). Moving from a grant-maker or an NGO focusing on implementing community development projects to a facilitator or partner in a multi-actor initiative means engaging with a greater diversity of network partners, becoming more visible, and presenting the vision for change to the partnership with a specific civil society partner.

The HIVOS assessment resonates with our experiences in Land for Life. Many of the learnings related to collective leadership or network building require international organisations, such as Welthungerhilfe or HIVOS, to establish a new and open culture, along with processes and structures that support this new culture. We believe that such a collaborative culture is not only essential for MAPs but also for a new identity of international development partners to play their part in decolonising the system.

Overview: Strengthening Land Governance through Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs)

In May 2012, the Committee on World Food Security adopted the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests (VGGT) to promote secure and equitable access to natural resources. One of the key recommendations (Paragraph 26.2) is the establishment of **Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (MSPs)** — referred to by Welthungerhilfe as **Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs)** — to foster inclusive, gender-sensitive, and people-centred land governance.

Why MAPs Matter:

Tenure governance is complex and context-specific. MAPs are essential tools for:

- Facilitating inclusive dialogue among diverse actors
- Promoting human rights-based and holistic approaches
- Pooling resources and fostering innovation
- Enhancing the legitimacy, accountability, and sustainability of solutions
- Improve trust and change attitudes among diverse actors

Various international institutions, such as the International Land Coalition (ILC), the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), and Welthungerhilfe (WHH), support MAPs/MSPs in land governance. Through Land for Life, WHH promotes the MAP approach with the support of BMZ. Within the Land Collaborative, a community of Practice coordinated by ILC, FAO and WHH, international MAP practitioners on land governance come together for joint learning and advocacy.

A growing body of knowledge has emerged in recent years to facilitate multi-actor partnerships that systematically and collaboratively achieve successful social outcomes. The leading publications emphasise that no single solution fits all, and each multi-actor partnership must be designed and continuously reassessed. Keeping this in mind, we recommend the following two guidelines:

- Petra Künkel et al, 2011: "Stakeholder dialogues: Skills for better collaboration", The [Collective Leadership Institute](#). The Berlin-based institute has been at the forefront of building capacities on multi-actor partnerships for the last 20 years.
- Herman Brouwer et al, 2016: "[The MSP Guide: How to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships](#)", Wageningen University. Their website offers a rich collection of tools and experiences from around the world.

For multi-actor partnerships to be successful, the tools and guidelines are broadly concerned with a comprehensive roadmap for change, as well as intertwined management and collaboration systems. Our toolbox borrows key concepts from these toolkits, further develops them, and makes them more specific to the land sector. We complement those tools with original ones from the Civil Society Academy International and Welthungerhilfe.



The Overarching Principle 1: Focus on Dialogue for Change

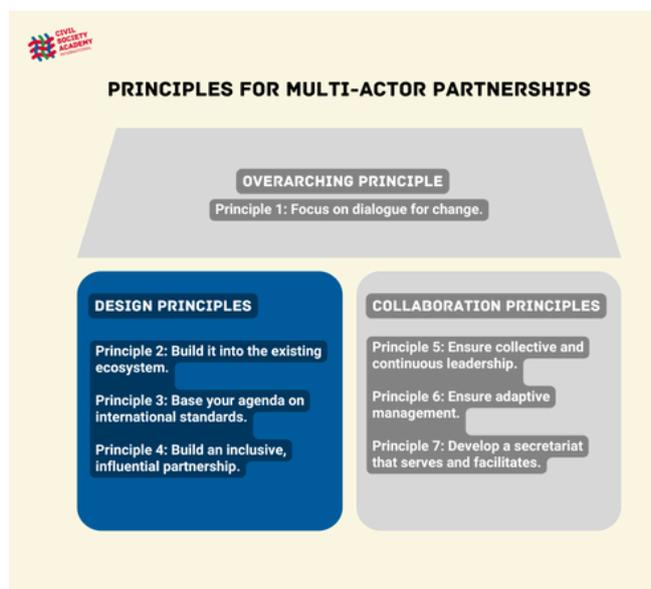
Creating a dialogue on land rights is less about debating or negotiating, and more about developing a platform where actors reflect and learn together, and sometimes even work in synergy to find creative solutions and have a positive impact. To achieve such a reflective or generative dialogue that helps citizens and vulnerable groups realise their land rights, we suggest following a change process with three phases and eight steps, starting from a deep sense of urgency and developing a first coalition of urgency around the topic of land rights, to creating change in people and policies.

The chapter on the first principle provides a detailed description of the steps in the change process. It highlights common pitfalls, such as cutting corners, prolonging the process, and overlooking the importance of mutual trust. We also provide tools to help you assess the process and performance of your dialogues and suggest simple ways to improve dialogue events. Three cases illustrate how Land for Life has contributed to successful dialogues: one on improving community-investor relations in Ethiopia, another on influencing the landmark 2023 land legislation in Sierra Leone and a third one on enhancing the implementation of the Liberia Land Rights Act.

The Three Design Principles

Developing a MAP is a way of social engineering and organisational design. A group of people design a partnership, which then comes to life as an organisation and continues to evolve. The design, at its initial stage and as the MAP evolves, needs to incorporate design principles, so this new network is valuable and in tune with its ecosystem on the national and international level.

In this sense, the MAP is another critical node in an interconnected system of organisations and processes that work on land rights. Building this node, the partnership which connects critical actors, requires vision and continuous focus.



Principle 2: Build it into the Existing Land Governance Ecosystem

Developing a successful MAP begins with understanding the ecosystem. This includes the imminent land governance issues in the country, as well as the policies, processes, and the various actors and their interests, capacities and influence. However, it is also critical to take the civil society perspective and assess the likelihood of success. When deciding to develop a MAP, we should be confident that there is sufficient civic space to influence policies and that policymakers are likely to engage with the MAP.

The chapter helps guide your country analysis of the land governance ecosystem and offers a stakeholder mapping tool that can be integrated into a broader analysis. We also highlight some of the key success factors related to the principle, such as conducting collective analysis with key actors to foster a common understanding (rather than outsourcing), paying attention to the positioning of the new initiative, and making a realistic assessment of the civic space.

Principle 3: Integrate the MAPs into International Networks and Agendas

In our globalised world, where many local and national development processes are connected to the regional and international level, MAPs do not flourish in silos, but in synergy with broader networks and agendas. In land rights, the key reference points are the agendas of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests (VGGT) and Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (RAI), as well as related international organisations, such as the International Land Coalition, the FAO, and the Committee on World Food Security.

The chapter presents details on the international ecosystem. It explains essential learnings from Land for Life, such as the improved legitimacy of MAPs, easier benchmarking of policies, and more effective international exchange, as the standards are universal. However, for training and funding purposes, global organisations are also critical. A case study on the 10th anniversary of the VGGT demonstrates how these international standards can be utilised for sensitising actors and influencing policymakers.

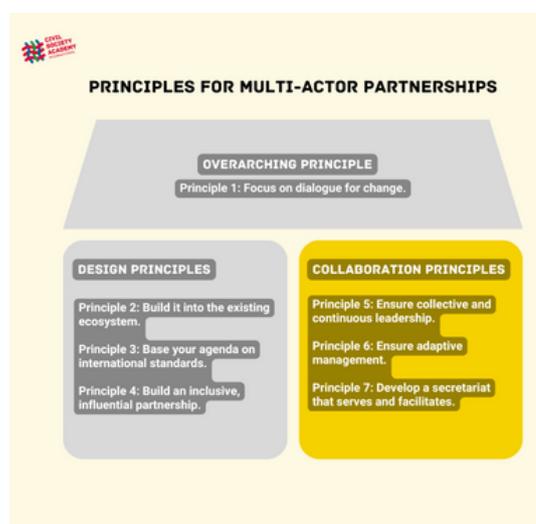
Principle 4: Build an Inclusive, Influential Partnership

We sometimes hear the terms “loose” or “informal” in connection with MAPs. MAPs may start loose or informal, but for MAPs to become effective, they require a collaborative culture, structures, and processes, as well as a clear purpose, resources, and ways to create impact. IN short: everything any successful organisation requires. To develop an effective MAP, we must invest money, time and have good people on board who embrace a partnership approach and persevere.

The chapter guides how to transition from an initial emotional narrative and a coalition of urgency towards developing a comprehensive MAP, while remaining lean. We present key learnings from Land for Life, including the risk of “overstructuring”, the challenge that even years into the initiative, people still struggle with the concepts of MAPs and partnerships, and the opaque factors that lead to MAPs being registered. Critical tools for (a) developing an initial emotional narrative of your MAP, (b) assessing the maturity of your MAP, (c) examining the partnership approach and (d) a generic governance structure are also included. Don't miss the inspiring case studies on the organisational structure and strategy of the Liberia MAP, now 8 years old.

The Three Collaboration Principles

In a world in which many organisations operate based on competition and hierarchy, how do we create a culture of collaboration, guided by a common purpose, shared risks and resources, and collective action, rather than greed and tactical considerations? This is a quest many organisations and leaders have embarked on. It is not new. And yet, this quest is of specific significance in MAPs, where a multitude of organisational cultures and personalities come together. For Land for Life, we found that two trending concepts — collective leadership and adaptive management — helped us to progress on our collaboration system. We further learned that the secretariat played a pivotal role. When MAPs excelled, the secretariat was aligned with the collaboration system and lubricated it.



Principle 5: Ensure collective and continuous leadership

Many organisations in the Land for Life countries are still traditional in their approach to leadership. Hierarchies matter, the leader knows best, and communication is directive rather than dialogic. However, the good news is that many leaders, though they might work in more traditional organisations, aspire to work towards collective leadership. There can be a deep sense of satisfaction if we collaborate well and achieve success together.

In this chapter, we describe traditional and collective leadership and explore ways to transition towards a more collective model. Undoubtedly, onboarding individuals who embrace collective leadership is critical, as is maintaining a tight core group. Other learnings from Land for Life include the importance of motivating people and the positive effect of informal communication. We present a range of tools, including a personal assessment of collective leadership habits, a formula for motivation, and core functions in successful process facilitation, as well as strategies for engaging the private sector. To emphasise the need for inclusivity and affirmative action in MAPs, we examine the case of Land for Life Liberia.

Principle 6: Focus on Adaptive Management

Adaptive management is a structured and iterative process of robust decision-making in the face of uncertainty, aiming to reduce uncertainty over time through system monitoring. The system is well described with the German term "auf Sicht fahren" (translated as "driving by sight"), which means our driving is guided by what we can see. Management focuses on the short term, while keeping the larger process and the goal or vision in mind.

In this chapter, we describe why complex issues such as land rights require adaptive management, with feedback loops, re-planning and strategising as well as experimentation and learning - something many hands-on managers need to get used to. We provide tools to assess the adaptiveness of your management system, propose a meeting schedule that focuses on reflection, learning, and replanning, and present 15 adaptive management tools, games, and strategies. A case study from Burkina Faso illustrates how adaptive management can help achieve advocacy outcomes.

Principle 7: Develop a secretariat that serves and facilitates

The secretariat is the centrepiece of the collaboration's system, which coordinates partner engagement, organises events, and manages the day-to-day activities. All four Land for Life initiatives have established a secretariat with at least two staff members.

In this chapter, we visualise an active secretariat that serves the partnership and examine different options for setting it up. According to our learnings, accountability towards a functioning steering structure (not the host organisation), good communication capacities and a proactive coordinator are among the key success factors. The establishment of a media partnership in Sierra Leone demonstrates the positive impact of effective communication on the advocacy efforts of the partnership.



Eleven Key Learnings

In this toolbox, we developed 47 learnings from Land for Life. The most critical eleven learnings are presented here. They have been selected collectively by the tool box team.

- 1 The MAP approach has yielded tangible outcomes in all four countries:** policy changes, improved coordination, a stronger civil society voice, and, importantly, changes on a personal level, as well as how we collaborate. We can confidently say it has been worth the effort.

At the same time, the multi-actor approach challenged our readiness as civil society actors to work in partnerships and our legitimacy to represent vulnerable groups. It also highlighted our limited capacity to engage in policy work. Even though developing capacities and a new culture has taken time, we believe that collaboration approaches, such as those in Land for Life, will lead the way in our future efforts as development actors in promoting human rights, localisation of aid, and the broader decolonisation agenda.

- 2 Creating high-level buy-in is challenging for civil society-initiated MAPs:** For the dialogue to be influential and effective, it is crucial to have influential people at the table. It has been frustrating for some MAP actors to repeatedly wait in the offices of ministers or department heads to be heard and to convince them to participate in the MAP.

Civil society-initiated MAPs are more effective in countries where democratic participation is more rooted and civil society is stronger. MAP actors are heard more and accepted as partners in the development process than in more authoritarian countries. We recommend studying the country context and the space for dialogue well before deciding that an initiative uses a multi-actor approach to influence decision-makers.

- 3 Dialogue and creating a win-win situation sound easy, but** maintaining a collective platform isn't easy if strong and conflicting interests exist. For instance, the new Sierra Leone Land legislation significantly impacted the power and financial situation of paramount chiefs in the country. There was no win-win for them, and a way forward could only be reached by creating public pressure on the country's decision-makers.

We realised that sometimes dialogue is not the answer. Instead, whistleblowing and a more confrontational approach can be successful and must be considered by civil society. If, as in Ethiopia or Burkina Faso, civil society actors exclude more confrontational approaches, their bargaining power is severely reduced, and dialogue on an equal level with state or private actors is less likely.

- 4 It is a rights-based analysis:** We have learned that the context analysis of land governance is sometimes approached more historically or even as a technical exercise that primarily relates to the inefficient governance system and low capacities of those involved. Although both perspectives are essential, we urge starting with those affected, focusing on the land rights abuses, injustices, and the question of why the state is not performing its critical duties. It is often a question of power.

In two of the countries, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia, Welthungerhilfe had no previous land rights initiatives, and there was limited advocacy work due to the authoritarian regimes. In hindsight, more capacity-building on advocacy and policy work could have been a booster in kickstarting the initiative.

5

Engage with critical actor groups: Likewise, we learned in some MAPs that specific groups were not sufficiently engaged at the start because they were perceived as less relevant or access was difficult. In Liberia, for instance, traditional leaders were initially overseen, and they proved to be key players in the MAP processes. In Ethiopia, integrating investors was initially perceived as difficult, and they were inadequately included. Interest groups of women were sidelined by nearly all the platforms in their early days.

A core lesson is that in the early stages, we need to establish meaningful connections with all critical groups related to land governance and critically reflect on the composition of our coalition of urgency as we gain more insights.

6

International guidelines can be powerful catalysts—but their uptake varies: Frameworks such as the VGGT and the RAI principles can provide legitimacy, visibility and direction for national MAPs. Particularly when international actors were also engaged and funding sources were tied to them, the political recognition and openness increased significantly.

However, the degree to which these standards were accepted and institutionalised varied considerably between countries. In some countries, such as Sierra Leone and Liberia, they were well integrated into national processes and shaped policy reform, including the recognition of women's land rights or the inclusion of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for communities. In other countries, like Ethiopia, they served more as reference points to initiate debate rather than as implementation tools. Knowledge and acceptance of the guidelines vary, and in some countries of the VGGT+10 initiative (e.g. in Asia), they could not be referenced in debates, as they were regarded as “western” or externally imposed. It's crucial to ground these frameworks in the national discourse and link them to domestic challenges. Initiatives like VGGT+10 were essential in making international debates tangible at the national level. They increased awareness and helped actors understand how global discourses could be linked to their local realities, making them more actionable for policymakers, civil society, and communities.

7

Partnership building requires focus, time, and money. Land for Life is now eight years old, and we learned that the rule that an organisation needs at least five years to operate sustainably is also valid for MAPs, especially in new contexts, and with new people. We often discussed how such processes can be accelerated or simplified. Certainly, mentoring, training and international connectedness are key factors in building the partnership. Still, each team and partnership has its context and acts based on its experiences. COVID-19, a coup, a civil war, and mass protests were contextual events, but also the establishment of a new and initially democratic government in Ethiopia, as well as a favourable civil society space for influencing in Sierra Leone. At the same time, organisational challenges, just like in any other organisation, were present: hiring, funding, compliance issues, keeping people engaged, and others.

Building a MAP is not a project. Whether registered or not, it is an organisational development process that should not be underestimated.

- 8** **The emotional narrative is essential for creating resonance**, as it can foster commitment and momentum. It has helped to onboard people and organisations and get the partnerships going. There is more to it. It is crucial to continually reinvent and develop the narrative, aligning it with the plight of vulnerable groups.

At the same time, we also learned to ensure that the storytelling is not perceived as a marketing ploy, and actors, for instance, state actors, are not offended.

- 9** **The notion of collective leadership is critical to a successful multi-actor process.** Collective leadership is a central element of an MAP and affects other principles, such as the likelihood of developing an influential partnership or managing the initiative adaptively. Developing a collective leadership culture requires those who truly embrace it; few people need to want it. They must be prepared to engage, utilise their influence, share resources, and demonstrate to others that a collective leadership style is desirable and achievable.

On the contrary, we have also experienced that if too few leaders adopt collective leadership, there is a risk that the partnership will slip into a more hierarchical leadership model, with one or a few people making decisions that are not transparent and have little involvement from the leadership group. This is a red flag in the collaboration process.

- 10** **A strong, accountable secretariat is crucial to MAP's success:** Land for Life experiences show that a well-functioning secretariat holds the partnership together, coordinates activities, facilitates dialogue, and manages communications. Without it, even committed leaders struggle to keep MAPs running. However, functionality requires more than performance—it demands accountability, especially to the MAP steering group, rather than the host organisation or donors. While secretariats are often housed within existing institutions, they must remain accountable to MAP governance. Usually, host organisations treat secretariat staff as their own, creating conflicts of interest and weakening MAP autonomy. This issue has led some Land for Life MAPs to form independent entities. The steering body must also demand accountability. In many cases, it lacked the capacity or will to challenge or guide the secretariat, creating a “petting zoo” effect—oversight in name only—limiting learning and strategic development. Donors, too, must be willing to let go of control. When donors attach rigid agendas to funding, they risk becoming de facto decision-makers. This undermines MAP's horizontal accountability and sidelines its members. Effective donor engagement means enabling secretariats to answer to MAP governance, not donors.

- 11** **Regular, well-prepared reflection meetings are at the centre of adaptive management.** Land for Life Sierra Leone, for instance, has successfully implemented a highly adaptive system, featuring quarterly reflection and planning meetings with all partners and transparent decision-making processes for planning and fund disbursement. An internal communication platform and annual strategy meetings complement the quarterly meetings.

A key learning point from the initiative is that each MAP must develop its adaptive management system, including routines and an effective internal communication system.

2.

Seven Principles of
Developing Successful
Multi-Actor Partnerships

Principle 1:
Focus on Dialogue for
Change

“

The best way to solve problems and to fight against war is through dialogue.

Malala Yousafzai

Why Dialogues?

Dialogue refers to a conversation or exchange of ideas between two or more people. It involves sharing thoughts, feelings, opinions, and information to promote understanding, mutual respect, and engagement.

A Dialogue for Change is a process that envisions change, for instance, on land governance, where dialogue among actors is used to advance the common agenda. The collective agenda is advanced by:

- *Analysis and Developing a Common Understanding:* Dialogue can bring together diverse perspectives and expertise to examine complex problems.
- *Problem-Solving:* Dialogue can address challenges collaboratively, generate ideas and solutions, and make decisions.
- *Collective Advocacy:* It involves articulating positions, presenting evidence, and persuading others to consider and potentially align with a collective agenda.
- *Building Relationships and Collective Leadership:* Dialogue helps to build rapport, understanding, and empathy among participants, fostering deeper connections and interpersonal relationships.
- *Conflict Resolution:* Dialogue can help navigate conflicts, misunderstandings, or disagreements by promoting active listening, empathy, and constructive communication.

The most advanced dialogues are often referred to as “generative dialogue”.

Think about the best dialogues you have had in your life: Think of a situation in which you and your friends or colleagues came together to discuss some of the most pressing social issues. Your thinking is constantly nurtured with new ideas and exciting inputs, resulting in a level of dialogue in which all of you together can go far beyond what each of you can do without each other. This leads to surprising insight, creative ideas, and the ability to transform your thinking and overcome your usual thought patterns and prejudices. Petra Künkel (XXX) calls this generative dialogue. This is what we should aim for. It is a personally fulfilling win-win situation, well beyond the win-win that focuses on the needs of organisations, communities or individuals.

In Multi-Actor Partnerships, such as Land for Life, the dialogue occurs on a platform or multiple platforms that interact regularly and ideally with a similar set of people, allowing the dialogue to move forward. Such partnerships and platforms are typically developed through a careful and purposeful process, which begins with an initial sense of urgency among a few people and progresses through several steps towards achieving changes in habits or policies. Much can go wrong during the development of the platform, and it is both challenging and creative work to keep the process on track.

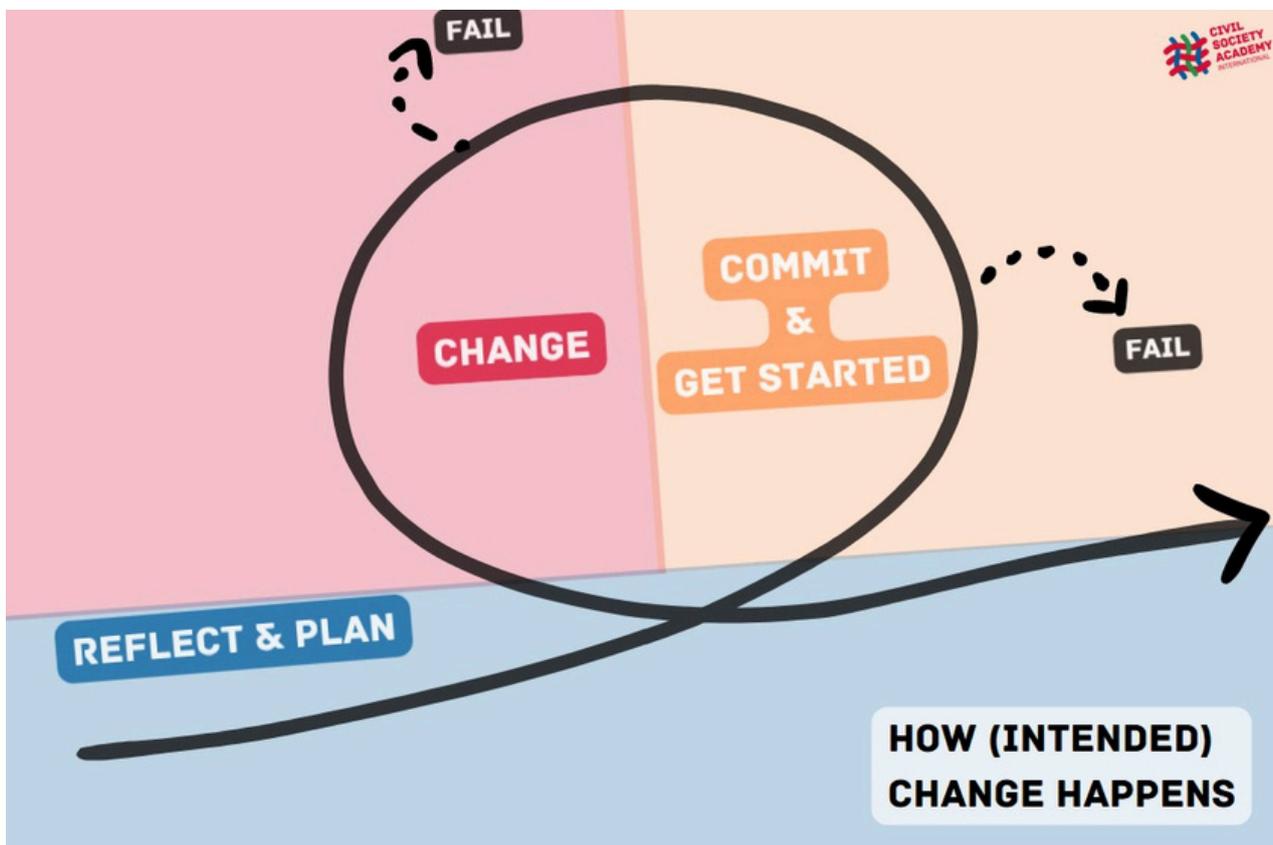
Before we move into understanding the process in more depth, we would like to share some learnings from Land for Life regarding developing the partnership and an effective dialogue:

How Change through Dialogue Happens

Overcoming procrastination on a personal level, progressing on a strategic shift in an organisation or building a coalition: Change in people and organisations is a dance between urgency, commitment and action.

But don't be fooled: Most change processes fail or are diluted as we move forward. Just think about any change you have planned personally, say to eat less, stop smoking, go running every day or build a closer relationship with a relative. We sense the urgency, build up some commitment, and then? Sometimes, we temporarily change behaviour, just to fall back to our harmful or unintended behaviour again. To achieve change on a personal level, we need thorough reflection and often support systems, such as a coach, a self-help group, or a supportive partner.

The reality is that change is not easy. This is also true in organisations. Most of you must have experienced it. Your organisation's leadership announces the most fabulous plans, energetically embarks on its new mission, and then falters due to opposing staff or a lack of resources. The big changes become very little ones, or even worse.



However, there are also very successful change processes. In our work on organisational change and building coalitions, we have realised that a sequential map is very important to collectively understand the change process, assess whether we are still on course, and reduce the likelihood of failure. Such sequential maps are the dialogic change model of the Collective Leadership Institute, which is widely used for multi-actor partnerships, and Kotter's 8-step model for organisational change.

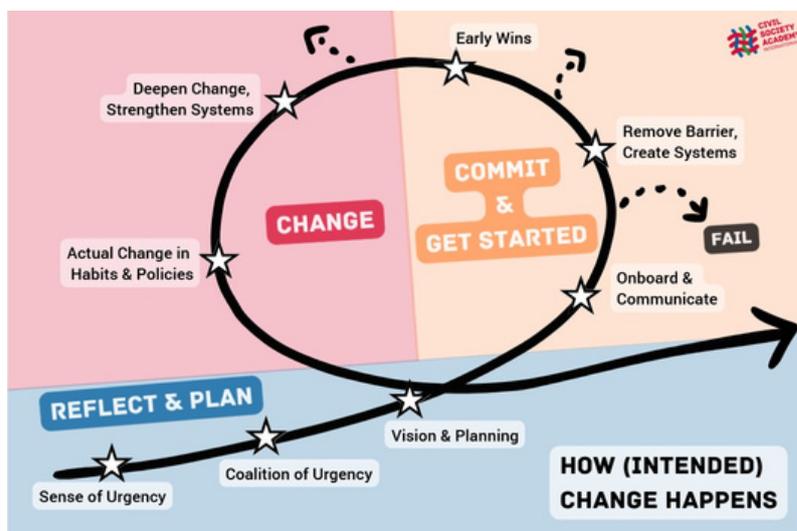
To understand the development of multi-actor partnerships, we have merged and adopted the two models and enriched them with our own experience in facilitating and supporting coalitions and multi-actor partnerships and coaching leaders.

How Change Happens - through Multi-Actor Partnerships and Coalitions

Before we describe the phases and steps, here are a few disclaimers: even though the model is sequential, it does not mean that you will exactly follow this sequence. There might be smaller loops backwards, or you might spend less effort on specific steps because things emerge by themselves. A district MAP on land rights might also evolve quicker than a national one, which has multiple layers and many more members.

However, if you want to do things right, you cannot jump steps and fast-track the process. Achieving change through dialogues and partnerships requires the energy, time and resonance of a critical group of people.

It does not just suddenly emerge; it can't be ordered or bought, but needs to be carefully designed and nurtured.



How Change Happens – Step by Step

Phase 1: Reflect and Plan

Sense of Urgency

- **An initiator with a sense of urgency:** The starting point of any successful multi-actor partnership process is a strong sense of urgency to address the challenge. This initial spark sometimes comes from external people, for instance, through a project proposal. This is not necessarily a problem; directly affected actors must share this sense of urgency.
- **Have a strong case:** The sense of urgency is often stronger if there are clear cases of injustice or direct disadvantages for groups of people, for instance, land is taken from farmers to be used by large agriculture businesses without adequate compensation.
- **Consider feasibility:** A sense of urgency overlaps with considerations of how feasible it is to address an issue. We have realised that some problems, such as land rights of pastoralist communities, are more difficult to address because they are embedded in a larger challenge of pastoral development, which does not have a satisfactory solution in most countries. Focusing on more feasible aims could be an advantage at this stage.
- **An emotional narrative:** To prepare for the next steps, we recommend creating a first emotional narrative that can create empathy with those suffering, for instance, loss of land, and emphasise the feasibility of addressing the issue in a coalition.

<p>Coalition of Urgency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-12 individuals: The second step is building a coalition of urgency, which consists of 6-12 highly motivated individuals who are committed to addressing the issues. They are the starting point, the initial dialogue platform, or the “core group,” as it is called in the Collective Leadership Institute model. We recommend using stakeholder mapping to identify those individuals and a simple list of criteria to screen candidates. • Motivated, diverse, open: It is an advantage if the coalition of urgency includes people from the state, civil society, and private sector, as well as some people with good reputations and well-connected to the decision makers in the region or country where you initiate the MAP. Additionally, consider the personalities of the individuals: They should be willing to work in coalitions and be open to new ways of working. • Heavyweights: Extra effort should be given to include a few influential heavyweights in this initial stage, as they will attract other critical people later. • One-on-one meetings: Next, one-on-one meetings should be scheduled to create resonance among potential members regarding land rights issues and ideas for addressing them through a MAP. You can usually sense in such meetings if you create resonance with your counterpart. • Build the coalition of urgency: To build a coalition, a series of meetings is recommended to explore land-related challenges further, build trust among coalition members, and essentially establish a team for the collective leadership of the MAP.
<p>Vision and Planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A basic, collective context analysis: As part of this step, it is critical to do a fundamental context analysis, including stakeholder mapping. We recommend a series of participatory sessions with your coalition of urgency to collectively understand the context. You may bring in further knowledge holders to support. In some initiatives, comprehensive consultancies were procured at this stage, which took time and were not that insightful. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ The analysis should give an overview of key actors, including existing coalitions or dialogue platforms, a short historical analysis, an analysis of groups that suffer most from land rights violations, an analysis of the most common violations and redressal mechanisms, an analysis of policies and gaps, and an assessment of the country's situation vis-à-vis international instruments such as RAI or VGGT. • Developing key insights: This step marks the interface between analysis and planning. It is crucial to develop a good plan that concludes and generates insights from the collective context analysis. Such insights could come in the form of finding. Examples for insights: a. We discovered existing coalitions on land rights during the stakeholder mapping, which we must consider as we move forward. And b. Millions of women, divorced or widowed, are affected or at risk of human rights abuses, as men take their land and existing laws are ignored. We recommend developing a list of 10-20 well-formulated key insights that can then be prioritised or clustered during the planning process. • Exciting planning events: Once key insights from the analysis are consolidated, planning can begin. We recommend one or two exciting and well-planned events with your coalition of urgency to review the key insights from the context analysis, prioritise challenges the MAP may address, such as agricultural investment or women's land rights, and create a vision and identity for the new partnership. • Consider representation: One of the most important questions is who to involve in the MAP. Land Right MAPs typically aim to enhance public participation in decision-making, particularly for those who are often excluded, and to establish a comprehensive platform for dialogue, thereby influencing policy-making. Hence, special emphasis must be given to including affected groups and bringing in influential people and policymakers. • Plan for 6-12 months: Another output from the workshops is a 6 to 12-month plan for phase 2: Commit and Get Started, which also includes adequate resources and an initial structure that will organise the planned activities.

Phase 2: Commit and Get Started

Onboard and Communicate

- **Enlarge the coalition of urgency:** Now we start building the larger partnership. This is a crucial step and requires everyone in the initial coalition of urgency to contribute, especially those with great networks and commitment-building skills.
- **Create ownership and commitment:** To build ownership, the partnership's identity is central. You can develop elements of the identity, such as the logo, name of the partnership, or a claim, collectively and have people comment and even vote. Then, to visualise this identity, you must develop a few communication products, such as flyers or a basic website. Members must be briefed about the identity and repeat it wherever they go.
- **Establish regular internal communication:** We recommend maintaining regular yet straightforward, low-threshold communication, such as sending short updates and holding chats through WhatsApp or similar platforms, emailing a set list of recipients, and scheduling regular phone conversations and meetings with key stakeholders. We observed that many multi-actor partnerships face challenges in establishing a well-functioning communication system, often because this is viewed as a 'nice to have' and delegated to junior officers, while leadership does not prioritise it. However, in coalitions, keeping everyone informed is crucial, and leadership must prioritise establishing effective communication channels.
- **One-on-one meetings and onboarding events:** Conduct a series of engaging one-on-one meetings to onboard new members and ensure everyone is aware of the relevance of the multi-actor partnership. Smaller workshops may be necessary to onboard new members and integrate them into the process. Training on key concepts should also be considered.

Remove Barriers and Create Systems

- **Remove or reduce barriers:** Barriers in such processes typically arise from individuals with tactical considerations (e.g., funding), conflicting interests, superficial participation by representatives, resource constraints, or the exclusion of critical stakeholders, such as women, marginalised groups, or policymakers. If no efforts are made, such barriers may slow down the process, and conflicts may escalate, jeopardising the MAP. It is essential to address issues in a sensitive yet open manner before they escalate.
- **Create lean, initial structures:** Start with a lean structure that focuses on a strong and transparent secretariat. This secretariat excels at organising, communicating, and coordinating with various stakeholders, and also provides leadership to the process. Building facilitation capacity from early on is also essential. Facilitation is crucial for dialogues and meetings to be meaningful and engaging for participants.
 - At this stage, our suggestion is to resist the urge to build much structure. Often, the coalition of urgency can serve as the foundational vehicle for dialogue, while new critical members can be added.
 - *As a thumb rule for agile/lean organisations, don't create roles and structures because you anticipate the need for those structures; only create them when there is a concrete and articulated need, for instance, for a working group to become active.*
- **Create a collective dialogue process:** The central element of a MAP on land rights is typically a collective dialogue process on land policy and its implementation, often occurring at different levels and with varying focuses. It is all about orchestrating and engaging members of the MAP and affected groups to contribute to the process, raise their issues and demands, and then develop collective positions or actions - for instance, to collectively build the capabilities of citizens on specific rights.
 - Don't plan single events but design a process which engages all critical stakeholders to contribute, with the longer-term aim of improving policies and their implementation.

- **Transparent and adaptive management:** Seasoned coordinators of successful networks will usually emphasise transparency and adaptiveness as some of their success factors. Transparency encompasses how decisions are made, the availability of funds, how they are spent, and by whom. Such systems must be introduced early on to foster trust and ownership.
 - MAPs, like other advocacy initiatives, should embrace adaptive management practices to quickly react to a changing context, such as new government policy initiatives or changing needs of the affected population.

Early Wins

- **Focus on early wins:** As a thumb rule, we should make early wins within the first year of the initiation of the MAP. If things drag on too long, there is a risk that a lengthy discussion about structures and positions will drain energy from the core purpose of the dialogue, i.e., to create change.
- **Focus on policies and solutions:** An early win might be achieved in the first comprehensive dialogue event or the first land conference, but there must be tangible outputs, such as agreed-upon positions regarding policy changes or demands for enhanced public consultations in specific policy implementations. In other words, the early win must provide direction for future processes, which will build upon and follow up on those positions.
- **The partnership speaks:** Communicating or announcing early successes is critical to building ownership among the entire collaboration. Ensure that all partners feel included in the branding, language, and agreed-upon positions. It is crucial that reporting is done on time, ideally within one to two weeks after the event has ended.
- **Celebrate:** don't forget it. This is when we have fun and build trust and closer relations with our peers. Under the motto: We are successful together!

Phase 3: Change

Deepen Change and Strengthen Systems

- **Keep the momentum:** After the first successes, a word of caution. The work has just begun. This is the moment when many change projects get stuck. Here are the difficult questions:
 - We emerge from the first events upbeat and with big plans, but how will we be able to implement them?
 - How can we progressively build our MAP?
 - How can we progressively increase our influence to change decision-makers' behaviours, practices, and policies?

Here are a few key considerations from our experiences:

- **Create and follow routines:** Networks, like any other organisation, require routines – management meetings, steering committees, annual membership meetings, etc. - and they must happen and be well-prepared; otherwise, the energy will fade away. More importantly, the dialogue processes require routines and continuous follow-up, with a clear pathway from one meeting to the next. This is what dialogue is all about and cannot be neglected. We emphasise this point because, in Land for Life, we had several instances where excellent conferences were held or great position papers were developed, but then ... there was not enough follow-up.
- **Build strong external communication:** To influence policy and earn support from new partners and the public, investing in external communication that focuses on the positions and the policy agenda is essential. This can include a well-designed website, partnerships with media outlets, social media presence, or insightful case studies. Strong external communication is vital to promoting the agenda and creating more energy and passion for the work.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a longer-term strategy: You may be surprised why this only comes now. We usually recommend engaging in more comprehensive strategy processes when experiences have been gained, key actors are established, and priorities emerge. Ideally, the strategy is collectively developed, incorporating analysis and planning. Firstly, it would indicate choices and priorities in how we further develop the dialogue platform and create more impact. Secondly, the strategy also defines organisational priorities, such as mobilising resources, formalising the partnership, or improving the management. • Implement strategy / remove new barriers: Implementing the strategy is a new change process that must be broken down into annual plans, communicated widely, and followed up in a regular management process. Just as in the second phase, barriers may emerge, which must be removed and addressed.
<p>Actual Change in Habits and Policies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document, communicate, and celebrate success: Now you are in the performing stage, and people will have recognised the partnership as an essential process for change. You can deepen this narrative by documenting successes, both small and large, and communicating the partnership's contribution to changes in habits and policies. Celebrate the achievements with those who contributed. Again, strong documentation and public relations work are central elements. • Continue building on successes: Once you are performing at a high level, the challenge becomes maintaining this level of performance, sustaining and rejuvenating the collective leadership and vision. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Change is a long-term undertaking. The struggle for land rights in most African countries will likely continue for several decades. As progress is made, the agenda evolves to match the context. If there are significant changes in the legislation, for instance, progressive new land legislation, or if the political context changes dramatically, the partnership requires new strategic priorities. • Regular review processes help keep the partnership on course. We recommend that, at least once a year, a more in-depth assessment of the contextual changes, the status of the MAP, and the outcomes achieved be conducted. Based on these insights, a plan for the future can be developed. • Building a support alliance: Support follows success, so it is a good point in time to look at the sustainability of the partnership and put new efforts into developing a support alliance of international organisations such as the International Land Coalition, Welthungerhilfe or FAO, but also including other partners in the eco-system, for instance, training institutions such as the Civil Society Academy International, think tanks or certification agencies. They all have an interest in supporting well-performing partnerships.

And then, what is next?

Upscaling, decentralising, duplicating, institutionalising, refocusing or evolving the partnership into a new model of creating impact, for instance, a think-tank, a donor or an organisation that certifies standards. So many options exist to take the partnership forward into a new cycle of change. It usually starts again with a sense of urgency from someone in the partnership or a coalition of people who share similar feelings.



Shortcuts are damaging, but dragging the process can create challenges too: If we take shortcuts and, for instance, move too quickly towards formalising a structure, critical opportunities for developing ownership and a collective vision are missed. It might not be easy to create such buy-in by key actors at a later stage. Likewise, if we remain at a theoretical level for too long and do not take active steps to influence policies and achieve early wins, people may lose interest and motivation.

Creating high-level buy-in is challenging for civil society-initiated MAPs: For the dialogue to be influential and effective, it is crucial to have influential people at the table. It has been frustrating for some MAP actors to repeatedly wait in the offices of ministers or department heads to be heard and to convince them to participate in the MAP.

Civil society-initiated MAPs are more effective in countries where democratic participation is more rooted and civil society is stronger. MAP actors are heard more and accepted as partners in the development process than in more authoritarian countries. We recommend studying the country context and the space for dialogue well before deciding that an initiative uses a multi-actor approach to influence decision-makers.

Balancing of groups and opinions: Some platforms were initially dominated by civil society because non-governmental organization (NGOs) were most interested in and understood engagement in dialogues as one of their mandates. As a result, other actors, including the state, perceived the MAP as more of a civil society platform.

To overcome this challenge, it is crucial to encourage private sector and state actors to join and participate, ensuring a more balanced dynamic.

Dialogue and creating a win-win situation sound easy, but maintaining a collective platform isn't easy if strong and conflicting interests exist. For instance, the new Sierra Leone Land legislation significantly impacted the power and financial situation of paramount chiefs in the country. There was no win-win for them, and a way forward could only be reached by creating public pressure on the country's decision-makers.

We realised that sometimes dialogue is not the answer. Instead, whistleblowing and a more confrontational approach can be successful and must be considered by civil society. If, as in Ethiopia or Burkina Faso, civil society actors exclude more confrontational approaches, their bargaining power is severely reduced, and dialogue on an equal level with state or private actors is less likely.

Building Mutual Trust: A 'Dialogic intervention' may be the agreed-upon option among all the affected parties, but trusting the person initiating the dialogue becomes difficult. Therefore, beginning with open exchanges, informal conversations, and joint working groups could establish a first sense of trust. For example, the Land for Life intervention in Malen Chiefdom, Sierra Leone, achieved relative success due to several open conversations between the Land for Life team and key community actors.

As indicated in the change model (in the next section), building trust is a careful process that cannot be forced. However, good facilitation and open talks on a personal level can significantly increase the success rate.

Onboarding with emotional and purpose-driven narratives does not work with everyone: We have realised that a few critical actors, who can be from civil society, the private or public sector, or traditional leaders, are not convinced by purpose and win-win. We need to address them personally, ensnare them, and sometimes tell them what they want to hear. Only then will they accept the dialogue and engage.

Pleasing others to get them on board is part of the game!

Regular Dialogue and Follow-up: In some cases, we observed that great dialogues were conducted, but afterwards, the follow-up was slow and did not match the large ambitions generated in some of the workshops. Sometimes, documentations were sent months later. As a result, momentum was lost, and people began to disengage from the process.

Creating momentum and achieving early wins in the dialogic change process can be challenging. If we can build momentum, we must nurture it and ensure that it continues to progress.

Create Impact and narratives of success: Narratives of success also nurture momentum. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, passing land legislation gave the platforms significant momentum, as actors felt they had an impact and importance, and they were part of this winning team. Communicating the successes helped build the platform further.

The impact must be documented and communicated to others to build the platform's reputation and attractiveness further.

Tools

Tool 1:

What is your Dialogue like? What is the
Process and the Way You Converse?

Tool 2:

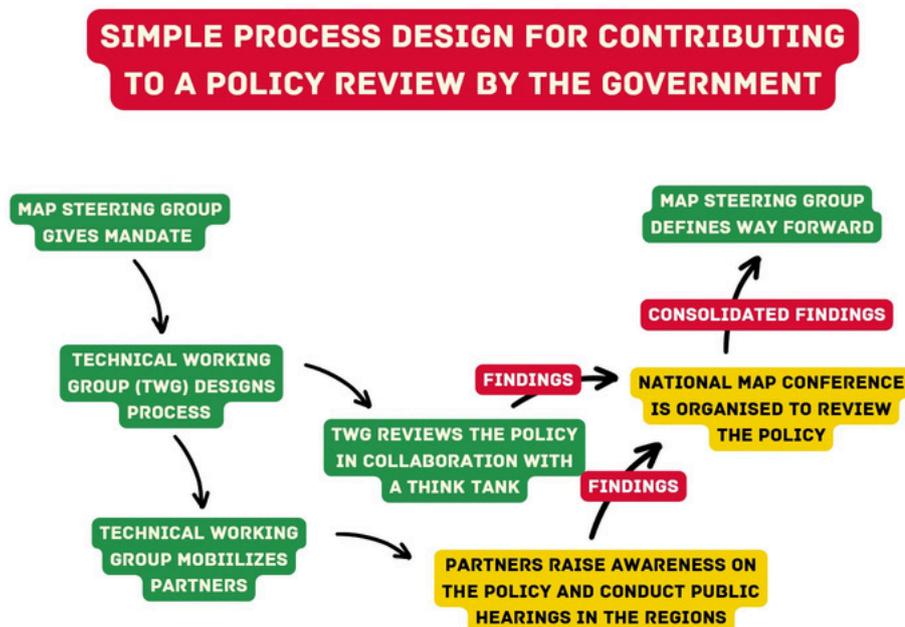
Seven Simple Ways to Improve Your
Events and Dialogues



Tool 1: What is Your Dialogue like? What is the Process and the Way You Converse?

There are manifold ways to conduct conversations and dialogues. When assessing dialogues, we can look at (a) the design and execution of the process and (b) the way you converse in events that happen. Both aspects are deeply rooted in national and organisational cultures. There are specific ways things are done. This is even more pronounced when state actors are involved. Let us look at both aspects:

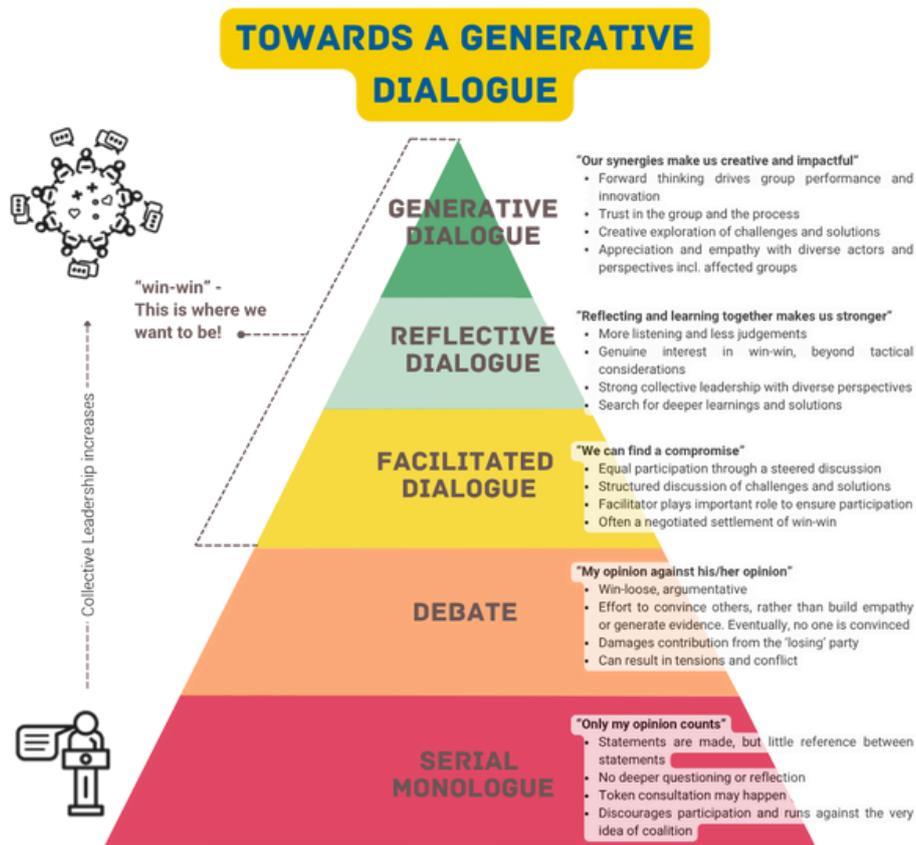
First, the process design and execution: Below, you see a simple process design for contributing to a policy review. It utilises various actors and formats to engage and generate findings that can be instrumental in the policy review. It includes a collaboration process with a think tank, partners conducting public hearings and a national conference to consolidate findings. However, this is not the usual process at all in the countries where Land for Life operates. The typical process involves drafting Terms of Reference (TOR) and finding a consultant to conduct the policy review, which is then often validated by the Technical Working Group, typically several months later. Such consultant-driven processes are deeply ingrained in the culture of the development sector. It is easy to see the downsides: the policy review has limited engagement, there is limited collaboration, and as a result, the findings are mainly owned by the consultant, rather than the MAP actors. We had such disappointing experiences in Land for Life, where time and money were lost. We gradually learned from such mistakes.



The second aspect concerns how conferences and workshops are conducted. Those events are central to a dialogue process, and it matters how they are designed and facilitated. Still, in many countries, there is a culture to use a series of PowerPoint presentations, panel discussions, and monologues, with brief Q&A sessions. Though such formats can have a role in a conference or workshop, they rarely move the dialogue forward. Instead, they are static and mainly represent the opinions of individuals. To advance to the next level of conversation – to move into the win-win zone – we need to do better, challenge traditional approaches, and employ a diversity of collaborative and creative methods. We provide a few suggestions for improving such events in the following article, such as through role-plays, emotional case studies, using feed-forward techniques, or simply setting up the hall without tables.

For many participants, creating a generative dialogue and doing things differently are exciting aspects of the multi-actor partnership, based on our experiences. It keeps people engaged, and they learn from new perspectives, which is what we often hear. But it is even more: it is the central element in most multi-actor partnerships. To be successful, we need to get it right and involve the right people.

The concept of “levels of conversation” below can be an essential tool for understanding at which level you are in your conversations and dialogue at the moment, and how you can move upwards towards a reflective or generative dialogue. .



Sources: Adaptation of Künkel, Petra et al, 2011.



Exercise: Please reflect in small groups on the process design and dialogue of recent processes in which the MAP has been involved.

1. Please map the process design in a graphic, similar to the one above (simple process design).
2. Was the process well designed and executed? How are different dialogue events building on each other? Were they well connected, with conclusions drawn and taken forward in the following meetings? Were we connecting the various levels and involving those most affected?
3. How was the participation in the process? Were we able to gather the right people, including influential individuals, representatives from diverse sectors, and those most directly affected?
4. In which of the five levels was the dialogue mainly located, the key events of the process, i.e. in technical working group meetings, conference, public hearings, etc.
5. What can we learn from this?



Tool 2: Seven Simple Ways to Improve Your Events and Dialogues

Ways	Tools
<p>1. Plan your interaction well</p>	<p>Concept format for the meeting or workshop: Use a simple format for planning your event. A format that can easily be discussed, emphasising objectives, outputs and the actual session plan. Ideally, it should be on one to two pages. If it is too long, nobody reads it. The template contains the following sections: Title, Participants, Objective, Outputs, Session Plan, and Logistics.</p> <p>The magic triangle: This is your most important tool to plan interactions, based on Ruth Cohn’s Theme-Centred Interaction (TCI), which she summarised in the quote: “A group of adults has excellent results when the topic is balanced with the needs of individuals and the needs of the group.” Learn more: Click here</p>
<p>2. Location and room set-up</p>	<p>Here are our <i>four key recommendations</i> on location and room set-up for stakeholder workshops or conferences:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select a quiet location where people enjoy staying. An ideal location is one with a garden area, where people can relax and gather in smaller groups. 2. Ensure the meeting hall is spacious and well-lit. 3. A U-shape without tables is, in most cases, the best room to set up. People see each other, and there is no second row. At the same time, the lack of a table makes people focus on the interaction, rather than on the items on the table, such as a laptop, a phone, or something else. Please look here for more details: https://www.sessionlab.com/blog/room-setup/ 4. Pinboards: A set of large pinboards is excellent for most processes. They are more flexible than flipchart stands, and you can keep several necessary posters on the pinboards to refer to them and use them in forward-thinking processes.
<p>3. Participation</p>	<p><i>Participation in an event is crucial for the quality of the dialogue, the outcomes of meetings, and the likelihood that good plans and commitments will be followed up on and that resources will be available.</i></p> <p><i>Balance the different actor groups</i> to prevent one group from dominating. Please also ensure that the most vulnerable segments are adequately represented.</p> <p>Earlier in the toolbox, we have emphasised that <i>delegated persons</i> who do not carry authority or expertise should be avoided as much as possible. Generally, it is better to focus on quality rather than quantity.</p>
<p>4. Encourage change in perspectives for empathy building</p>	<p><i>Role plays</i> are a great way to change the perspective and step into the shoes of other MAP partners, vulnerable groups, policy makers you want to influence. Here a generic facilitation guide for roleplays.</p> <p>The empty chair exercise is a simple practice for listening to an organisation’s purpose. It consists of allocating an empty chair to represent the organisation and its evolutionary purpose at any meeting. Anybody participating in the meeting can, at any time, change seats to listen to and become the organisation's voice.</p>

5. Practice empathetic listening in small groups

In many events, group work in larger breakout groups is still one of the primary facilitation methods. According to our learnings, large working groups should not occupy too much space in meetings and conferences. They are more likely to be dominated by a few participants, and rarely represent the views of the entire group, unless the group work is combined with other methods, such as individual brainstorming or scoring methods.

Reflections in pairs or groups of three are a simple way to encourage better participation and empathetic listening. Short reflections, without the time-consuming tasks of poster writing and presentations, are often better than lengthy groupwork sessions.

A good method is also [speed dating](#), where participants quickly reflect in pairs on several questions with new peers for each question. You can also mix questions regarding the workshop topics with more personal questions, such as "What are you passionate about?" so participants get to know each other better and develop empathy with their peers.

6. Practice creative forward thinking

The game changer for forward thinking is using Marshall Goldsmith's [Feed Forward](#). It focuses on positive and creative forward thinking, rather than dwelling on past issues and reacting to them. Feedforward can be used in one-on-one exercises and for providing suggestions and comments on presentations, as well as during interactions at conferences or workshops.

There are also many templates and models for forward-thinking processes, meetings or workshops, such as the [double diamond](#) or the act-reflect-learn cycle, based on Kolb's learning cycle, which is also promoted in the adaptive management section Both models separate analysis from planning and enable the groups to develop new ideas for the future and more creatively solve problems.

To spark creativity and a childlike enthusiasm, you may also consider collective drawing exercises, such as rich pictures or [drawing together](#). We also achieved excellent results by utilising LEGO Serious Play to develop prototypes and innovative solutions in collaborative groups.

7. Manage the events and the dialogues in an adaptive manner

Conferences and workshops rarely turn out exactly as you have foreseen. Therefore, it is always beneficial to manage events adaptively to achieve your target at the end of the event. Here are a few recommendations:

- As organiser and facilitator, you should arrive early at the venue and ensure that everyone knows what they have to do.
- Observe the group dynamics and gauge participants' satisfaction with the event.
- If you feel that the event goes sideways, it is a good option to have a time-out and discuss how the group can collectively move forward.
- A good practice in multi-day events is daily evening debriefing sessions.



Case Studies

Case Study 1:
Making Agriculture Investment work for
Communities in Ethiopia

Case Study 2:
Influence on the 2022 Land Legislation and its
Roll Out in Sierra Leone

Case Study 3:
Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue for the
Implementation of the Liberia Land Rights Act



Case Study 1: Making Agriculture Investment work for communities in Ethiopia

The example of Community-Investors-Local Government Forums

Background

The Community-Investors-Local Government Forum (CILGF) is a multi-actor process at the community level that aims to foster dialogue, develop mutual trust, and create a win-win situation for the community and investors. The forum can be an effective mechanism, especially in the context of weak governance, which often leads to injustices and simmering grievances. Typically, the CIGF is established and facilitated by Civil Society actors; however, there are also examples of Forums set up by state actors. The investment commission in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, for instance, has established forums at the District level, which include state and private actors, but not yet community representatives.

In Ethiopia, the CILGFs were first implemented in Benishangul Gumuz, a popular region for investors, by Green Love Appreciative Development (GLAD), a local non-governmental organisation, with support from the German International Cooperation (GIZ). Land for Life was inspired by the idea and piloted such forums in two districts of the Oromia Region, Lume and Batu, to promote responsible agricultural investment and develop an effective model that could be scaled elsewhere.

The Challenge

In Lume Woreda, near its capital, Modjo, the climatic conditions are ideal for many products that are exported to the European market, such as fruits and flowers. Foreign investors have discovered the area since the Ethiopian government embraced investor-friendly policies more than 20 years ago.

When the first investors arrived, there was no dialogue with the local communities, and local farmers were evicted from their land, receiving small compensation. This left many local people angry, powerless, and with less land for cultivation, although many families also benefited from jobs at the new horticulture companies.

Since then, ownership of many companies has changed, and those responsible at the time are no longer in power.



Photo: Discussions between the manager of Zuqualla Hort PLC and participants of a Land for Life Workshop in 2023.

Zuqualla Horti PLC, for instance, has taken over a farm in Lume in 2021 from Israeli investors. The company is part of a large Dutch consortium which produces flowers and seedlings for the European market. The company openly expresses its commitment to maintaining a positive relationship with the local community through fair employment practices, environmental protection, and charitable initiatives. Yet, those actions are implemented from a position of power and do not satisfy many farmers in the area, especially those who lost land in the process.

Approach: Overcoming the challenge through regular dialogue

Dialogue, practical and regular, at a level playing field, as level as possible, is the solution for Land for Life. To bring the actors to a common level, the initiative created awareness among the community about land rights, agricultural investment, and the role of state actors in protecting citizens from land grabbing, arbitrary treatment of agricultural labourers, and environmental pollution. Local Governments also participated in the training, as they are often unaware of their rights and obligations.

To onboard people to the dialogue, Land for Life staff then held bilateral conversations with all relevant stakeholders, following a straightforward narrative: agriculture investment presents both challenges and opportunities for all actors, and together we can find solutions that benefit everyone, including investors and community members.

The forum in Lume includes:

- One investor,
- Five local government representatives,
- Two Traditional local elders – Aba Geda and Hade Sinke,
- 18 Community members.

There are monthly dialogues. Stakeholders actively engage in setting the agenda for each session, while Land for Life Ethiopia assists in facilitating the dialogues. The conversation between the different actors not only helps build trust among existing actors but also creates awareness within the community that they are not powerless. If new investors came to the community, they would be aware of their rights and could take action to avoid problems.

The Process - Step by Step

1. An assessment to understand the regional and district level context regarding investment practice, security, land rights and environmental protection issues.
2. Bilateral conversations with all relevant stakeholders and encouraged the various groups to enter discussions.
3. Visit to other CIGFs: In the Lome case, a delegation from investors, the community, and the local government visited the GIZ-supported forum in Benishangul Gumuz.
4. Conduct a collective meeting to determine the launch date of the program and clarify the responsibilities of each actor.
5. Launch the dialogue forum.
6. Conduct monthly dialogues, facilitated by Land for Life field staff.
7. Held a bilateral meeting with the Woreda land and investment office heads.

Impact

- **Legal awareness:** Land for Life provided training on legal awareness to participants in the community, as well as at the investor and local government forum. Based on this, the local community has started claiming their rights.
- **Adequacy of compensation** – one of the key grievances of the community regarding the investment was the low amount of compensation payment given at the time of eviction. Hence, Land for Life Ethiopia conducted an assessment of the expropriation and compensation practices in two investment sites. The key findings from the assessment have helped to bring the issue to the attention of the relevant government office. It is still under review.
- **Labour rights:** Employees in the investment requested improvements to their working hours and safety measures to be implemented. As a result, companies began enhancing the work environment to ensure better working conditions, including improved hours and the provision of necessary safety equipment
- **Support community projects:** The companies began to fulfil their corporate social responsibilities by providing potable water and creating additional job opportunities for the local youth
- **Chemical pollution:** The community also raised concerns about the release of chemicals in the nearby farmland. However, improvements have been made in this area, and the company has taken measures to control the waste.

Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

This platform is effective because it has strived to address the questions of all actors in the forum, and activities are implemented based on trust and mutual benefit. Some of the success factors and lessons learned include:

- An initial assessment helped to understand the regional and district level context, and to identify the various target groups and stakeholders
- We actively engaged relevant stakeholders (community, investor, and local government) in the forum to ensure that diverse perspectives were considered and led to more comprehensive and sustainable solutions
- The capacity development training provided to the members of the platform enhanced the capacity of actors involved in the CILG
- Regular evaluation and feedback mechanisms conducted (quarterly and annual review meetings) have helped in identifying areas for improvement and refining the forum's processes and strategies
- Winning the trust of stakeholders, esp. the sceptical investor, and engaging factors in the forum was very challenging and needed consistent effort.
- Acknowledging and addressing power dynamics among the different stakeholders has helped in creating a more equitable and inclusive forum where all voices are heard and valued



Case Study 2: Influence on the 2022 Land Legislation and its roll out in Sierra Leone

Background

Sierra Leone's land governance has historically been dominated by traditional authorities, especially Paramount Chiefs, who wield significant power over land decisions. This system often marginalised women and vulnerable groups, leading to widespread land disputes and tenure insecurity. For example, in Malen Chiefdom, a large-scale land lease displaced hundreds of residents, exacerbating food insecurity.

The Land for Life (LfL) consortium, formed in 2019 by four civil society organisations with support from Welthungerhilfe, sought to address these imbalances. Their goal was to empower marginalised groups and advocate land policies aligned with international human rights standards, including the UN Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT).

The Challenge

A key challenge was the profound imbalance of power and lack of trust among the different groups involved in land governance. Paramount Chiefs held strong authority over land decisions and were reluctant to give up control. They viewed land as a symbol of their power and sought to maintain complete control over customary lands. Their influence extended into government and private sector circles, making reform efforts more complex.

This unequal power dynamic marginalised women, vulnerable groups, and smallholder farmers. It led to widespread land disputes and increased food insecurity. Without strong civil society advocacy, the reform risked reinforcing existing inequalities, ignoring women's rights, and failing to guarantee free, prior, and informed consent for customary landowners. The laws could have ended up as ineffective as the old ones.

Civil society played a critical role in addressing these challenges. Through persistent advocacy and inclusive dialogue, they helped shift power dynamics and ensured the reform process remained rights-based and representative of the broader public interest.

Approach: Multi-Actor Dialogue and Trust Building

Recognising the need for inclusive dialogue to address challenges related to trust and power dynamics, LfL facilitated the creation of decentralised Multi-Actor Platforms (MAPs) at the chiefdom and district levels. These platforms brought together traditional leaders, civil society, government representatives, private sector actors, and vulnerable groups to engage in regular, facilitated dialogue on land issues. Over time, the level of dialogue improved, creating opportunities to discuss and contributing to a national land reform process.



Photo: Land for Life Sierra Leone - DMSP Meeting

Key Elements of the Approach

- Decentralisation and Inclusion: Establishing 12 chiefdom-level and four district-level MAPs enabled continuous engagement and gave voice to women, customary landowners, smallholder farmers, youth, and land users.
- Community-Level Dialogues: To overcome intimidation by chiefs in formal settings, LfL organised town hall meetings where vulnerable groups could safely express their views on draft land bills.
- Civil Society Coalition and Advocacy: CSOs collaborated to produce policy briefs that reflected community perspectives, informing advocacy efforts with the Ministry of Land, the Ministry of Justice, and Parliament. A media alliance amplified rural voices and raised public awareness.
- High-Level Roundtable Dialogue: In May 2022, a landmark roundtable dialogue convened by the Ministry of Land brought together traditional leaders, the private sector, and civil society. Civil society guided the discussion towards a rights-based approach, successfully negotiating compromises with Paramount Chiefs and influencing the final land laws.

Impact

The passage of the Customary Land Rights Act and the National Land Commission Act marked significant progress in securing tenure rights for women and vulnerable groups. Greater participation of these groups in multi-actor platforms and community dialogues is expected to improve food security and land equity. Although Paramount Chiefs have lost some authority, they now have formal roles within the new system, which requires continued dialogue and adaptation to ensure effective implementation.

Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Persistent dialogue and ongoing advocacy were essential in shifting power dynamics and gaining the cooperation of the National Council of Paramount Chiefs. Civil society played a vital role in keeping decisions rights-based and representative, ensuring that powerful actors did not dominate the process. Empowering women and vulnerable groups was a key focus, with reforms mandating their representation in land governance and supporting individuals who challenged injustices. Strategic media engagement helped amplify marginalised voices and build public support. The unity of civil society organisations strengthened advocacy efforts and presented a cohesive voice throughout the reform process.

This case shows that meaningful dialogue for change takes time, patience, and trust-building. Inclusive, multi-stakeholder platforms are critical to success. Engaging traditional authorities early and persistently, empowering vulnerable groups through decentralised forums, fostering strong civil society coalitions, and using media strategically all contribute to advancing reform. Dialogue is a long-term process that requires ongoing management and follow-up to maintain momentum and achieve lasting impact.



Case study 3: Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue for the Implementation of the Liberia Land Rights Act

Overview

The 2018 Liberia Land Rights Act marked a significant milestone in addressing longstanding land governance challenges and responding to the needs of vulnerable groups, particularly women. Despite its transformative potential, implementation has been slow due to the absence of supporting instruments such as clear regulations and guidelines.

Background and The Challenge

Liberia historically operated under a dual land tenure system combining statutory and customary law. Customary lands were deemed “public land,” allowing the government to allocate large tracts for national parks and concessions, often displacing communities and stripping them of livelihood, food sources, and cultural heritage.

The Land Rights Act, enacted in October 2018 following years of advocacy led by a civil society working group, was the first law to recognise and protect customary land rights formally. It effectively unified the dual land tenure system. It introduced critical provisions: community-led land management, women’s land rights, and the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for concessions. It also mandated community participation in concession reviews every five years.

Despite its promise, the implementation of the Liberia Land Rights Act has faced significant challenges, including legal, institutional, procedural, and socio-cultural issues. Resources and technical capacity have been inadequate, and entrenched customary practices continue to obstruct inclusive reform. These issues were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted coordination and slowed progress.

Approach

Since the law’s passage, the Liberia Land Authority, in collaboration with civil society, policymakers, and international partners, has taken steps to operationalise the Land Rights Act. Key actions included drafting regulations, developing an implementation strategy, creating public messaging campaigns, training stakeholders, and strengthening institutional capacities. A 2020 webinar with broad stakeholder participation helped surface implementation bottlenecks, revealing the need for a more structured engagement process. In response, the MAP Liberia Land Platform (the LfL-supported Multi-Actor Partnership) proposed a *National Land Conference* in 2022 to assess progress, identify challenges and opportunities, and generate collective recommendations.



The Process – Step by Step

1. Conceptualisation:

Lessons from the 2020 webinar shaped the concept for the National Land Conference, with emphasis on practical implementation barriers and solutions.

2. Planning and Resource Mobilisation

A series of planning meetings brought together MAP members, development partners, and donors. Dedicated teams were established, including a steering committee, technical and logistics teams, media support, and facilitators. Eighteen development partners contributed technical and financial support.

3. Policy Brief Development

To structure discussions, policy briefs were developed around eight key themes: women's, youth, and disability-inclusive land rights; customary land formalisation; responsible agricultural investment; decentralisation of LLA services; and coordination in the land sector.

4. Conference Implementation

Held from March 1 to 3, 2022, the National Land Conference convened 300 participants, including community representatives (with strong female and vulnerable group participation), government officials, civil society organisations (CSOs), the private sector, donors, and development partners. The conference resulted in a progressive **resolution outlining key recommendations** for accelerating the implementation of the Liberia Land Rights Act.

5. Post-Conference Action

MAP members reviewed and contributed to the draft Land Rights Act regulations, and follow-up actions were initiated to address the key recommendations that emerged from the conference.

Impact

One of the significant outcomes of this process was the formal passage and gazetting of the Land Rights Act's supporting regulations—a critical step forward in operationalising the law.

Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

- **Broad Coalition-Building:** Engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, including donors and development partners, was essential for legitimacy and resource mobilisation.
- **Political Will and Institutional Buy-in:** Securing the active involvement of the Liberia Land Authority ensured policy traction and government ownership.
- **Evidence-Based Approach:** The process drew on data, pilot experiences, and input from a diverse array of stakeholders to inform strategy.
- **Locally Driven Process:** Empowering local actors to lead the initiative enhanced ownership, relevance, and sustainability.

Principle 2:
Build it into the Existing Land
Governance Ecosystem

“

A large tree cannot sustain itself without the support of an ecosystem of various-sized life forms. In the same way, a complex society, like a human community, relies on the interconnectedness and support of diverse individuals to thrive.

Hendrith Vanlon Smith Jr

What is a land governance ecosystem?

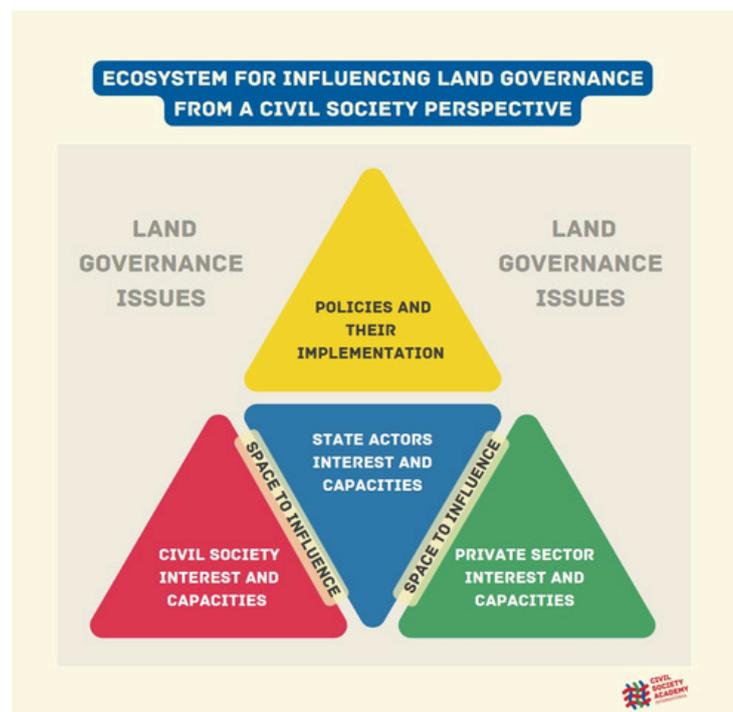
An ecosystem is a complex network or an interconnected system of actors and institutions with different histories, capacities, powers, and interests. Within a broader social, economic, and political context, a narrower ecosystem can be mapped for specific issues, such as land governance, to describe the system's power relations and capacities.

We will never be able to perfectly map such an ecosystem because many relationships are not open, and actors and relationships change constantly. Also, the broader context is dynamic and may change unexpectedly. However, before embarking on a multi-actor partnership on any topic, we must thoroughly understand the issues and the ecosystem. Once on our journey, we must proactively learn and update our understanding of the ecosystem and transparently communicate it in the partnership. Successful advocacy is based on understanding the issues, policies, and key actors.

If we attempt to build something new into such an ecosystem to influence it, we must understand how it functions.

Land for Life's purpose was clear and focused from the beginning. We aimed to positively influence the land governance system, encompassing institutions, policies, and their implementation. This purpose defines the scope and the perspective of our ecosystem mapping.

In the graphic to the right, we have visualised the most critical factors in the ecosystem. Those factors must be included in a context analysis or feasibility study on setting up multi-actor partnerships.



Land Governance Issues

We recommend starting by mapping the most severe and most common rights abuses and creating a profile of the groups affected by them. We have realised that land governance issues are often treated like technical challenges in the state machinery. From a civil society perspective, it is good to focus on the groups that are affected and on telling their stories: The widows who are deceived by their late husbands' families or the smallholders whose land is taken by the state without adequate compensation. Those narratives are at the centre of our initiatives. They are then consecutively enriched with the results of the other analysis during the ecosystem mapping.

Policies and Their Implementation

During the early days of setting up a multi-actor partnership, this entails policy mapping and at least some fundamental analysis of the most critical policies and their implementation. This mapping should include existing policies and those currently in the pipeline.

If we are serious about influencing policies, we need individuals who have a deep understanding of the relevant policies and institutions. This is often overlooked when discussing multi-actor partnerships. Policy dialogues are usually a central element of the MAP. Hence, a meaningful dialogue is based on the capacity of all actors at the table to add value. The more meaningful the dialogue is, the more influential actors we can attract.

Another critical aspect is considering international standards or even using them as a benchmark for the assessment. For instance, the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems can serve as a benchmark to evaluate national policies and their implementation. In Principle 3: Integrate the MAPs into international networks and agendas, we will discuss the importance of global standards and connectedness.

The different Actor Groups and their Interest and Capacities

A stakeholder or actor analysis is the core element of understanding the land governance ecosystem. State actors at different levels are usually the decision-makers regarding policies and their implementation. A good actor analysis would detail the main contributors to the decision-making process, their interests, capacities, and influence. It is not merely based on institutions but on individuals. Our advocacy efforts usually aim to influence individuals within institutions, such as the Minister of Agriculture or an influential advisor to the Prime Minister.

As the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) freeze in early 2025 demonstrated, decision-makers are sometimes not just national state actors but international actors. Their priorities count. In land governance in Africa, some of the leading global influencers are the FAO, the World Bank, and the German government. Certainly, their financing decisions helped governments, such as Sierra Leone, progress in developing land governance institutions. At the same time, the absence of significant funding in neighbouring Liberia contributed to a stagnation in building its land governance institutions.

Apart from the state actors, we must also analyse all other critical actors in the system, such as company leaders, private sector interest groups, influential actors in think tanks, civil society groups, networks and the media.

As we work from a civil society perspective, special emphasis must be given to understanding the various civil society actors, their capacities, and interests. Like other sectors, civil society is not monolithic; however, the actor landscape can be diverse and even competitive. In countries where democracies are weak and civil society is more service-oriented, such as Ethiopia and Burkina Faso, the capacity of civil society to engage in policy work is generally lower than in countries with a more extended history of stability and democracy.

As our primary concern is vulnerable groups, it is crucial to ask: Do disadvantaged groups have a voice, and are those claiming to represent them genuinely doing so? Such considerations are critical, as they suggest that more needs to be invested in the capacity building of civil society actors, from local to national level, to have a meaningful seat at the table.

Space to Influence

The space to influence state actors and, in turn, policies and their implementation differs widely in the four Land for Life countries. In Ethiopia, for instance, the space for influence has generally widened under the new government; however, navigating the diverse policy-making processes has been challenging. The government has tried to systematise the policy-making and public participation processes over the last few years. However, policymaking still happens mainly behind closed doors, public participation processes are often ad hoc, and the parliament lacks public trust. In such an evolving framework, it took time for Land for Life Ethiopia to understand the dynamics and establish a foothold in the system.

Here are some of the key questions regarding the space to influence:

- How free can citizens, civil society, the media, and private sector interest groups operate? This includes, among others, the freedom of association and expression, as well as the right to protest.
- Are there formal spaces for influencing or assessing policies and their implementation, and how well are they developed? Those spaces include public participation processes, official advisory structures, or parliamentary reviews. Furthermore, citizens could challenge laws or institutions in court, and evidence could be obtained through the Right to Information process.
- What informal spaces for influencing exist? Such spaces could include existing conference or dialogue formats, elite clubs where influential people meet, and a culture of accessibility by policymakers. However, there is also a dark side to influencing, such as corruption or nepotism. All those aspects need to be considered and analysed.

Is a multi-actor partnership the best option?

Retrospectively, we can say that the decision to implement a Multi-Actor Partnership in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia was premature. We are not saying it was wrong because significant progress was made, and we do not know what would have happened if we had taken a different approach. However, in retrospect, we can certainly say that some conducive factors for MAPs were not given. Both countries were politically unstable, and the appetite of state actors to address some of the critical land governance issues was low. Furthermore, the space for influencing and engaging with decision-makers was not supportive. Despite such concerns, the funding proposal for the first phase was not open-ended; it had already fixed the multi-actor approach without a sufficient understanding of the ecosystem.

From a civil society perspective, the multi-actor approach is one of many ways to influence policies and their implementation. Other methods could focus on building civil society capacities at the community level to influence local policy implementation, adopting a think-tank approach, or establishing an advocacy network with civil society partners. We could use each of those options or a combination of them.

Rather than fixing the approach at the onset of the intervention, we propose a short first phase (reflect and plan) to assess advocacy options more open-ended, with a diverse coalition of urgency, as described under principle 1. This coalition could engage in a series of collaborative meetings and exercises to gain a comprehensive understanding of the ecosystem and develop a vision for a potential MAP, including its positioning within the ecosystem. We recommend assessing the MAP option against other options or a combination of options.

Have we really build confidence?
Only one workshop with farmers

Strongly pushing the government to engage on land issues (policy change)

Dialogues events occurred in short time (half day)

Checking/Evaluating members contribution after training/engagement

Disclosure engagement process
- poor commitment
- poor awareness
- want to incentivize
- low engagement

Private sector to be engaged more.
→ less participation some dialogue

Environment
Agroecology not considered in policy brief
→ workshop is reported

Dialogue skill at infant stage

Level of policy maker involvement
* In the investment legislation for dialogue we missed to involve or higher officials from policy making organ.

Why? Participants of gov hesitate
- low pay - not adequate for transportation
- per diem (transport pay)

Dialogues
- inadequate incentives and partial civil dialogues
- limited national
- less engagement of communities in each dialogue
→ delay in decentralization

1. Inclusion: Currently some limitation on participation in dialogue (community, land claimant / private sector)
→ insufficient ideas
→ advocacy weaker less business

5 things
- marginal participation
- board members
- "dialogue"
= commitment
- other aspect

- Mula
- Bilcha
- Getacher
- Bazuala

So well?

Land for Life - Learnings on Building the MAP into the Existing Ecosystem



It is a rights-based analysis: We have learned that the context analysis of land governance is sometimes approached more historically or even as a technical exercise that primarily relates to the inefficient governance system and low capacities of those involved. Although both perspectives are essential, we urge starting with those affected, focusing on the land rights abuses, injustices, and the question of why the state is not performing its critical duties. It is often a question of power.

In two of the countries, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia, Welthungerhilfe had no previous land rights initiatives, and there was limited advocacy work due to the authoritarian regimes. In hindsight, more capacity-building on advocacy and policy work could have been a booster in kickstarting the initiative.

Engage with those who know the ecosystem from the outset: The analysis at the initial stage is an excellent opportunity to connect with key players in the ecosystem. We can utilise it as a networking opportunity and simultaneously learn more about the land governance system. This is a gradual process of learning and must be well-documented. In those conversations, we can also screen for potential core group members and start building resonance for the initiative.

Engage with critical actor groups: Likewise, we learned in some MAPs that specific groups were not sufficiently engaged at the start because they were perceived as less relevant or access was difficult. In Liberia, for instance, traditional leaders were initially overseen, and they proved to be key players in the MAP processes. In Ethiopia, integrating investors was initially perceived as difficult, and they were inadequately included. Interest groups of women were sidelined by nearly all the platforms in their early days.

A core lesson is that in the early stages, we need to establish meaningful connections with all critical groups related to land governance and critically reflect on the composition of our coalition of urgency as we gain more insights.

Don't outsource the context analysis, but do it collectively: We had disappointing experiences with consultant-led context analysis in at least two countries. In these conventional processes, consultants discussed expectations and terms with MAP actors at the beginning of the study. However, they then worked independently, and the next larger opportunity to give feedback is when they deliver a draft report. At that time, nearly everything was completed, and it was too late for substantial suggestions. As a result, we had mediocre studies that were not collectivised and had a limited impact on the MAP positioning.

In contrast, we had supported context analysis in other initiatives, where a team of partners did the study. The analysis was conducted step-by-step, utilising templates for each stage, with insights generated after each piece of analysis. There is no perfect way of doing it. Still, a step-by-step collective process ensures that the learnings are shared within the group and will help position the MAP, develop its identity, and address critical issues.

The space to influence is critical: A critical learning from Land for Life is that more analysis on the space to influence was needed at the beginning of the initiative. Limited space does not necessarily mean we should discard a MAP option. There is a compelling argument to be made that developing effective dialogue structures is particularly important, especially in such circumstances. However, we may create a better intervention design if we anticipate the difficulties.

A central question in this regard is how much engagement by policymakers is realistic for a MAP initiated by civil society, even if everything is done well. If the answer is “not substantial”, we must consider alternative strategies. Options could include engaging with influential donors to gain better access to policymakers, building civil society capacities for advocacy and local-level dialogues, among others.

Reflect on the platform's positioning and how it can add value to the ecosystem. Once you have a good idea about the ecosystem, the question of positioning arises. It does not mean that this positioning will then be final, no. It takes time to find the exact place. However, a reflection on some key questions can help avoid some challenges and find a suitable position quickly:

- Are we duplicating existing initiatives?
- Are there initiatives we can build on, or do we need to build something entirely new?
- Are the host organisations suitable for hosting a MAP secretariat, and do they understand its implications? (A common confusion is that the secretariat staff, which should be accountable to the platform, is sometimes treated as *their* NGO staff.)
- How can we ensure the most vulnerable groups are engaged in the platform?
- Which policy changes or implementations are feasible, and which ones are most important to our target groups?
- Which actors do we need to engage to be successful, and is it feasible to engage them?

Tools

Tool 3: Stakeholder Mapping



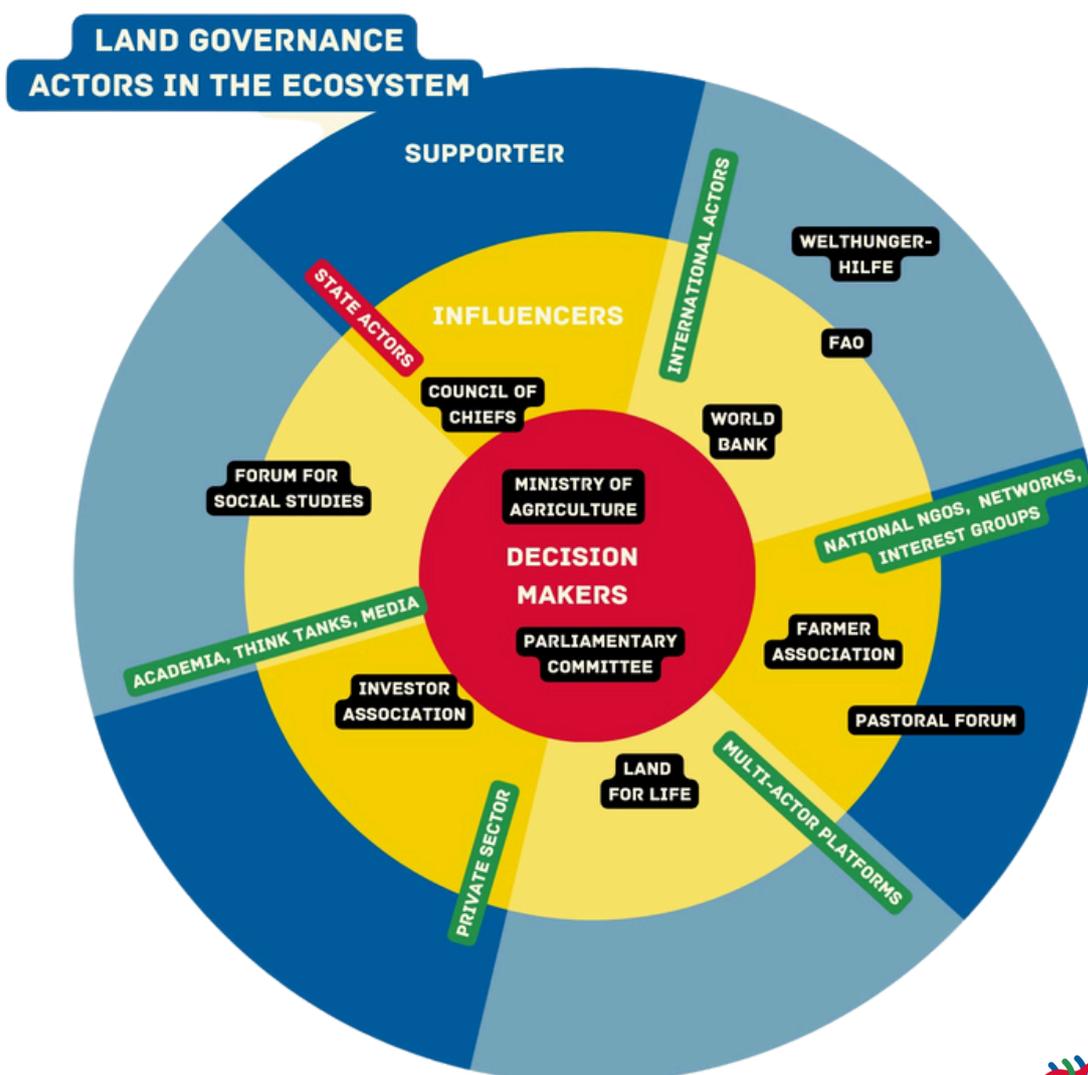
Tool 3: Stakeholder Mapping

Stakeholder mapping is a **strategic process for identifying and analysing individuals, groups, or entities interested in a project or business initiative**. It aims to understand stakeholder perspectives, influence, and potential impact on the project's success.

In advocacy initiatives, including most multi-actor partnerships, the key questions in stakeholder mapping are power-related. Who makes decisions based on which interests, and who is most influential in critical decision-making processes?

To give the mapping focus, it is always done with a goal in mind. Regarding land governance, the goal is to *improve land governance in country X, creating a positive impact for vulnerable groups*.

Be aware: If the goal is too broad, for instance, progress on governance in general, actors quickly become many, which makes it harder to comprehend and filter the key actors. If the actor landscape is very complex, visualising the actors in several maps, for instance, on regional and national levels and for specific aspects or sub-sectors, can also be a good alternative.



Our visual shows some sample actors, and is not related to a specific country. It has three circles.



Supporters: This is the outer circle and includes individuals and organisations that support other organisations in influencing policies or practices. In our case, Welthungerhilfe is seen as a support organisation. Usually, Welthungerhilfe does not directly engage with decision-makers on land governance.



Influencers: This is the middle circle. They are individuals, organisations, and often networks or umbrella organisations that influence decision-makers and usually have a particular agenda or interest. Please note that in democratic countries, influence is usually more transparent and openly public. In more autocratic countries, advocacy and lobbying happen more behind closed doors. In this example, we have also mapped Land for Life in the circle of influencers. As a partnership, Land for Life intends to influence the decision-makers.



Decision Makers: These make up the centre of the visual. Certain state actors are those we aim to influence through our MAPs, either by leveraging other influencers or, if possible, by engaging them actively in our dialogue forum. Ideally, we should not just influence but actively engage them in our dialogue forum. Knowing the decision-makers in a process is essential to a thriving advocacy initiative.

Apart from the three circles, the cake has wedges of the main actor groups. This can be adapted as needed.

Key steps in a stakeholder analysis:

Before starting, please ensure that you conduct the stakeholder analysis with a group that has sufficient knowledge about the ecosystem.

1. **Defining the scope:** Typically, the scope is related to the goal of your initiative, for example, to improve land governance in country X, thereby creating a positive impact for vulnerable groups.
2. **Brainstorm all key actors:** Although we have only mapped a few actors in the graphic above to demonstrate the method, a comprehensive stakeholder analysis considers many more actors. Brainstorm actors from all different sectors.
3. **Develop a stakeholder table** that includes the organisation, individuals, and their roles, influence, and interests in decision-making.
4. **Visualise all key actors in the above template:** Please note that the circle and where an organisation or individual is positioned are critical. The World Bank, for instance, is closely aligned with the decision-makers in the above example.
5. **Develop insights for your initiative:** Many insights may reflect on the actors you want to engage in the MAP. However, we can also gain insights into our positioning, such as whether we are duplicating efforts or where the MAP could add value.

Please note that the proposed mapping is just one possibility. The VENN diagram and the interest influence matrix are also effective ways to visualise stakeholders.

Principle 3:

Integrate the MAPs into
International Networks and
Agendas

“

Networking is more about farming than it is about hunting. It's about cultivating relationships.

Ivan Misner

Why International Standards and networks?

International Context and Its Relevance in the Land for Life Initiative

Another layer of context that was initially underestimated in the Land for Life (LfL) initiative was the international dimension. As the initiative progressed, it became increasingly evident that anchoring Multi-Actor Partnership (MAP) agendas in international standards and linking national MAPs to global networks significantly benefited national-level outcomes. International frameworks and networks played a crucial role in enabling MAPs to align their work with broader global agendas, enhance their influence in change processes, broaden their perspectives, promote learning, and increase both their legitimacy and, in some cases, their access to funding. However, to fully benefit from this international layer, it was essential to understand the relevant guidelines and actors in global land governance.

The VGGT and RAI Principles

In the case of Land for Life, the most influential references were the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests (VGGT) and the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI).

These two frameworks, developed under the auspices of the United Nations and other global organisations, provide comprehensive guidance for the governance of land and agricultural investments, particularly in the context of developing countries. The VGGT, adopted by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in 2012, serve as a reference for governments, civil society, and the private sector in establishing responsible tenure systems. The guidelines aim to secure land rights and access to natural resources in a manner that upholds food security, promotes environmental sustainability, and protects human rights. A key focus of the VGGT is the recognition and protection of legitimate tenure rights, especially for vulnerable and marginalised populations. By acknowledging both formal and customary rights and addressing overlapping claims, the guidelines promote fair and transparent land transactions that prevent land grabbing and ensure local communities have a say and receive benefits from land-related investments. They also stress the importance of robust policy and legal frameworks to enhance tenure security and governance effectiveness.

The RAI principles, endorsed by the CFS in 2014, were developed to complement the VGGT by offering specific guidance on agricultural investment. They are intended for investors, policymakers, and other stakeholders, encouraging investments that bolster food security and sustainable development without harming communities or the environment. The RAI principles underscore the importance of respecting land and resource rights, promoting culturally appropriate and inclusive investment models, and safeguarding indigenous rights and heritage. In addition, they emphasise environmentally sound practices and economic viability, with benefits distributed fairly among all stakeholders, including women and marginalised groups.

Both frameworks are rooted in inclusive, participatory processes and are intended to inform national and local-level policies and practices. For MAPs addressing tenure and investment challenges, these frameworks serve as vital points of reference. The VGGT, in particular, recognises the role of multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) in achieving responsible tenure governance.

The guidelines specifically encourage the use of MSPs to promote inclusive decision-making, foster transparency and Accountability, support conflict resolution, and tailor the VGGT principles to local contexts. This reinforces the understanding that collaboration across sectors and stakeholder groups is key to achieving policy legitimacy and effective implementation.

The VGGT and RAI also contribute to establishing a shared international understanding and standard for people-centred land governance. They support global efforts to enhance food security, reduce poverty, foster sustainable development, and promote responsible investment. Although they are voluntary, these guidelines hold substantial weight and have been adopted as reference frameworks by many governments, civil society actors, and private sector stakeholders.

Core Principles of the VGGT:

- **Recognition and Respect for Legitimate Tenure Rights:** Acknowledges both legal and customary rights, and emphasizes that all legitimate tenure rights should be recognized, respected, and protected.
- **Transparency:** Encourages the availability of clear, accessible, and public information about tenure systems, land transactions, and governance decisions.
- **Participation:** Promotes active, free, and informed participation of all stakeholders—particularly marginalized groups—in tenure-related decision-making.
- **Accountability:** Stresses the responsibility of both governments and non-state actors in ensuring oversight and access to grievance mechanisms for tenure governance.
- **Rule of Law:** Advocates for legal frameworks that are consistent with international human rights standards and provide legal certainty.
- **Non-discrimination:** Ensures equal tenure rights for all, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status.
- **Protection Against Arbitrary Evictions:** Calls for safeguards against forced evictions and stipulates the need for due process and fair compensation.
- **Respect for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:** Highlights the importance of protecting customary rights, traditional institutions, and the principle of self-determination.
- **Gender Equality:** Promotes equal tenure rights for women and men and aims to eliminate gender-based discrimination.
- **Safeguards Against Corruption:** Recommends integrity and anti-corruption measures in all tenure-related governance and transactions.

Role in MAPs and the Land for Life Experience

Many governments have publicly committed to implementing the VGGT and RAI principles, resulting in a range of reforms, including updated land policies and laws, improved land administration, the establishment of MSPs, strengthened international partnerships, and the creation of conflict resolution mechanisms. Institutions such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Bank often support these reforms by providing both technical guidance and financial assistance.

Civil society organisations and MAPs can use these guidelines as credible tools to critique existing policies, inform public awareness campaigns, influence high-level actors, guide policy discussions, and shape pilot initiatives in local land administration. By drawing on these internationally recognised frameworks, MAPs can increase their legitimacy, define shared objectives, and offer incentives for broader stakeholder engagement. In some contexts, access to international funding for land-related reform is contingent upon adherence to these principles.

While the guidelines are widely respected and are generally seen as inclusive and context-sensitive, their reception varies. In some countries, Civil Society reports that the VGGT have been rejected by governments as a Western imposition, making it more strategic to discuss their substance without explicitly naming the framework. This was not an issue in the LfL countries, where the promotion of the VGGT proved to be a constructive and effective strategy.

Other international standards and frameworks, such as the AU Framework and Guideline on Land Policy in Africa (F&G), those concerning human rights and the right to food, the Rio+Conventions, the Malabo-Declarations and many more land-related international frameworks are relevant in land governance. They can be utilised for advocacy and national policy efforts - the VGGT and RAI played the most prominent role in the Land for Life experience so far and thus form the centre of this discussion. Especially the connection to the Rio+ Convention is, however, regarded as strategically important and will gain increasing relevance in the future.

International Connectedness



Beyond policy frameworks, understanding the landscape of international actors and building alliances is crucial. Connecting with global partners, exchanging knowledge, and forming coalitions can create a more supportive environment for national MAPs. A preliminary and non-conclusive effort to map international actors relevant to land governance revealed both strengths and missed opportunities in LfL's global engagement.

A key strength was LfL's collaboration with other development partners working on land issues and multi-stakeholder approaches. Through the Land Collaborative, LfL collaborated with the International Land Coalition (ILC) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to establish a community of practice focused on MAPs in land governance. This platform facilitated knowledge sharing, joint international advocacy, and collaborative resource mobilisation. As a result of this cooperation, several spin-off initiatives emerged, such as the VGGT+10 initiative, a learning series on private sector engagement, and a strategic partnership initiative involving FAO, ILC, Welthungerhilfe (WHH), and the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), which aimed at improving coordination and support for land reform efforts across Africa. These partnerships not only improved alignment among international actors but also created new opportunities for national MAPs in terms of both capacity building and funding.

Despite these achievements, some opportunities for international engagement remained underexploited. One such gap was the lack of deeper collaboration with global private sector actors. While national-level strategies to engage private sector stakeholders were developed, implementation proved difficult. Exploring engagement at the international level could offer a new entry point that has not yet been tested within the LfL initiative. Efforts were also made to build stronger ties with the African Union, including a joint side event with the African Land Policy Centre at the 2023 Conference on Land Policy in Africa in Addis Ababa. However, establishing a consistent institutional link with the [AU's land governance strategy](#) proved difficult, mainly due to irregular engagement and the absence of formalised cooperation mechanisms.

In summary, international standards such as the VGGT and RAI, along with meaningful engagement with global actors and networks, significantly strengthened the effectiveness and credibility of national MAPs under the Land for Life initiative. Continuing to cultivate and expand these international connections, particularly with currently under-engaged stakeholders like the private sector and regional bodies, holds further potential for scaling and sustaining responsible land governance.

Land for Life – Learnings on International networks and Standards



In an interactive session with Land for Life partners, we distilled our main learnings on basing the agenda on international standards and connecting the MAPs to global networks.

International guidelines can be powerful catalysts—but their uptake varies: Frameworks such as the VGGT and the RAI principles can provide legitimacy, visibility and direction for national MAPs. Particularly when international actors were also engaged and funding sources were tied to them, the political recognition and openness increased significantly.

However, the degree to which these standards were accepted and institutionalised varied considerably between countries. In some countries, such as Sierra Leone and Liberia, they were well-integrated into national processes and shaped policy reform, including the recognition of women’s land rights and the inclusion of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for communities. In other countries, like Ethiopia, they served more as reference points to initiate debate rather than as implementation tools. Knowledge and acceptance of the guidelines vary, and in some countries of the VGGT+10 initiative (e.g. in Asia), they could not be referenced in debates, as they were regarded as “western” or externally imposed. It’s crucial to ground these frameworks in the national discourse and link them to domestic challenges. Initiatives like VGGT+10 were essential in making international debates tangible at the national level. They increased awareness and helped actors understand how global discourses could be linked to their local realities, making them more actionable for policymakers, civil society, and communities.

Don't underestimate the power of personal networks in international spaces. International connectedness can support sustainability and momentum. Linking MAPs not only to international standards but also to regional and global networks creates opportunities for peer learning, sharing best practices, and building strategic alliances. These connections encouraged resource pooling, for example, with ILC, and reinforced the sustainability of land governance efforts beyond project cycles. Much of the international connectedness stems not from formal structures but from empowered individuals—local partners who join panels, build networks, and share insights. These personal engagements triggered a ripple effect: creating visibility, attracting partners, and opening new opportunities.

International advocacy amplifies local voices: By engaging in international advocacy and storytelling, local actors gain access to broader audiences and amplify their impact. Their experiences informed global debates, and in return, this exposure helps attract political support at the national level. By inviting both political and civil-society actors from the countries to international advocacy events, it was also possible to improve personal relationships within countries, bring national debates into a broader context, and increase political commitment.

Build the capacity of civil society to navigate international spaces: Understanding how international processes work—and where entry points lie—was transformative for national civil society actors. It broadened their perspective, helped them reframe national challenges, and inspired locally grounded innovations aligned with global standards.

Consider international actors in your ecosystem analysis: When assessing the context for establishing a MAP, include international organisations, frameworks, and donors in the study. Their influence can shape political will, bring legitimacy, and offer opportunities for alignment or support. Neglecting them may limit strategic leverage.

Case Studies

Case Study 4:
VGGT +10



Case Study 4: VGGT +10

The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT), endorsed in 2012, marked a landmark achievement in securing legitimate tenure rights for vulnerable populations worldwide. Over a decade later, attention to land governance has waned despite its critical role in addressing food security, poverty, and environmental challenges. To reignite momentum, Welthungerhilfe, in collaboration with ILC, GIZ, and FAO, launched the [VGGT+10 initiative](#), conducting assessments and implementing action plans across 12 countries in Africa and Asia. The initiative emphasised the importance of translating these international guidelines into national policies to ensure equitable access to natural resources and strengthen tenure security for marginalised communities. The initiative also presented an opportunity for the MAPs to leverage the power of the guideline for their objectives and enhance their positioning in international networks, as well as in national land governance landscapes.

The initiative consisted of three main pillars to achieve its objectives: Cross Country Knowledge Generation, Strengthening VGGT Implementation at the national level, and raising commitment at the international level.

1. Cross-Country Knowledge Generation

The VGGT+10 initiative conducted assessments in 12 countries to evaluate the state of land governance, using the VGGT as a benchmark. The assessment produced reports for each country, highlighting the main achievements and barriers to successful VGGT implementation, which provided the basis for national discussions and action planning. Comparing the 12 countries also unveiled general learnings that could be used to generate strategies and commitments at the international level. The assessment revealed significant progress, with eleven countries enacting new policies or implementing substantial amendments that strengthened women's land rights, recognised customary tenure, and enhanced inclusive governance. Policy-making processes across countries have become more consultative, supported by the establishment of MAPs. Despite these achievements, implementation challenges continued to be a critical barrier. Reforms often struggled to translate into meaningful impact due to slow communal land registration, persistent inequalities, limited resources, and resistance from elites. The initiative highlighted these gaps, underscoring the need for continued efforts to ensure policies effectively benefit marginalised communities.

2. Strengthening VGGT Implementation at the Country-Level

The initiative leveraged the national MAPs to achieve its objective of fostering the VGGT implementation through debate, awareness and commitments. The MAPs brought together diverse actors, including governments, civil society, communities, and the private sector, to discuss the national assessments and develop strategic action plans for improving the implementation in the future. Seed funding facilitated the rollout of these plans.

For instance, in Burkina Faso, the Ministry of Agriculture translated the guidelines into local languages, and the Gender Ministry engaged customary chiefs on women's land rights. In Liberia, the National Fisheries Authority trained staff and fishermen on VGGT principles, while a dormant government unit dedicated to the guidelines was reactivated. In Ethiopia, additional regional dialogues enhanced awareness and commitment at the sub-national level, addressing previously identified knowledge gaps.

How the VGGT+10 Initiative Advanced Women's Land Rights in Burkina Faso

In 2022, as part of the VGGT+10 initiative, the Plateforme Nationale Multi-Acteurs sur le Foncier (PMAF) in Burkina Faso undertook a series of coordinated actions aimed at improving the understanding of women's land rights among traditional authorities and creating more equitable land governance structures.



Photo: PMAF Burkina Faso

As in all participating countries, the first step of the process was a national dialogue workshop on the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT) in June 2022. Government, Civil Society, Communities, the Private Sector, and Customary leaders were invited to reflect on their roles within the framework of these internationally recognised principles. Through presentations and group discussions, the workshop successfully built awareness of the VGGT principles and identified gaps in the current land governance system.

One of the identified issues was a gap between formal and customary land rights for women. While women have the right to inherit land formally, customary practices often hinder women's land ownership. Traditional leaders not only expressed a commitment to advocate for women's land rights but also contributed to refining communication tools, such as a pictorial guide explaining the 2009 Rural Land Law and VGGT principles, to be used in broader sensitisation campaigns.

Following this workshop, PMAF launched a regional sensitisation tour, utilising these tools to continue awareness-raising among traditional and community stakeholders in key regions, such as Centre-West and Boucle du Mouhoun. Land rights claims and personal testimonies of women were directly presented to customary chiefs across all 13 regions of Burkina Faso. These encounters, facilitated in partnership with the Women's College of the Confédération Paysanne du Faso and supported by Oxfam, opened up meaningful dialogue channels between women and traditional leaders. One notable case occurred in Kougougou, where a widow's land rights issue was resolved immediately during the meeting, signalling a shift in the responsiveness of customary leaders. These efforts expanded the reach of the dialogue and reinforced the alignment between national law, international standards, and local customs.

As a result of these activities, both attitudes and procedures changed: Customary leaders began to publicly support women's land rights, marking a significant cultural shift in a context where patriarchal norms predominantly govern land. Women were empowered to advocate directly and credibly for their rights. The initiative resolved specific land disputes, notably restoring land to dispossessed women, and the process laid the foundations for longer-term systemic changes, integrating international standards, such as the VGGT, into local customary frameworks.

3. Raising Commitment on the International Level

The VGGT+10 initiative aimed to bolster international commitment to the VGGT by leveraging insights from country-level perspectives and highlighting their critical role in addressing contemporary challenges, such as food security, human rights, and sustainable livelihoods. Recognising a decline in global focus on tenure rights over the past decade, the initiative utilised its anniversary year to regenerate attention and mobilise support. Key international events included the official launch at the May 2022 Global Land Forum in Jordan, which fostered discussions among government and civil society representatives on implementing progressive land legislation.



Photo: Land for Life International at VGGT + 10 Berlin 2022

A high-level meeting in October 2022 during the FAO-hosted Plenary Session of the CFS in Rome reflected on lessons learned and reaffirmed commitments to VGGT implementation. In November 2022, two consecutive events organised by WHH and its partners, including ILC and the Land Matrix Initiative, engaged international stakeholders. A virtual thematic exchange generated recommendations on utilising the VGGT more effectively, while a political panel event in Berlin focused on Germany’s role and global collaboration. The initiative’s activities culminated in a virtual closing event on July 4, showcasing insights, outcomes, and lessons learned from the participating countries.

The initiative demonstrated how the interlinking of knowledge generation, dialogue, and strategic partnerships at various levels can enhance national progress. At the country level, there were tangible outcomes, such as the revival of government organs or changes in the behaviour of traditional authorities. Since its rollout in 2022, awareness of the centrality of land governance in tackling global issues, such as climate change, and the general implementation of the Rio Conventions has increased on the international level. As in all advocacy endeavours, this will not be related solely to the initiative, but it may have contributed.

Case Example: Institutionalising the VGGT in Sierra Leone - Pathways to the 2022 Land Reform

In Sierra Leone, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests (VGGT) served as a foundational framework for land reform efforts over the past decade, culminating in the adoption of the progressive National Land Commission Act and Customary Land Rights Act in 2022. Introduced shortly after their global endorsement in 2012, the VGGT gained traction in the country through a combination of government commitment, civil society engagement, and sustained international support, particularly from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the World Bank, and other development partners.

Early efforts focused on awareness-raising, capacity building, and multi-stakeholder dialogue, which helped to embed VGGT principles within national discourse and institutional frameworks. Led by the Ministry of Lands and supported by the FAO, a national working group on the VGGT, comprising relevant experts from multiple sectors, was established. Through this multi-stakeholder engagement, the principles were integrated into land policy discussions, legal drafting processes, and pilot initiatives at the local level, particularly in areas affected by large-scale land-based investments. The multi-actor platforms created, including the District Multi-Stakeholder Platforms by Land for Life, played a key role in building consensus, translating technical standards into context-specific practices, and legitimising tenure reform through inclusive participation.

By 2022, the VGGT had become a central reference point in national land governance, informing legislation that formally recognised customary land rights for the first time, strengthened safeguards for communities, and established mechanisms for transparency and accountability in land administration. Sierra Leone’s experience demonstrates how international soft law instruments, when locally adapted and collectively owned, can contribute to far-reaching structural reforms in land governance.



Photo: Land for Life Sierra Leone - DMSP Meeting



Photo: Land for Life Sierra Leone - VGGT engagement before the passing of the Laws



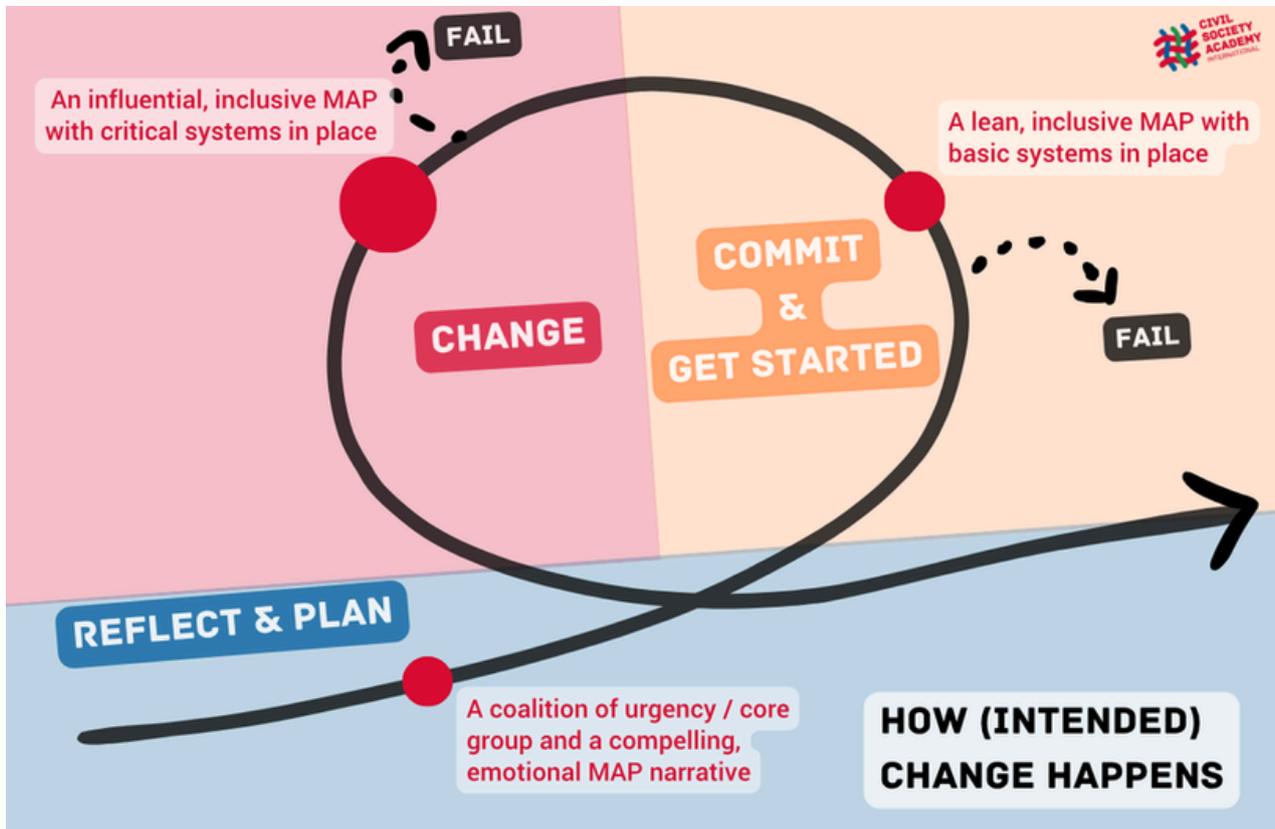
Photo: Land for Life Sierra Leone - Working with the media

Principle 4:
Build an Inclusive and Influential
Partnership

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Doesn't matter if it's personal or professional, a good partnership takes work.

Brian K. Vaughan



Essentially, the partnership-building process is organisational development. It begins with an idea and a compelling, emotional narrative. A group of passionate people is involved, and eventually, a lean system is put in place, a first and evolving vehicle for change. It is social engineering, developing something new. As the partnership grows in age, size, and impact, more systems are needed. An influential and inclusive partnership takes shape.

Like any other organisation, a partnership requires a purpose and resources, creates impact, and has a common culture. However, there are also particularities. The model of a multi-actor partnership predefines commonalities that nearly all such partnerships would follow.

The commonalities of Multi-actor Partnerships

- In multi-actor partnerships, we forge an influential partnership with diverse partners from the state, private sector, academia, and civil society to address a complex challenge collectively.
- The vision is collectivised among all actors, and so are the target groups of the intervention and the strategy processes.
- MAPs always promote a culture of collaboration and dialogue. Transparency and mutual trust are foundational values common to all successful Multi-Actor Partnerships.

- The structures and processes usually aim at collective decision-making and inclusion. We will aim to include people who live by the values and actively participate in the processes, even though they might have differing opinions and, at times, interests.
- The leading resource in a MAP is usually not funding, but the partners that participate in the partnership. Their influence, their voices and their collaboration are most precious. Adding value to the partners and putting them into action is what the partnership is about.
- When creating impact, a dialogue platform or a broad consultation process is usually a central element of a MAP. This is how the MAP intends to influence its members or a country's policies, for instance, about land rights.

When we develop a MAP, those commonalities are given. This does not mean we should not discuss them. We need to fill those commonalities with life. Vision, culture, having the right partners on board, and creating impact through dialogue all require constant attention.

Think more about a Lean Start-Up than a Well-funded State Office

Social pioneers and activists, such as Rajagopal P. V. of the Indian land rights movement, and successful start-up entrepreneurs, like Steve Jobs of Apple, share a common trait: tenacity, vision, and a gradual yet determined development of their organisation or network.

A critical problem we realised in many Multi-actor Partnerships is that the initial pioneers do not emerge like they would in most start-ups or social movements; instead, they are onboarded as volunteers or even hired as staff. In Land for Life, all the project coordinators were initially employed by an NGO which hosted the project. In most cases, the coordinator then became the MAP facilitator. Those facilitators were instrumental in developing a core group or coalition of urgency and a first emotional narrative. Consequently, the hiring process of the initial coordinator and the onboarding of core group members are among the most critical processes in MAP development, and the candidates would ideally bring the virtues of social pioneers with them.

Another challenge is the projectized approach of most MAP development processes. "Entrepreneurs are rightly wary of implementing traditional management practices early in the start-up, afraid they will invite bureaucracy and stifle creativity (Eric Ries, 2011). Eric Ries makes this point for start-ups, but we must be wary too. If we are involved in developing a MAP, we need to counter the typical project management approach, promote creativity, and resist bureaucracy.

Defining Lean Organisations

A lean organisation (...) is a business model and management philosophy focusing on maximising efficiency, minimising waste, and continuously improving processes to deliver value to customers. (...) Although lean principles and practices originated in manufacturing, particularly from the Toyota Production System (TPS), they have eventually been adopted across various industries and sectors.

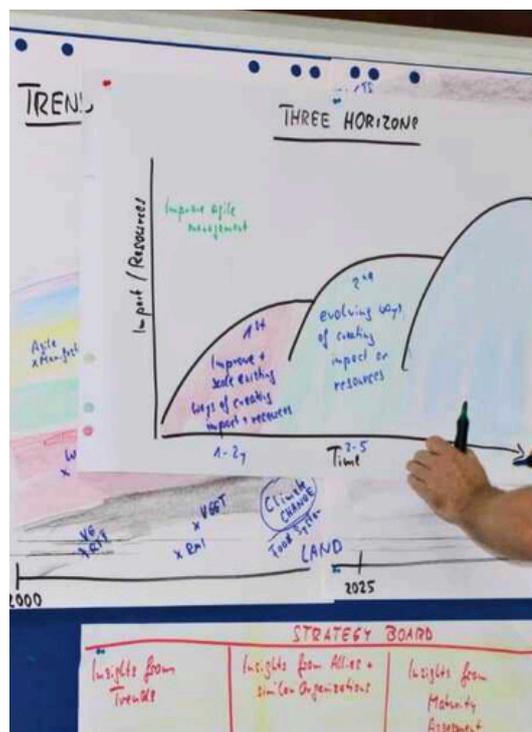
Understanding Lean Organisational Structure

A lean organisational structure is a streamlined and efficient framework that minimises hierarchy, reduces bureaucracy, and focuses on essential roles and functions. This structure emphasises simplicity, agility, and cost-effectiveness by eliminating unnecessary layers of management and decision-making. It encourages direct communication, quicker decision-making, and empowers employees to take ownership of their work. Lean organisations often have cross-functional teams, flexible job roles, and a strong commitment to continuous improvement. This structure aligns with Lean principles, fostering a culture of efficiency, waste reduction, and customer-centricity.

[Lean Transition Solutions](#)

In Land for Life, we frequently experienced an urge from some leaders to focus on structure, to implement numerous complex processes, and to establish bureaucracy. This is evident in frustrating processes that yield no outputs and time-consuming discussions about non-functional organisational units, such as technical working groups. This is quite the opposite of a lean or an adaptive organisation.

We now promote the lean and gradual development of the partnership, with an evolving structure. Organisational units and processes are only established if they are necessary. This is a rule in lean, adaptive organisations: we don't put organisational structures and policies in place that react to anticipated future requirements, but we evolve the organisation around real issues and our current priorities. We would underline this for the development of MAPs.



Ordeals of smallholder farmers: “Adde Bontu’s”

In Gelan, a small village in the eastern outskirts of the capital Addis Ababa, lives a strong woman. Adde Bontu is 75 years old and makes a living by selling vegetables in the local market, ‘Gullit’. ‘Gullit’ is a small open-air market where low-income families, mostly women, trade in vegetables and some food items in small volumes daily. Adde Bontu’s husband, the father of her four children, died of sickness a long time ago. The heavy burden of raising the children fell on Adde Bontu’s shoulder. Sadly, their four children all died within the last decade. With the meagre income she gets from retailing vegetables, Adde Bontu now supports herself and her three grandchildren.

Back then, before seven or so years, Adde Bontu had a decent life. With four hectares of land and a grazing parcel to her name, she used to cater for the basic needs of her family and managed to make ends meet. Adde Bontu was a respected farmer, and she was regarded as the pride of the village. Over the last five years, however, things started to change for the worse.

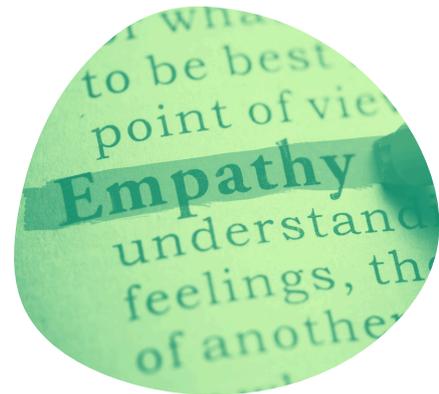
Her children sold their share of the land and bought a used car to venture into a taxi business, which turned out to be an unwise decision. They all went bankrupt. Then the land she was growing vegetables on was taken away from her and was given to investors. In the years following the expropriation of her land, Adde Bontu lost her four children. Three of them died of illness, but her eldest son committed suicide leaving his three children behind.

Adde Bontu is one of thousands of smallholders in villages surrounding Addis Ababa affected by the city’s expansion and misguided investment projects. Adde Bontu’s case illustrates the devastating impact of inefficient and weak land governance on the poor. This case emphasizes the need for duty-bearers and all stakeholders involved to urgently wake up to the negative consequences of some key policies, or failure in translating policies and laws on the ground, on the lives and livelihoods of the poor, especially on vulnerable women. It is also a testament to what happens when actors of diverse interests and unbalanced power intervene based on their self-interest with insufficient interaction among those concerned on the immediate and long-term consequences of their decisions and actions, especially on vulnerable groups.

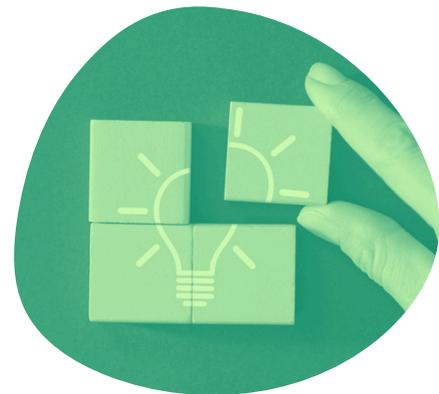
Start with an emotional narrative and a coalition of urgency

Lean also means starting with a bold idea and using few resources to nurture it to become a reality gradually. This bold idea must be woven into an emotional narrative that can attract the initial key players who make up the coalition of urgency. This initial narrative must create emotional resonance, inspiring people and making them want to engage. To create *emotional resonance*, this initial narrative must meet three criteria: (1) Empathy, (2) Clarity, (3) Sense of urgency.

It creates empathy. Reading Adde Bontu's case above makes one empathise with those suffering from grave injustices related to land rights. Millions of such stories could be told. The motions and the empathy are critical in mobilising people for a cause, and you must integrate those stories into your emotional narrative. A straightforward suggestion: From the beginning, giving those affected by injustices the centre of the platform and having them talk about their life and emotions is one of the most potent ways to create empathy.



It provides clarity: We mention it further below in the "Learnings from Land for Life". But we have also experienced it in many other MAPs. People have a blurred picture of what the MAP does and how it operates. For some actors, a blurred picture may create curiosity, but for the majority, it just means they cannot be sure if their time and energy are spent well. Clarifying the approach and how it can lead to change through dialogue is one of the most critical parts of the initial narrative. It is like a pitch for a product, in which you explain why the product solves the problems best. Or, in our case, it explains why the multi-actor approach is best suited to solving the problem faced by Adde Bontu and others affected by injustices.

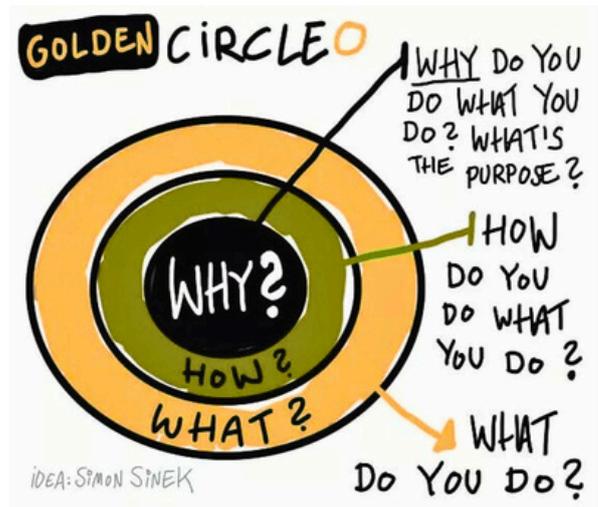


It nourishes a sense of urgency. What we want in the initial narrative (and in the later ones, too) is that the people we address feel the same sense of urgency. They must think that the problem is grave, that addressing it is urgent, and that they can be decisive in solving it. In other words, "if you join us, we have a good chance of solving this issue."



Simon Sinek's Golden Circle is an excellent way to tell an emotional narrative that meets the three criteria of empathy, clarity, and a sense of urgency. In Tool X, we explain how you can use the Golden Circle's template of Why-How-What as a simple, inspirational way to create your emotional narrative.

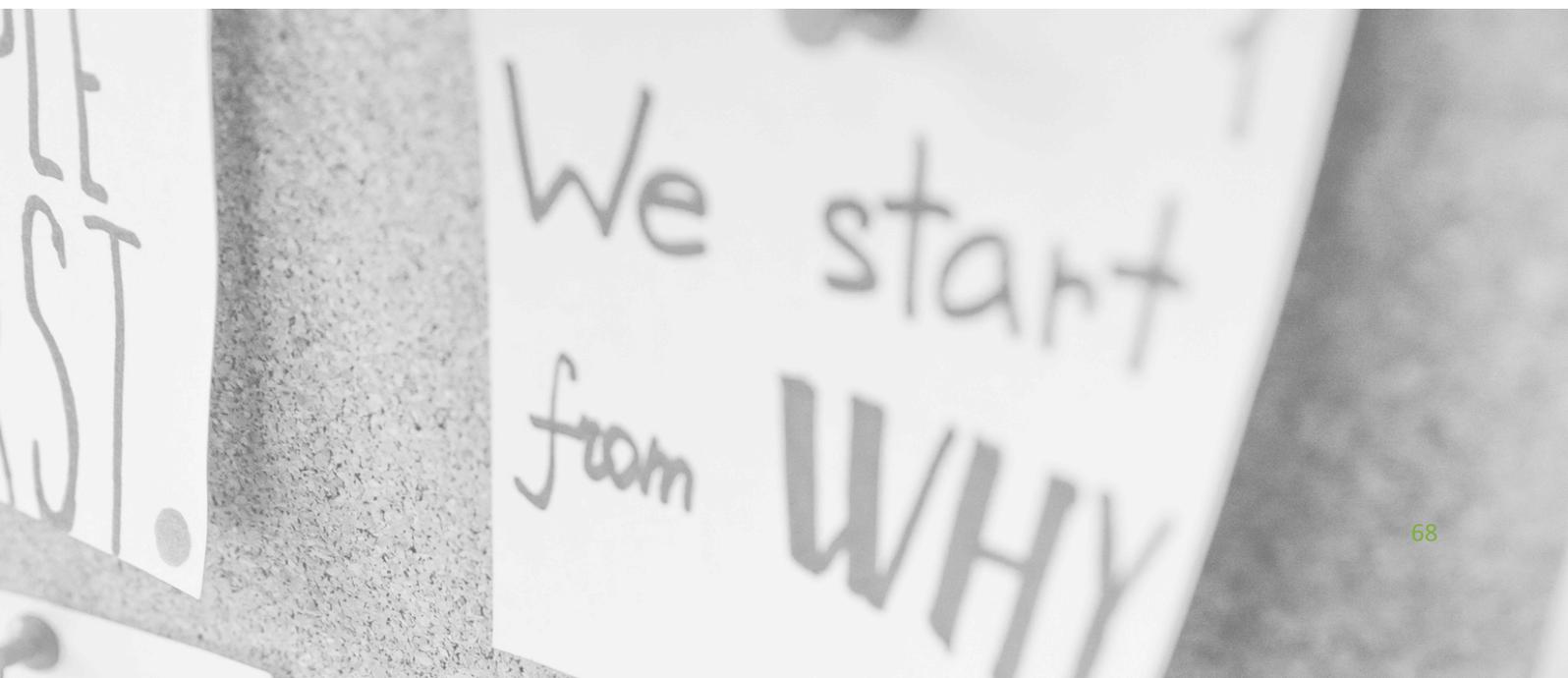
Sinek suggests starting every narrative of an organisation with why it exists, because this engages the reader or listener. People are usually attracted to the purpose and passion of an organisation, rather than its activities (the what). In our case, the 'why' is the powerful vision and purpose of the MAP, along with the stories of those most affected, which create empathy and emotional resonance. The Narrative moves on to the how, which is the collaboration and dialogue following the multi-actor approach and its unique values. Finally, we will discuss the specific actions we will take to improve the lives of those affected.



The emotional narrative or identity is one side of the coin; the other is people. Organisations, including partnerships, are made of people. They are developed and driven by people. Nothing happens without them.

In our process of partnership building, the coalition of urgency will bring the narrative to life. We mentioned some of the criteria of this coalition earlier, which include being comprised of 6-12 passionate and collaborative actors, being multi-actor (representing civil society, the private sector, the state, and academia), with members either being representative of those affected, influential, or thoroughly knowledgeable about the issues.

Those criteria are essential, but equally important is that this group of individuals becomes a team. A series of collective activities and good facilitation is required to become a team, not just any team, but a team that builds a successful multi-actor partnership.



Towards a vision of a mature multi-actor partnership

When assessing the organisational development of a MAP, we use two critical tools:

1. The eight-step model, with which we can assess where in the model the partnership-building process has reached, and
2. The maturity assessment, with which actors can assess their MAP against 16 statements characterising a mature and impactful MAP.

The maturity assessment is based on the Impact Navigator, a toolkit for civil society leaders and social pioneers to ideate, design and develop strong and innovative organisations that have purpose and create impact for a better world. For more information, see: [Impact Navigator](#)



The impact navigator looks at the four interrelated spheres of an organisation:

- **OUR PURPOSE:** Why it exists and for whom
- **OUR CULTURE:** Who we are and how we work together
- **OUR IMPACT:** How we create impact and change
- **OUR RESOURCES:** How we mobilise and retain funding and partners

The 16 statements within those four spheres give us a good sense of the main organisational development aspects we must consider in creating a mature and impactful partnership. All four spheres are equally important, and we must use an entire arsenal of collaboration and organisational development methods to progress. For instance, we must integrate the affected groups, develop a strategy, foster a partnership culture, focus on impactful activities, and mobilise resources.

We developed the maturity assessment to help MAPs regularly review their partnership-building processes and priorities. We recommend using it annually.



People often have a blurred picture about the organisational design of the platform: This is undoubtedly so when a multi-actor partnership is first initiated. For some, it is abstract, while others connect the ideas with existing networks in the country and how they work. As we moved forward, we realised that for some actors, ambiguities persisted regarding what a multi-actor partnership in the land sector is and what it could achieve. These ambiguities are not just related to the complexity of the multi-actor approach. Reasons for this are that some MAPs lack regular engagement of actors, conduct few dialogues, and have limited collective action.

We recommend that the MAP define a straightforward narrative that outlines its differences from other networks and approaches and repeat this narrative to actors.

Partnership building takes focus, time and money: Land for Life is now 8 years old. The rule that an organisation needs at least 5 years to operate sustainably is valid for such multi-actor partnerships, especially in new contexts, and with new people. We often discussed how such processes can be accelerated or simplified. Certainly, mentoring, training and international connectedness are key factors in building the partnership steadily and successfully. Still, each team and partnership has its context and acts based on its experiences. COVID-19, a coup, a civil war, and mass protests were contextual events, but also the establishment of a new and initially democratic government in Ethiopia, as well as a favourable civil society space for influencing in Sierra Leone. At the same time, organisational challenges, just like in any other organisation, were present: hiring, funding, compliance issues, keeping people engaged, and others.

Building a MAP is not a project. Whether registered or not, it is an organisational development process that should not be underestimated.

The decision to register a MAP as an organisation must be considered carefully: Three of the four Land for Life initiatives have registered organisations in year 3 or 4 of the intervention. Our retrospective analysis reveals that the registration and related activities, such as decision-making, securing funding, defining a new identity, and setting up systems, required a significant amount of time, money, and effort that could have been spent more effectively. The advantages and disadvantages of setting up the entities were also not entirely objective. The secretariats urged them to break free from the host organisations. A discussion to move the partnership to a new host, which is more conducive, was cut short. At the same time, the steering groups mostly argued that the registration would give the MAP more legitimacy and, in the long run, more influence.

Despite some concerns over the sustainability of the new organisations, our analysis of the decisions to register is relatively positive, as the new organisations effectively capture and perform critical functions in the policy dialogue. However, the alternative to registration, i.e., having a “conductive host” such as the Right to Rice Foundation in Liberia, may even be a more effective solution, with good international embeddedness and a likelihood of sustainability.

Most partnership-building processes have a few challenges in common: Those challenges have been repeatedly taken up in discussions, capacity building, assessments and strategy processes. Some Land for Life MAPs have successfully overcome them. The most important challenges are:

1. Some secretariat functions, especially those related to documentation and communication, were not adequately performed. This affected all other aspects of the organisation, such as funding and partnership culture.
2. Often, the steering committees were not strong enough, or not sufficiently critical and did not give enough guidance to the secretariat. Tough questions were not discussed.
3. Technical working groups were installed, but it was sometimes challenging to keep them running. We tend to create heavy structures, and the discussions often centre around how the structures could or should look instead of focusing on the dialogue related to policies.
4. Most MAPs remained dominated by men, and the integration of more women was relatively slow. Still, all MAP coordinators are men.

The Strategy Processes are critical: country teams and the international support team put significant efforts into the strategy processes of the Land for Life MAPs. Most MAPs now have good strategies or are in the process of planning their future strategy. They include organisational priorities, as well as priority areas for policy changes. In some cases, a more detailed context analysis, including policies, stakeholders, and trends, would help define the strategy more effectively. Nevertheless, we have no standard format or process design yet, partly because some of the platforms use the strategy template of the International Land Coalition, which has also evolved. All four Land for Life platforms are now members of the ILC. We should analyse the strategy processes again and develop collective learning as we move forward.

The emotional narrative is essential to create initial resonance: The emotional narrative can create resonance, commitment and momentum. It has helped to onboard people and organisations and get the partnerships going.

There is more to it. It is crucial to continually reinvent and develop the narrative, aligning it with the plight of vulnerable groups. However, we need to ensure that the storytelling is not perceived as a marketing ploy, and actors, for instance, state actors, are not offended.

Decentralised structures and engagement with vulnerable groups are key. The decentralised structures, for instance, the district multi-stakeholder partnerships in Sierra Leone and Liberia, or the Community-Investor Local Government Forums in Ethiopia, have been essential in bridging the gap between vulnerable groups and national processes. In Sierra Leone, the decentralised structures have been so successful that they are now scaled to have representative structures in all the country's districts. Their inclusion in the national debate makes the dialogue accountable and prevents it from becoming too elitist or technical.

Even though decentralised structures might not always be possible, all MAPs must consider the engagement of vulnerable groups at the centre of the MAP's identity.

Tools

Tool 4:
Creating an Emotional Narrative along
WHY-HOW WHAT

Tool 5:
Strengthening the MAP: Defining Priority
Areas by using the Maturity Assessment

Tool 6:
Collaborative Partnerships – Are We
Ready for It?

Tool 7:
Generic Structure of a MAP



Tool 4:

Creating an Emotional Narrative along WHY-HOW WHAT

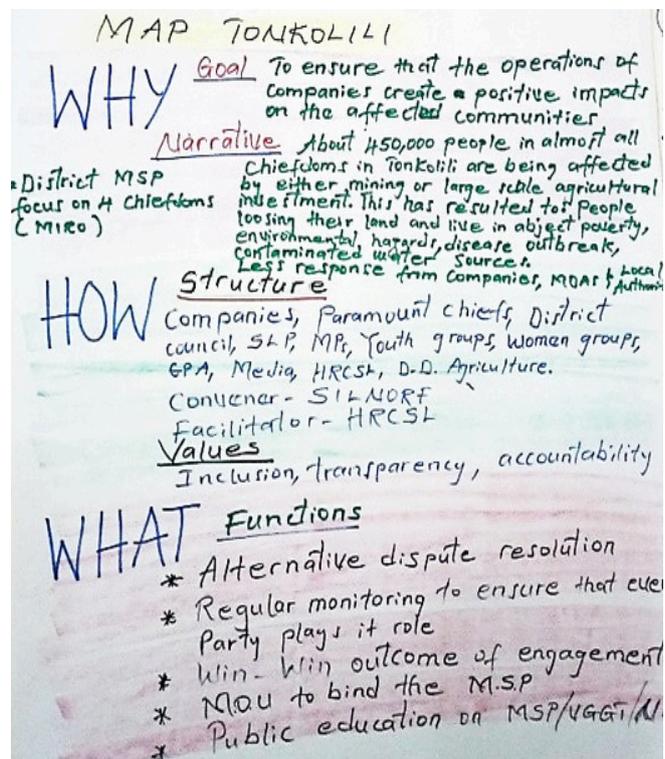
Simon Sinek's Golden Circle — which emphasises 'why', 'how', and 'what' — is an excellent framework for describing a multi-actor partnership. A good narrative of a MAP always starts with the 'why', the purpose that unites diverse actors, including governments, NGOs, businesses, and community groups. Aligning around a shared 'why' — a common purpose or mission — is essential. This shared purpose serves as the unifying force. It enables actors to see beyond their interests and focus on the greater good that the partnership aims to achieve, such as addressing land rights.

From there, the Golden Circle's focus is on the 'how'. The 'How' articulates the partnership's unique value through collaboration, shared governance, resource pooling, or inclusive decision-making. It helps clarify the partnership's principles and operating model, which is crucial for building trust and accountability among diverse stakeholders.

Finally, the 'what' captures the tangible actions and results, such as joint programs, advocacy campaigns, or policy frameworks. This structure helps communicate the partnership's identity to external audiences and reinforces internal coherence, making the Golden Circle a powerful tool for both storytelling and strategy in multi-actor collaborations.

Template for the MAP Identity / Narrative

<p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is our vision? • For whom do we exist, and what are their issues? (Use real people's examples and quotes.)
<p>How?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is that multi-actor partnership? • What are our values? • Who participates?
<p>What?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What exactly are we doing? • What did we achieve so far? <p>Appeal to the audience at the end of the narrative</p>



Poster: Why-How-What of a District Multi-Stakeholder Partnership in Tonkolili, a District in Sierra Leone. The narrative was developed during a workshop in 2019.

Exercise - Golden Circle (Why-How-What):

- Introduce the golden circle to the audience. You may also show the video of [Simon Sinek's TED Talk](#).
- Create groups of 4-5 to create the MAP identity/narrative
- Introduce the template to the group and explain each of the sub-questions. Explain to the group that no more than two flipcharts should be used for the identity.
- Give the groups 45 minutes to develop the identity.
- Have each group pitch the identity in a 2–3-minute pitch.
- Ask the rest of the group to provide feedback on the identity pitch. Make sure you reflect on the three criteria for a narrative that creates emotional resonance: (1) it creates empathy, (2) it provides clarity, and (3) it nourishes a sense of urgency.

Suppose you have more time or do the exercise as part of a multi-day event. In that case, asking a smaller group to consolidate the different presentations and feedback into one final identity pitch is helpful. An additional fun exercise is to ask a skilled orator from the group to deliver a 2–3 minute pitch to the group on the MAP identity, without using posters. Don't forget to take a video of the speech.



Tool 5: Strengthening the MAP: Defining Priority Areas by using the Maturity Assessment

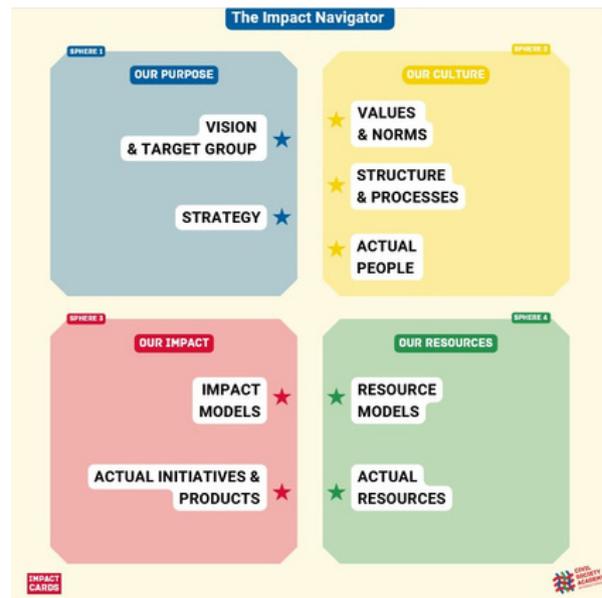
The tool's purpose is to assess the maturity of the MAP, including all its elements, to develop insights, and contribute to planning. The tool builds on tools developed by CIFOR (The key characteristics of the tool are:

- It is a participatory self-assessment with key actors in the MAP, creating collective understanding and ownership.
- It can be done in a one-day workshop, ideally with 10-15 participants. An online scorecard to get inputs from a larger audience could be added (beyond the participants of a workshop). It can also be easily combined with the Outcome Harvesting and planning sessions for the MAP.
- It is also a valuable tool for annual assessments or participatory evaluations.
- It is based on a simple organisational model – the impact navigator.
- It is easy to implement and easy to document.

The six steps of the Maturity Assessment

Step 1: Establish the scope and introduction to the Impact Navigator (30 minutes)

- The scope of the maturity assessment is the MAP with all its organisational aspects. The maturity indicates how far we have reached in developing the MAP
- Maturity does not mean it is a one-way road. It is possible to move backwards in specific components.
- To assess the MAP, we score 16 statements in four organisational spheres: purpose, culture, impact, and resources. The tool is based on the Impact Navigator, which is explained in detail on the Civil Society Academy International [website](#).



Step 2: Presenting the 16 statements and scoring (120 minutes)

The scoring is an individual exercise, not a team exercise. The scoring includes:

- Briefly go through all 16 statements and explain the differentiation of the statements in the four spheres: purpose, culture, impact and resources.
- Then look at one sphere at a time by starting with “our purpose” and explain the four statements and the corresponding questions in detail. Take questions after each sphere and ensure everyone understands the statements and the underlying concepts. Then let the group score, either on a print-out or on a flipchart. Ask the group to write reasons for their scoring on a flip chart next to the scoring.
- Then go through the next sphere and repeat the exercise with the new statements.

Multi-Actor Partnerships: Maturity Assessment

Based on the Impact Navigator

SPHERE 1

OUR PURPOSE

1. We, all partners of the MAP are clear about the purpose and the changes the MAP envisions.



2. The purpose and the collective way our MAP envisions change inspires people from outside and attracts new actors.



3. We focus on the needs and rights of the most vulnerable and they are at the forefront in our strategies, in planning and day-to-day activities?



4. We develop strong and inclusive strategies and roadmaps, which are implemented and create impact.



SPHERE 2

OUR CULTURE

5. We established a culture of trust, dialogue, collaboration and transparency. The culture is "lived", not merely on paper.



6. The MAP is driven by collective leadership of a diverse steering group, which takes decisions in a collective and transparent manner.



7. A secretariat is the backbone of the MAP, and performs key functions i.e. facilitating the collective processes, communicating, and managing events.



8. There is a lean structure practicing adaptive management incl. role clarity, clear vision, regular review and planning sessions, and context analysis.



SPHERE 3

OUR IMPACT

9. The dialogue platform is central to our MAP. It meets regularly, generates solutions and contributes to the intended outcomes.



10. We have developed a collective agenda, and are clear about which actors and processes we want to influence and how.



11. We use international instruments and standards to further our cause. They are integrated in our collective agenda.



12. We are successful in influencing decision makers, practices, and policies, and document our outcomes and practices.



SPHERE 4

OUR RESOURCES

13. Our MAP engages with everyone who should be present including disadvantaged groups and actors with opposing views.



14. Our members participate in the MAP because they see value in the collaboration. This includes the member's leadership.



15. We mobilize and retain support and funding for our MAP to achieve its objectives and guarantee its sustainability.



16. We are transparent, accountable and modest in using financial resources. Our members know the budget and how it is used.



How to rate?

Rate each statement individually, not in a group!

Totally disagree

Mostly disagree

In between

Mostly agree

Totally agree

IMPACT CARDS



Step 3: Confirm the results and select priority issues (45 minutes)

- After scoring all 16 statements and reasons for the scoring have been given, the facilitator presents the results, one by one, including the most critical/frequent remarks given by the respondents.
- Now, the group is asked to select four priority statements for further analysis and learning. Those could be the lowest-scoring statements, but it is also possible that the priorities include statements that do not score low. Working on them could open specific opportunities. Interesting discussions may also arise on statements that were scored very differently by the individual participants.
- If there is no agreement by the group on which statements to prioritise, you could ask each member to prioritise by voting again.

Step 4: Reflection in groups on four priority statements (60 minutes)

Now we continue in groups: Each of the four groups will look at one priority statement. For instance, one group may examine the prioritised statement 7: A secretariat is the backbone of the MAP, performing key functions, such as facilitating collective processes, communicating, and managing events.

Give each group a flipchart/template with the following parts:

1. Prioritised statement
2. What are our three key learnings from the discussion, and are the learnings relevant for developing the MAP?
3. What could be the way forward to improve our scoring on this statement?

Add the following instructions:

- Discuss freely for around 30 minutes about the statement, the corresponding questions and the comments made earlier during the scoring exercise.
- Then ask the groups to focus on the questions on the flipchart/template.
- Ask each group to nominate a representative who will present the findings. The representative is also responsible for ensuring that the findings are included in the next planning session for the MAP.

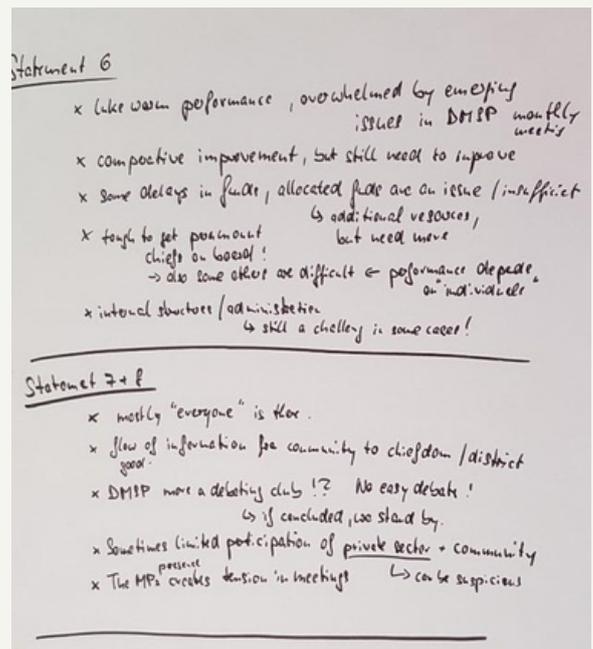
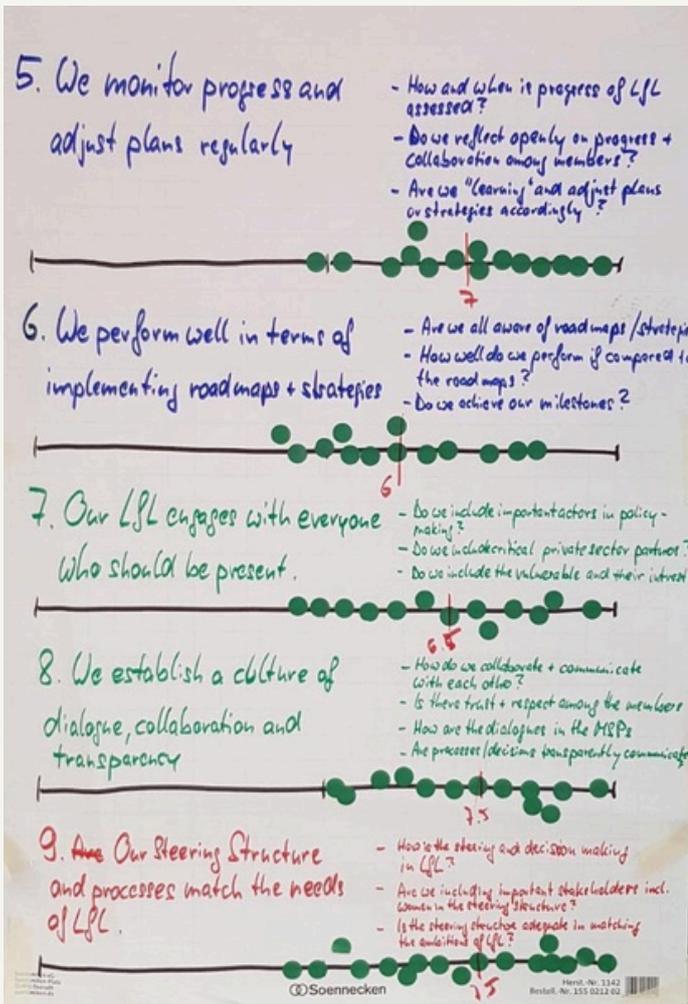


Step 5: Presentation of the group work (60 minutes)

- Each group presents the key findings in about 5 minutes.
- After each presentation, give 5 minutes for feedforward. The presenter takes notes of the feedforward and ensures it is considered in the next planning session of the initiative.
- Then the next group presents.

Step 6: Summary, way forward and check-out (30 minutes)

- Reconfirm with the group if the exercise was helpful and the most important points have been raised.
- Take time to ensure that the day's findings are taken forward in the next sessions and that the group representatives are clear about their mandate.
- Do a check-out exercise, for instance, "I like, I wish," to evaluate the day and get input for the next day. Ask each participant one by one to say two sentences... "I liked ... ! I wish ... !"



Examples from the scoring in Land for Life Sierra Leone in 2022



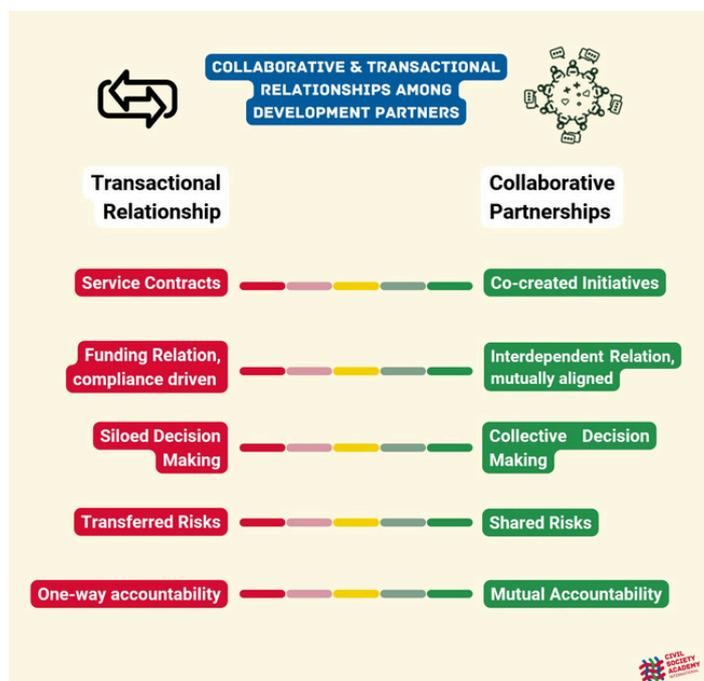
Tool 6: Collaborative Partnerships – Are we ready for it?

Apart from lean, a MAP also embraces the characteristics of collaborative partnerships. In the graphic below, we compare transactional relations with collaborative partnerships. The transactional relationship between organisations is one extreme. One organisation receives a service contract, is bound to deliver accordingly, and has limited decision-making power. In the collaborative partnership, the initiative is co-created, decisions are made together, and there is shared risk.

Initiatives are usually somewhere in between. In the development sector, the narrative is slowly shifting towards a collaborative model. Driven by a localisation and decolonisation agenda, many international NGOs are searching for new ways to develop such collaborative partnerships, and one of those models is the MAP. However, sometimes partners that become part of a MAPs are not ready for collaborative partnerships. And it is easy to understand why. Government or private sector organisations often operate mainly on the transactional model with partners. And even NGO partnerships are often more transactional. Just think about your organisation and the dominant partnership models you follow.

Moving from a transactional model to a collaborative model necessitates a significant cultural shift. While your organisation is shielded from other organisations in a transactional partnership, the collaborative partnership model requires openness and the abandonment of competitive behaviours. In collaborative partnerships, the success of our partners is also our success. We co-create, share, and achieve together.

To raise awareness of the dominant partnership models among MAP partners and the challenges that may arise when transitioning to the collaborative model, we recommend using the model to the right.



Reference - Based on the model of the [Partnership Brokers Association](#)

Exercise:

1. Explain to the audience the difference between transactional and collaborative partnerships and the shift in organisational culture required to move towards a collaboration model.
2. Ask the audience to self-reflect on:
 - o Rate your organisation's partnerships (not only the MAP) along the five indicators.
 - o What is your organisation's culture like when it comes to partnerships?
 - o What are the implications for participation in the Multi-Actor Partnership?
3. Ask the audience to share their findings in random groups of 2-3.
4. Ask some of the groups to summarise their findings and the implications for the MAP.

Case Studies

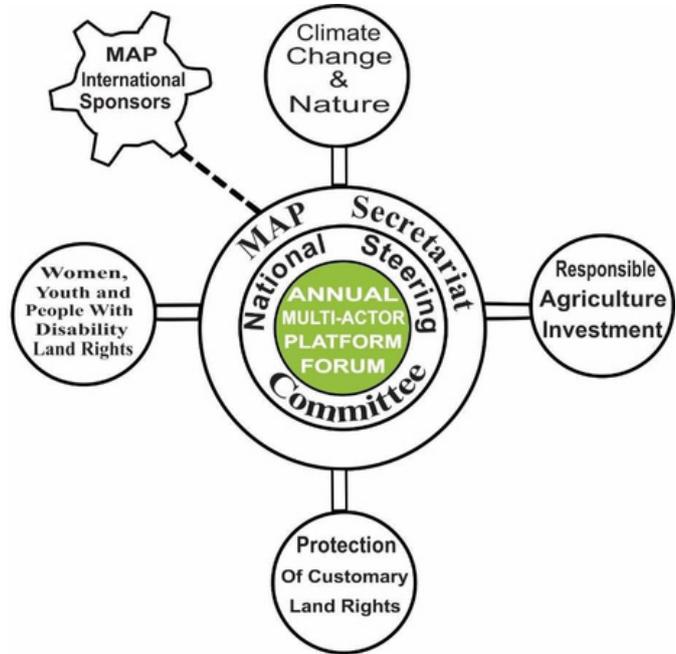
Case Study 5:
Organisational Structure of Land for
Life Liberia



Case Study 5: Organisational Structure of Land for Life Liberia

In this case study, we illustrate the governance structure and strategy of Liberia's Land for Life Initiative and explore commonalities and differences with Land for Life in other countries.

In Liberia, there is a General Assembly of all members, known as the Annual MAP Forum, which comprises all member organisations from various sectors. The General Assembly typically meets annually and serves as the primary decision-making body of the partnership. There are 44 members in the General Assembly: 29 civil CSOs, eight private sector companies, five state actors, and two from Academia. Compared to other actors, the strong participation of civil society can sometimes be a challenge, as the partnership is viewed as an NGO project rather than a collective initiative. The MAP Liberia has recognised this as a challenge and has attempted to bring more state actors into the partnership.



There is also a national steering committee, which is elected according to a quota system. The steering committee meets more regularly, guides the implementation of decisions by the General Assembly, and follows up on the activities of the secretariat and the technical working groups. In Liberia, the steering committee has eleven members. In 2024, the MAP made a significant effort to increase the inclusion of vulnerable segments in the steering committee. There are now four representatives from women CSOs, one from a CSO addressing issues of the physically challenged, one land rights NGO, two state actors, one private sector representative and two representatives of the decentralised dialogue structures.

In other Land for Life countries, the steering committee is referred to as the steering group or the administrative council. The number of representatives varies from 7 to 11. A commonality is that keeping the steering committees consistently running requires a lot of effort, also due to regular changes in representatives and sometimes commitment issues. Capacity building, regular engagement of the steering committee in events, and international exposure are reasonable means of maintaining commitment.



Photo: MAP Liberia - Land right advocacy

The secretariat in Liberia has three staff members: one ILC facilitator, one Land for Life coordinator, and one Communication and Programs Officer. In the Liberian case, the MAP is not independently registered; however, it has been hosted by the Right to Rice Foundation since its inception in 2018. The Foundation is also the beneficiary of the Welthungerhilfe grant, and the secretariat manages the grant too. Land for Life in Burkina Faso has a similar structure, though it is independently registered. In Ethiopia and Sierra Leone, Land for Life is a CSO Networks that host MAP platforms and has developed a larger structure. In Principle 6, we will discuss the different secretariat models in more detail.

The Liberia MAP has four thematic working groups, indicated by the four outer circles in the graphic above. Each group is assigned a specific topic and implements collective activities related to it. Though the working groups, in theory, play an essential role in operationalising the partnership's strategy, they often lag or meet irregularly. After years of struggle in Liberia, the working groups now function to a good extent, because...

To minimise frustrations with inactive structures, we recommend initiating working groups only when they contribute to a concrete process, such as developing a policy paper for a MAP conference.

Please note that there are also partnerships with technical working groups, which do not have a thematic focus but look at an activity cluster, such as organisational development, advocacy, or research. As strategic priorities are often set around such clusters, such working groups simplify the work processes. The disadvantage is that each group then handles a larger thematic portfolio.

The MAP international sponsors are another organisational body that has been recently added to the structure. They constitute a support group of organisations such as Welthungerhilfe, the International Land Coalition, or FAO that are interested in strengthening and sustaining the partnership's work in the long run. Regular support group meetings are a great way to keep them involved.

Key Lesson Learned

Representation and balance of power: The dominant role of CSOs risks undermining the identity of a true multi-actor initiative. Hence, deliberate efforts should continue to bring more state actors, private sector players, and academic institutions into active roles, ensuring shared ownership and legitimacy across sectors. The onboarding of Women Organisations is commendable.

Sustainability and Commitment of Governance Structures: Maintaining a functional steering committee requires consistent engagement, as high turnover and low commitment have been common challenges. Regular capacity-building, event inclusion, and exposure to international platforms can strengthen member motivation and long-term participation.

Functionality of Working Groups: Working groups tend to underperform when created without a clear, time-bound purpose. To ensure relevance and engagement, they should be established around concrete tasks or outputs, such as policy papers or campaign strategies, and dissolved or reshaped once their mandate is fulfilled.

Tools

Tool 7:
Generic structure of a MAP



Tool 7: Generic structure of a MAP

When a group intends to establish a Multi-Actor Partnership, the question of structure is often a hot debating point. The generic structure below can serve as a starting point for discussion. We developed it by examining a diverse range of MAPs and networks.

Organ	Purpose of the Organ	How is it constituted	Accountabilities of the Organ
General Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serves as the highest decision-making body of the partnership. Provides strategic direction and oversight. Ensures broad representation and inclusivity among stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Composed of representatives from all member organisations (NGOs, farmers cooperatives, government agencies, private sector, and other stakeholders). Membership criteria include a commitment to the partnership's objectives and active participation. Meets biannually for decision-making sessions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approves key policies, strategies, and annual budget plans. Elects members to the Steering Committee every two years. Reviews and approves annual reports and work plans. Ensures alignment with the partnership's mission and values. Approves new members of the partnership.
Steering Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides governance and oversight between General Assembly meetings. Guides strategic implementation and decision-making. Acts as the executive body of the partnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprised of a group of X elected representatives according to a quota system (X NGOs, X community groups, X gov. agencies, X private sector). The corresponding members elect their representatives, such as all NGO members elect their representatives. Chaired by an elected leadership (chair and co-chair), who is selected among the steering committee members The term limit is X years; Steering committee members can serve X terms. Meets quarterly or as needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures decisions made by the General Assembly are implemented. Provides financial oversight and approves budgets within the annual budget plans. Coordinates and supports the work of the Secretariat and Technical Working Groups. Addresses conflicts or challenges that arise within the partnership.
Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides administrative, coordination, and operational support to the partnership. Serves as the communication hub among members. Ensures continuity and day-to-day management of partnership activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small, dedicated team (2-3 staff) hired or seconded from partner organisations. Led by a MAP Coordinator, reporting to the Steering Committee, who is confirmed by the Steering Committee. Includes finance, communication, and programmatic support staff as needed. Is hosted by one of the member organisations on a rotational basis for three years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports the implementation of Steering Committee and General Assembly decisions. Organises meetings, prepares minutes, and manages documentation. Facilitates communication and information management internally and externally Advance collaboration with member organisations, resource mobilisation and capacity building. Oversees financial management, including grants and funding administration.
Technical Working Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide specialised expertise to support the implementation of partnership activities. Develop and recommend policies, strategies, and technical solutions. Act as advisory bodies to the Steering Committee and Secretariat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formed based on strategic priorities (e.g., public relations, policy dialogues), instituted by the steering committee. Composed of experts from partner organisations, academia, and government. Membership is by nomination and voluntary acceptance. Chaired by a technical lead, regularly reporting to the Steering Committee. Meet as needed, based on project cycles and deliverables. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct research and analysis on key thematic areas. Develop technical guidelines and recommendations. Monitor and evaluate programmatic activities within their scope. Engage stakeholders in knowledge-sharing and capacity-building initiatives.

Principle 5:
Collective and Continuous
Leadership

“

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

Why collective leadership?

In collective leadership, a group of people with diverse skills and experiences come together to work toward goals that they jointly develop. In contrast to traditional leadership, where one person makes key decisions after consulting with others, collective leadership empowers the group to assign the task to the person or people with the most relevant expertise to tackle problems and implement solutions ([Katie Shonk, 2024](#)).

Collective leadership has been adopted by many organisational types, including businesses, NGOs, and networks. It is embedded in a new organisational culture, which is described here in this chapter and elsewhere in this toolbox. This new organisational culture emphasises collective leadership, adaptive management (principle 6), and collaborative partnerships (see principle 4). Organisations that embrace such a culture are less inward-looking and more outward-looking, with a philosophy that together, we can achieve more and contribute to the common good. Such a culture aligns with the ideas and values of multi-actor partnerships and other coalitions that have collective action at their core.

Here are the main differences between traditional and collective leadership

Aspect	Traditional Leadership	Collective Leadership
Power Structure	Hierarchical authority is concentrated in a single leader	<i>Shared authority and responsibilities are being distributed</i>
Decision-Making	Top-down – the leader makes final decisions	<i>Collaborative – essential decisions are made together or by consensus</i>
Role of the Leader	Central figure who directs others	<i>Facilitator or Collaborator who supports group processes</i>
Expertise	Assumes the leader has the most expertise	<i>Recognises that expertise is distributed across the group</i>
Communication Style	Individual – the leader is held accountable	<i>Collective – the group shares accountability</i>
Goal Orientation	Directive – instructions flow from the top	<i>Dialogic – open dialogue and mutual listening</i>

It is important to note that the collective leadership aspects described here are also mirrored in the structure. Earlier, we examined the Land for Life MAP in Liberia, which is led by a steering committee elected by the General Assembly. The critical characteristics of a high-performing steering committee include ownership, shared accountability, shared decision-making, and dialogical communication grounded in trust. The characteristics of collective leadership are built into this structure. Likewise, performing thematic working groups will have similar success factors.

Setting up high-performing, collaborative committees and working groups requires hard work, tenacity and clarity, especially in the beginning. The cultural barriers can be enormous: people are accustomed to traditional leadership and cannot imagine that other styles can be effective. Introducing collective leadership and a culture of dialogue can be frustrating. Who has not experienced it: During the facilitated workshop, many participants were inspired and excited, and based on this positive mood, ambitious plans were made, and people committed to numerous beneficial processes. But a few weeks later, we realise that many people overcommitted, with some becoming unresponsive. And the notion of shared accountability and ownership becomes an illusion. The truth is that most networks of multi-actor partnerships go through such experiences. And some continue operating under such circumstances for years, without finding a way out. To keep the ball rolling, even without significant meaningful contributions from members, secretariats take over an increasing number of tasks. And it becomes at risk of being led by the secretariat.

Collective leadership requires people who embrace it

Just as in other teams, the functional organs of multi-actor partnerships can accommodate some difficult individuals. If there are many, it affects morale, team culture and performance. Similarly, a few exceptional collective leaders can make all the difference towards elevating the organ and even the entire platform towards a generative dialogue and collective action.

This makes the selection and onboarding of the leaders a top priority. But let's face it. While a civil society group that initiates a MAP will have reasonable control over onboarding other civil society members, there is less control in the case of state and private sector actors. On one hand, you want leaders who embody the habits of collective leadership. On the other hand, you also wish to have individuals who have the power to influence policy and make decisions on collective action. These are not always the people who inhibit collective leadership. It is a balancing act.

To avoid partnerships becoming a shadow of themselves and, instead, establish effective collaborative leadership, the following actions can be considered:

- Ensuring the committees have many members with collective leadership habits (see tool 8).
- Better understanding of the individual interests and motivations in participating in the MAP (see tool X)
- Training committees and working groups on collective leadership,
- Inspiring leaders by looking at high-performing committees and exceptional collective leaders.
- Providing clarity on the governance system and the roles of each member
- Keeping a strict routine in conducting the meetings, so the participants are regularly engaged
- Effective preparation and good facilitation during the meetings, to encourage collaboration, dialogic conversations and building ownership
- Reflection and Learning sessions during the meetings, so people become more self-aware, and the meetings, role distribution, and shared ownership improve over time.
- Coaching the facilitators to encourage more collaboration, and improve meetings and processes

On a positive note, we have found that even leaders who are more inclined towards traditional leadership can thrive in successful and vibrant collaboration processes. Co-creation and being successful together may fulfil a profound human aspiration.



The notion of collective leadership is critical to a successful multi-actor process. Collective leadership is a central element of an MAP and affects other principles, such as the likelihood of developing an influential partnership or managing the initiative adaptively. Developing a collective leadership culture requires those who truly embrace it; few people need to want it. They must be prepared to engage, utilise their influence, share resources, and demonstrate to others that a collective leadership style is desirable and achievable.

On the contrary, we have also experienced that if too few leaders adopt collective leadership, there is a risk that the partnership will slip into a more hierarchical leadership model, with one or a few people making decisions that are not transparent and have little involvement from the leadership group. This is a red flag in the collaboration process.

Building and retaining a tight coalition of urgency/core group is essential: When assessing a MAP, we usually ask about the few individuals most important in moving it forward. This small group was often created when the MAP was initiated as a coalition of urgency or a core group. Much of the thought process about the MAP happened in those groups. It is good to see that in all four of the Land for Life countries, a few members of the initial group of urgency (2018) are still part of this essential core group in 2025, while others have left, for instance, because of career shifts, conflicting interests or because the motivation dropped. And others were onboarded and are now part of this group.

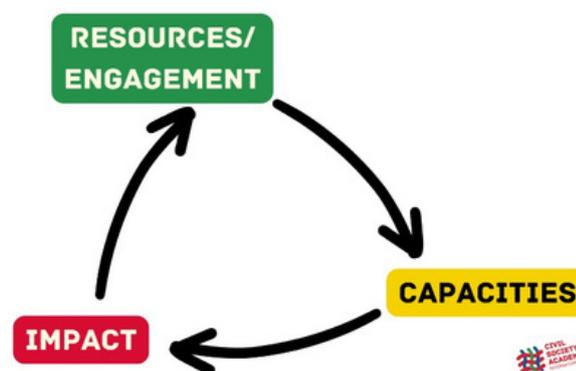
Such a core group is the heart of the MAP and must be nourished. The group should reflect on the composition and culture within this core group. A critical time is when the MAP is structured, and initial core group members become part of the steering group. However, the steering group has new members, and more emphasis is given now to quotas and the organisations they represent. It is essential that the culture of the initial core group is retained, and inclusive dialogue and collective leadership are practised in the new steering group.

Characteristics of the coalition of urgency/core group: Such a tight group, which is at the centre of the initiative, should meet some characteristics. This list is not mandatory, but we recommend that actors consider the composition of the core group.

1. Be diverse in terms of sectors, gender, and perspectives on the complex problem the MAP addresses,
2. Consist of at least five highly committed individuals,
3. Have a passion for the cause and a willingness to invest in the initiative,
4. Embrace a culture of collaboration and collective leadership,
5. Some should possess the influence to change policies or to engage other critical actors,
6. Some should have a unique expertise that helps to take the MAP forward,
7. Some should be skilled in facilitating processes.

Informal communication is key: Just like in other teams, formal and informal communication are essential to building a cohesive and strong core group. Informal communication has been crucial in forming the initial core group in Ethiopia through buna tetu, traditional coffee ceremonies, where leaders deliberated on land rights and shared their views. Other opportunities for informal communication to foster a collective spirit and empathy include meetings, workshops, social evenings, and exercises that encourage one-on-one discussions.

Successful initiatives are attractive: A key learning in Land for Life is that the cycle of impact, resources/engagement, and capacities also applies to MAPs. If the initiative creates impact, I am more than happy to engage meaningfully and invest my resources. This engagement will increase the capacities of the MAP, making an impact more likely.



This is not further surprising. However, it visualises that engagement and resource mobilisation can rarely be improved if we don't work on capacities as well as early wins and successes to create impact.

Be realistic about motivation, expectations and interests. People leave the core group, and others join. This is normal. However, high fluctuation hampers progressive collective leadership. A critical lesson in Land for Life is that the leadership groups sometimes fail to understand the motivations of actors for engaging in the cause: Apart from an intrinsic interest and motivation for the cause and for creating change, curiosity, opportunities to learn, to travel, or to progress in their careers might be additional motivations. Additionally, per diems or potential funding opportunities may also be factors.

In day-to-day operations, we sometimes hesitate to question the performance or composition of groups because it is somewhat sensitive. However, inactive groups or those lacking accountability, where promises are made but not fulfilled, are a common source of frustration. Group and individual reflections, managing expectations, and realistic planning are, therefore, critical to freeing groups from a cycle of broken promises.

Be strategic in attracting all relevant actors into the coalition: In the Land for Life initiative, engaging the private sector has proven both essential and challenging. Historical mistrust, misaligned incentives, and limited awareness of the benefits hinder participation. While private companies can reduce their risks and improve outcomes by joining MAPs, they often require a clear business case and phased, trust-building engagement.

Land for Life and other MAPs across Africa and Asia have responded by co-developing practical strategies—emphasising advocacy, dialogue, and capacity-building—to foster responsible investment and protect community land rights. Despite that, challenges persist, and global-level engagement may offer promising pathways for more effective private sector collaboration in land governance at the national level.

It needs continuous effort to bring Women and other marginalised groups on board: Inclusivity is central to the success and legitimacy of MAPs. Yet, systemic barriers—ranging from cultural norms and institutional exclusion to logistical and financial constraints—continue to marginalise women, persons with disabilities, and grassroots actors and pose challenges to including them in MAPs. Achieving meaningful inclusion requires deliberate, context-specific strategies, such as legal quotas, decentralised structures, dedicated funding, and empowerment through legal literacy and advocacy. It is an ongoing challenge for Land for Life, and continuous efforts such as combining advocacy for structural reforms with grassroots mobilisation and leadership are needed to ensure MAPs support shifting power dynamics and build more equitable, representative platforms for sustainable land governance.

Tools

Tool 8:
The Habits of Collective Leaders

Tool 9:
The Motivation Formula: Keeping People Engaged in
the Process

Tool 10:
Four Core Functions in Process Facilitation of MAPs

Tool 11:
Engaging the Private Sector in Multi-Stakeholder
Partnerships for Land Governance



Tool 8: The Habits of Collective Leaders

Leaders who embrace the concept of collective leadership within a Multi-Actor Platform share certain habits in common. In the graphic below, we have merged observations of outstanding leaders who have been instrumental in the ongoing platforms with some leadership models we have promoted in the Civil Society Academy International. We have tested this exercise in Land for Life, and it is a good self-assessment tool for participants of MAPS. The exercise is straightforward.



Exercise:

1. Define collective leadership and walk the MAP members through the collective leaders' habits. While you explain the leadership habits, you can refer to exceptional leaders or challenges in partnership leadership.
2. Ask the audience the following questions
 - How do you rate yourself in the five habits: Inspire, Advocate, Steer, Intervene and Engage & Support on a scale from 0-9, with zero being inadequate, and nine being exceptional?
 - Reflect on your rating.
3. Ask each participant to share their scoring in groups of 2-3. No larger groups, please.
4. Give the audience two further questions for reflection:
 - How many people in the MAP would you truly rate as being collective leaders?
 - How do you feel about the collective leadership in your MAP?
 - What could be ways to improve the collective leadership?
5. Ask some participants to reflect in the plenary on their findings about their collective leadership habits and the adequacy of collective leadership in the MAP.



Tool 9: The Motivation Formula: Keeping People Engaged in the Process

We've all experienced it: we start a project with great motivation, but over time, our enthusiasm fades or frustration creeps in, often leading to disengagement. Frequent stakeholder changes require time and energy, impacting the initiative's continuity.

So, how can we maintain motivation over the long term? The answer isn't straightforward—if it were, it would be simple to achieve. Sustained motivation requires a deeper understanding of human psychology.

Three primary areas that influence motivation:

1. Professionalism of the MAP: This includes the level of expertise and adherence to best practices. Alongside the seven principles, all the tools we've outlined contribute to this professionalism. When applied effectively, they increase the likelihood of MAP success. Professionalism also requires a high level of awareness, the opposite of ignorance. Consciousness in complex changes means the willingness to understand the whole truly: the context, the barriers to change, the importance of prioritising how people work together, and so on.

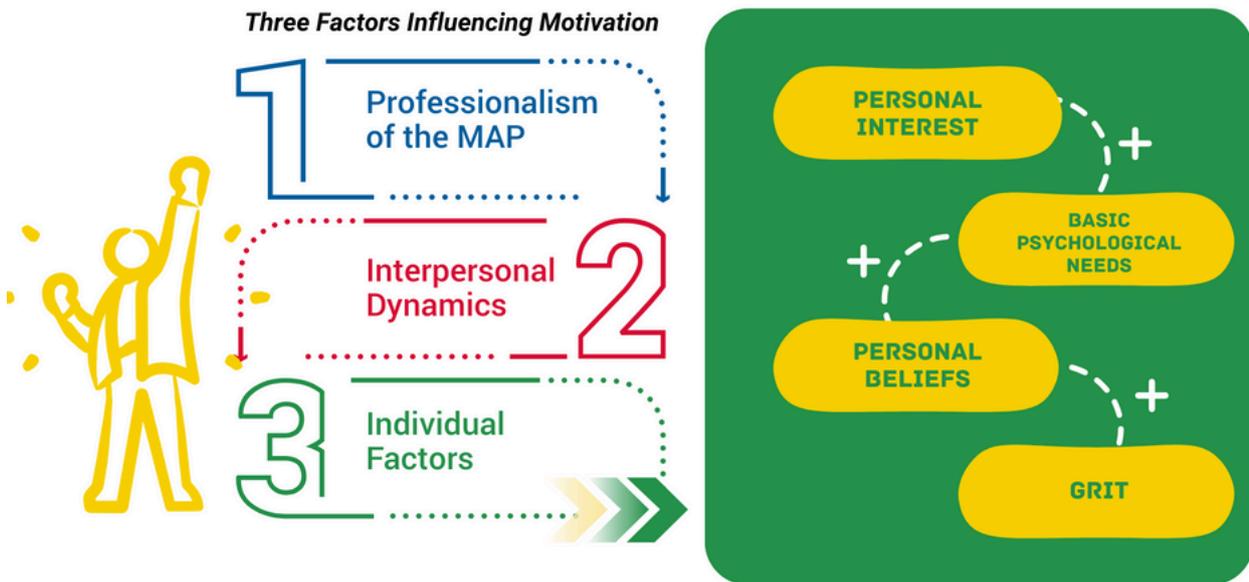
2. Interpersonal Dynamics: The way we interact with one another is essential. Successful MAPs rely on coordinators and key stakeholders who not only master the seven principles and tools but also bring genuine passion and dedication to their work, and especially to the people involved. Their personality and approach—often unconsciously—have a powerful impact, either motivating or demotivating those around them. This is one reason why IDGs (Inner Development Goals) are increasingly central to discussions on MAP success.

Key qualities such as empathy, appreciation, collaborative problem-solving, respect, trust, humility, attentive listening, and co-creation—an ethos that transcends ego—are fundamental for fostering a supportive and positive atmosphere within the MAP. Being a role model can inspire others, but it's essential not to seek admiration or followership. Instead, the goal should be to empower individuals to discover their unique paths. We are not meant to replicate one another; instead, our diversity brings immense beauty, potential, and completeness. Co-creation flourishes when we embrace this diversity, allowing each person's distinct contributions to enrich the collective endeavour.

Engaging with systemic change requires seeing oneself as part of the system that needs transformation, rather than attempting to change others. Those who excel in fostering engagement understand not only that the world must change, but that they must also be willing to change themselves.

3. Individual Factors: Individual factors unique to each play a significant role in motivation. These include *personal interests, basic psychological needs, personal beliefs, and grit* (perseverance + passion). We will focus on these factors and provide a practical exercise to explore them in detail. These ingredients draw inspiration from prominent psychological theories, such as Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory and McClelland's Motivational Needs Theory, as well as the book "Grit" by Angela Duckworth.

FORMULA OF MOTIVATION



Source: Adaption of Self Determination Theory of Deci & Ryan, Theory of Needs by McClelland, Grit by Angela Duckworth

Personal interests:

Personal interests are inherently individual and, unequivocally, cannot be influenced. Period. The reasons driving active participation in a MAP process are as varied as the individuals themselves. Some may be driven by a profound passion for the topic at hand, seeing the MAP as a manifestation of their vision and mission. Others may be motivated by more practical concerns, such as the need to support their families financially or the allure of career advancement. Personal relationships can also play a significant role: I like the team leader and want to be around her. Or I am a curious person and want to have new experiences. Consequently, the pivotal question arises: What benefits await me if I choose to engage in the MAP? How does my involvement serve my interests, and what tangible advantages does it offer?

Basic psychological needs:

To initiate and continue a particular behaviour or activity (e.g., active involvement in the MAP) depends, above all, on the fulfilment of our motivational needs: self-efficacy/achievement, affiliation/relatedness, autonomy, and/or power. These needs are universal and innate. However, some may be more salient than others at certain times and are expressed differently based on time, culture, or experience. Thus, we have all four types of motivation regardless of age, sex, race, or culture.

Self-Efficacy/Achievement: People with a high need for self-efficacy/achievement want to experience that their behaviour and activities have an impact. They like to control the outcome. They have the steady wish to grow. They are motivated by accomplishment in the workplace. They want to get feedback to improve. They engage easily in a MAP as long as the MAP offers space to grow, experience impact, and achieve mastery.

Affiliation/Belongingness: People with a high need for affiliation/belongingness want to interact, be connected to, and experience caring for others. They prefer to spend time creating and maintaining social relationships, enjoy being part of a group, and have a desire to feel loved and accepted. They tend to adhere to the norms of a specific workplace (or MAP) and culture, and typically do not change these norms for fear of rejection. These individuals favour collaboration over competition and prefer situations with low risk or high certainty. They work well in areas based on social interaction. They love to organise social events for the MAP.

Power: People with a high need for power enjoy work and often place a high value on discipline. A person motivated by this need enjoys status recognition, winning arguments, competition, and influencing others. With this motivational type comes a need for personal prestige and a constant need for a better personal status. Stakeholders with a high need for power require a platform to showcase themselves.

Autonomy: Autonomy is the universal urge to be causal agents of one's own life and act in harmony with one's integrated self; however, this does not mean to be independent of others. People with a high need for autonomy often do not like to be overly involved in groups, as this can compromise their autonomy. If the MAP becomes too bureaucratic, with too many rules and committees, these people will withdraw.

People often remain unaware of their personal needs, as many individuals have not contemplated the intricacies of their motivations, such as power, affiliation, achievement, and autonomy. Those driven by a high need for power may ponder whether their involvement in the MAP will enhance their status or provide opportunities for influence. At the same time, individuals seeking affiliation may join in the hope of gaining appreciation and a sense of belonging. Those with a high need for achievement may unconsciously evaluate the MAP's potential to showcase their abilities and foster self-efficacy. At the same time, those prioritising autonomy will scrutinise whether the MAP allows for independent action without undue constraints.

To maximise the effectiveness of the MAP, it's essential to ensure representation of all four needs within the core group. Project leaders, if present, should understand the dominant needs of each member to tailor their approach accordingly. For instance, investing more time with members seeking affiliation rather than autonomy can enhance group cohesion. Organising occasional gatherings or parties may particularly appeal to individuals with a high need for affiliation, fostering a sense of community. Consistently highlighting the initiative's successes can fuel the motivation of those seeking self-efficacy, reinforcing their belief in the project's impact and propelling them forward. There is much more to do. Ongoing discussions within the core group are crucial for effectively identifying and addressing evolving needs and challenges.

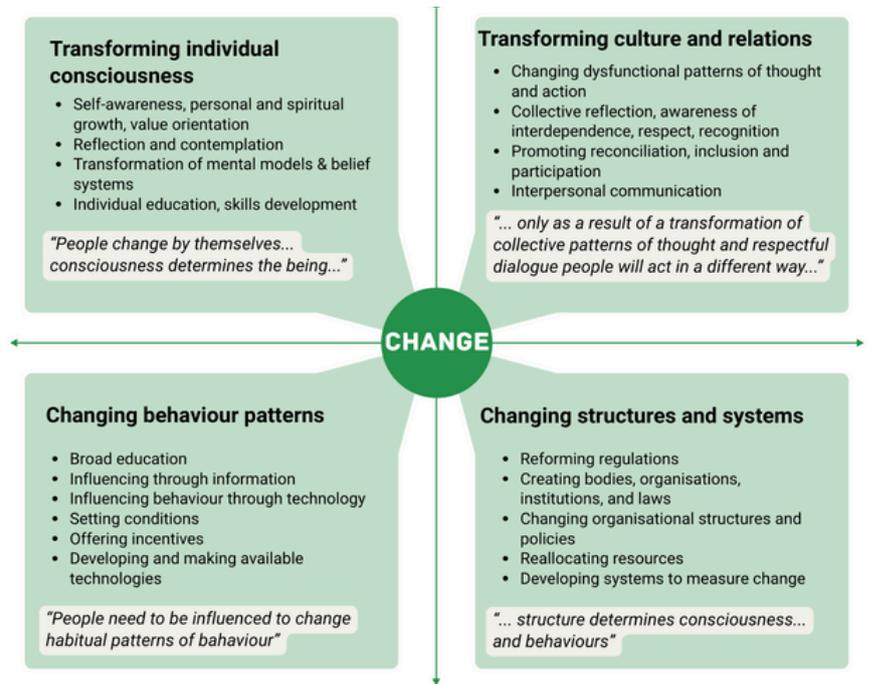
Personal beliefs on how change happens:

Many of us aspire for positive change, driven by a desire to leave a better world for future generations, rectify injustices, or safeguard what we hold dear. However, while we frequently discuss the notion of change, how much do we truly understand about its mechanisms?

There often exists a disparity between an individual's beliefs about how change occurs and the underlying model of change embraced by a particular professional intervention strategy. Some individuals staunchly believe that change unfolds at a deeply personal level through insights, while others contend that clear structures, rules, and laws are indispensable for lasting change to occur.

To navigate this complexity and foster a comprehensive understanding of change, the Four Quadrants of Change (4Q) framework, developed by Ken Wilber, proves invaluable. This framework enables you and your team members to identify, acknowledge, and address the diverse dimensions of change, while also providing a roadmap for implementing four distinct strategies for catalysing change in human interactions.

Similarly, to addressing basic psychological needs, it's evident that all four dimensions of change should be considered. Due to our cultural background, upbringing, education, and experiences, we tend to gravitate towards one dimension over others. We often believe that this dimension holds the key to initiating and driving change, and we may excel in it. This diversity of strengths is a positive attribute. When each individual can actively contribute and shape their preferred dimension within the partnership, experiencing the resulting effects, it fosters deep motivation.



Source: Adaptation of Ken Wilber (4 quadrants of change)

Grit:

Grit is the sum of perseverance and passion. People are born with different levels of perseverance. Perseverance depends mainly on genes. The culture we are born in, parenting, education and experiences in schools shape perseverance and passion during childhood and adolescence. Some individuals demonstrate remarkable resilience and determination, persisting in the face of adversity to achieve their goals, while others may be more prone to giving up quickly. Some tests can be used to determine how persistent you are quickly. But you often know it yourself. In our "Personal Change Concept", we have described exercises that everyone can use to work on their perseverance. In other words, this factor is highly individualised.

Exercise: Step by Step

Step 1: Form 3 groups that work on one of the three individual factors of motivation. Each group gets a different question:

- **Group A:** What can we do to better understand the personal interests of the key stakeholders in the MAP?
 - For a warm-up, each group member will share their interest. Be HONEST! Don't judge!
- **Group B:** What can you do to nurture the four different basic psychological needs of all the stakeholders in the MAP?
 - For a warm-up, each group member will assess themselves. What is your dominant basic psychological need?
- **Group C:** What can you do to find stakeholders with a high level of grit and to nurture grit during the MAP process?
 - For a warm-up, each group member can complete the grit assessment and share their results. (<https://angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale/>)

Step 2: Presentation of the ideas in plenum with feedforward and decision on which ideas the MAP will implement!

Step 3: Integrate ideas and feedforward.

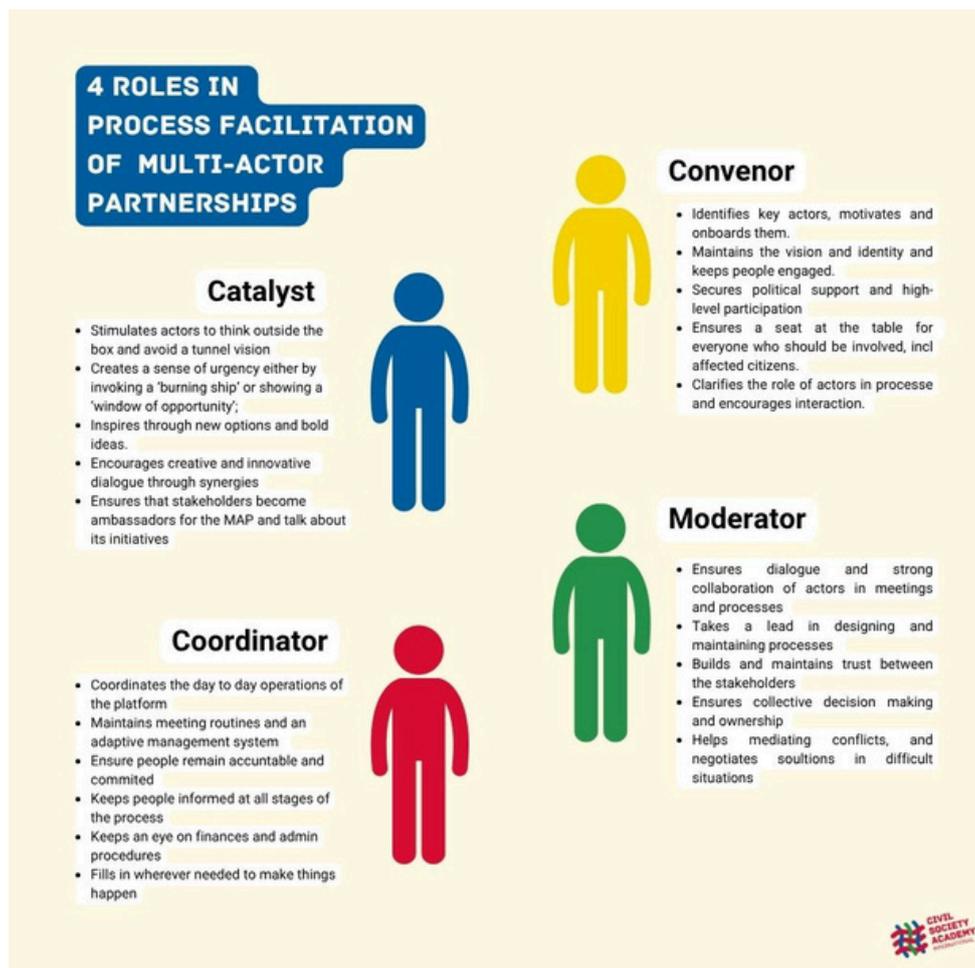


Tool 10: Four Core Functions in Process Facilitation of MAPs

One of the compelling concepts in the MSP guide is their adaptation of the categorisation of facilitation roles from Sørensen and Torfing (2013). The three roles are:

- **The convenor** brings actors on board,
- **The catalyst** ensures a sense of urgency and outside-the-box thinking, and
- **The moderator** ensures effective participation and collaboration.

It is easy to see the concept's relevance when discussing the successes or challenges of Land for Life in the intervention countries. The case study on Sierra Leone (See Case Study 2), for instance, illustrates how a catalyst with a strong sense of urgency and a sense of political opportunities can be critical in steering the MAP to become active at the right points in time, and with promising interventions. While in Ethiopia, when starting the MAP, we had a very strong convenor, a former Minister for Land Administration who was now leading an NGO. He knew many actors in the ecosystem, was widely respected, and used his influence to bring in new talent. In contrast, when he became less available, the MAP slowed down due to his assignment into a new role, and other critical players were also less engaged. In Liberia, the MAP has a skilled moderator who effectively engages with affected groups and facilitates dialogue processes, which significantly contributes to the successes in the country's National Land Conferences.



Source: Adaptation of Herman Brouwer et al (2015) and Sørensen and Torfing (2013)

In our adaptation of Sørensen and Torfing, we have included the coordinator as one of the key roles in successful process facilitation. We believe that maintaining the process, adapting it to the context, and guiding it towards tangible outcomes requires effective coordination. This role emphasises the day-to-day coordination of activities, adaptive management, and leadership functions in building and maintaining a well-performing platform.

In Land for Life, there is a full-time coordinator in each country. The assigned coordinator also contributes to the other roles, such as moderator or catalyst, and other leaders participate in the coordination role. This is the essence of collective leadership.

If we examine the four roles, we can evaluate ourselves. For instance, the author of this article identifies his strengths and inclinations more in the catalyst and moderator roles, rather than in the other two roles. Likewise, everyone has inclinations. We can assess the MAP itself to determine if each role is fulfilled well and by whom, or if it is not fulfilled. If a critical role, for instance, the convenor, is not sufficiently fulfilled, getting influential people onto the platform may become quite challenging. If we don't have catalysts, the platform may languish and drag on without anyone raising an alarm.

A well-oiled MAP would have all four roles fulfilled to an appropriate degree.

Exercise:

- ***Step 1:*** *Introduce the concept of the four roles in process facilitation. Talk about the observations you have made in different MAPs, and about people you know who fulfil one or the other role well.*
- ***Step 2:*** *Ask the participants to reflect on the following three questions quietly:*
 - *Which of the roles are you more inclined towards, and are you good at?*
 - *Which roles are well fulfilled, by whom, in your MAP, and which are missing?*
 - *If specific roles are not fulfilled well, what are the effects on the MAP?*
- ***Step 3:*** *Share the findings in small groups of 3 people.*
- ***Step 4:*** *Reflect on the insights from the exercise in the plenary.*



Tool 11: Engaging the Private Sector in Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Land Governance

Establishing a Multi-Actor Partnership (MAP) means bringing all relevant stakeholders to the table, including the private sector. In the context of land governance, particularly in countries participating in the Land for Life program, private sector engagement is not only relevant but also essential. However, consistently engaging private companies has proven challenging across many countries.

Historical mistrust between sectors—especially civil society actors and businesses—often hinders willingness to participate. For companies, the immediate benefits of joining a MAP are not always as visible or tangible as they are for civil society actors. Even when local-level company representatives are willing to engage, decisions can be blocked by faraway corporate leadership, sometimes on a different continent.

Nonetheless, assessments (e.g. [World Bank](#), [USAID](#)) indicate that engaging in MAPs can present a valid business case for the private sector. Participation can reduce risks and costs linked to land conflicts, grievance processes, and underutilised disputed land. Despite this, awareness of these benefits is often low. Past experiences with adversarial advocacy tactics, such as blame and shame campaigns, also contribute to companies' hesitation.

The Land Collaborative Learning Cycle on Private Sector Engagement

The Land for Life MAPs are not alone in facing these challenges. A learning needs assessment conducted by the Land Collaborative, a community of practice of Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (MAPs) in the land sector, found that many MAPs (also referred to as Multi-Stakeholder Platforms, or MSPs) across Africa and Asia encounter similar barriers to private sector engagement. In response, the Land Collaborative organised a virtual learning cycle on engaging the private sector and Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI). Many MAPs across Africa and Asia participated, including Land for Life. The learning cycle included the joint development of a guidance note and country-level strategies.

The [guidance note](#) provides practical strategies for MSPs to engage the private sector in a way that supports responsible, people-centred land governance. As pressure on land intensifies and investment landscapes become increasingly complex, MSP practitioners must navigate disputes, regulatory gaps, and power imbalances. The guide offers structured approaches, actionable strategies, and key tools to help practitioners engage companies effectively while protecting community rights.

[A Guide on How to Engage the Private Sector](#)

A critical first step is understanding the private sector's role, motivations, and challenges in agricultural investment. MSPs should conduct thorough situation analyses: mapping stakeholders, evaluating the regulatory context, and identifying risks and opportunities. The guide includes conceptual frameworks to support analysis of land governance systems, investment value chains, and entry points for influencing corporate behaviour.

Equally important is understanding the business logic that drives decisions in the private sector. Companies are unlikely to engage in a partnership without a clear benefit to be gained. Rather than resisting this reality, it is more productive to embrace it, highlighting how participation in a MAP can reduce revenue risks from land disputes, enhance the social license to operate, or improve market access through compliance with international standards.

Instead of immediately inviting private actors to become formal MAP members, a phased approach has proven more effective. Engaging companies in specific activities, such as awareness-raising events or joint learning initiatives, can help build trust over time, eventually leading to more sustained collaboration. This gradual process also helps mitigate power imbalances. Creating neutral secretariats, avoiding financial dependence on private sector funding for the strategic actions, and adopting a step-by-step engagement strategy can prevent undue influence by powerful actors.

To engage companies, MSPs can adopt three complementary approaches:

Advocacy – MSPs can influence policy by working with governments to push for regulatory reforms and hold companies accountable through legal mechanisms. Tools like policy briefs, legal actions, and investor campaigns can support efforts to promote equitable land governance.

Collaborative Social Learning – Facilitating dialogue among communities, investors, and public officials is essential. MSPs can use stakeholder forums, learning labs, and field visits to create safe spaces for mutual understanding and problem-solving. These platforms enable companies to grasp community concerns while building trust and accountability.

Capacity Strengthening – Many businesses, especially domestic investors, lack awareness of RAI principles. MSPs can provide training programs, toolkits, and knowledge-sharing platforms to educate companies on ethical investment, land rights, and sustainable business models. Strengthening community capacity is equally critical to ensure their voices are heard in negotiations and decision-making.

Ultimately, the guide emphasises the importance of combining advocacy, dialogue, and capacity-building to influence corporate behaviour and improve land governance. With the right policy tools, learning mechanisms, and engagement strategies, MSPs can protect community land rights and foster responsible investment practices.

All related resources—including a context analysis diagnostic tool, the comprehensive guidance note, a social learning toolkit, and strategic planning tools—are available online: [Guide: Engaging the private sector in responsible agricultural investments - ILC Learning Hub](#).

The Land for Life Experience

Developing country-level strategies has enabled a more targeted and strategic approach to private sector engagement in the Land for Life initiative. However, this has not fully addressed the systemic and contextual challenges.

For example, when the Liberian MAP publicly launched its Private Sector Engagement Strategy, only one company attended the event, and it was already involved in the MAP. Often, companies in Liberia don't respond to civil society requests. It illustrates the persistent difficulties of attracting new private sector partners.

As highlighted in the section on leveraging international agendas and networks, engaging international companies at the global level to build influence at the national level remains an underutilised but potentially impactful strategy.

Case Studies

Case Study 6:
MAP Inclusivity in Liberia and Sierra Leone



Case Study 6: MAP Inclusivity in Liberia and Sierra Leone

Why Inclusivity Matters

Inclusivity lies at the heart of the Multi-Actor Partnership (MAP) approach. For sustainable land governance, it is essential that all relevant stakeholders—especially those traditionally excluded—have a seat at the decision-making table. This means proactively including women, persons with disabilities, grassroots communities, and marginalised groups whose voices are often unheard in land-related negotiations and planning. Without inclusivity, land governance risks reinforcing existing inequalities and overlooking local knowledge. Inclusive MAPs foster legitimacy, ownership, and long-term success by ensuring that land policies and practices reflect the perspectives of all stakeholders.

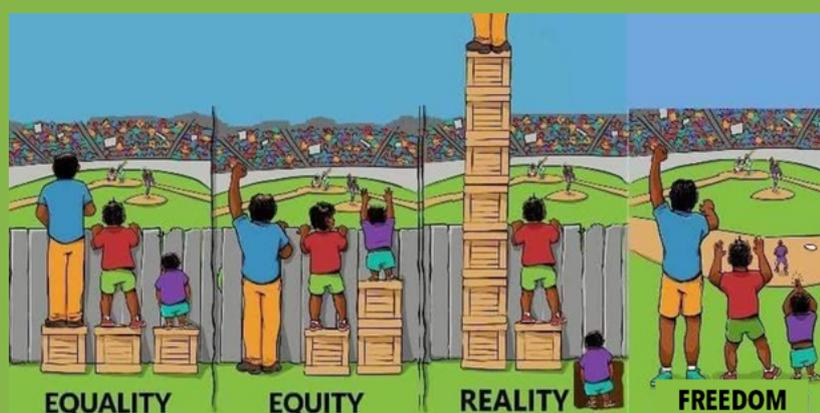
The Challenge: Barriers to Inclusivity

While inclusivity is a cornerstone of effective MAPs, its realisation remains challenged by a range of systemic barriers. Cultural and societal norms often inhibit marginalised groups, such as women, from speaking freely or being heard in formal decision-making settings. Deeply rooted gender roles and a lack of confidence, combined with the reluctance of male counterparts to engage with women's perspectives, create environments where female voices remain marginalised.

Institutional and structural factors further entrench exclusion. MAP participation is frequently tied to institutional membership and formal roles or positions of authority, in which women and other marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities and youth, are systematically underrepresented. In many customary systems, women are legally or traditionally barred from leadership and land ownership, making inclusion impossible without proactive measures.

Additionally, economic and logistical constraints limit inclusive participation. Many grassroots actors live far from centralised decision-making venues and face prohibitive travel costs. Accessibility barriers, such as venues unsuitable for people with disabilities, further restrict engagement.

These challenges are deeply ingrained in social, political, and economic structures and vary according to context. Nevertheless, they must be deliberately addressed during the planning and implementation of MAPs to ensure that these platforms truly reflect and serve all stakeholders. Not only must the respective groups be included, but they also need to be equipped with the relevant resources to engage in the processes meaningfully (Equity). Ideally, and for long-term effects, the mentioned barriers withholding them from decision-making processes should be removed on a systemic level (Liberation).



Source:
[That Equality Image](#)
- based on the work of Craig Froehle

Strategies to Address Inclusivity

Due to those reasons, inclusivity, especially regarding women and grassroots actors, has been a constant challenge in the Land for Life experience. Creating truly inclusive Multi-Actor Partnerships requires deliberate, context-sensitive strategies. There are some immediate measures that support inclusivity, which LfL has built into its implementation structure. This includes raising awareness and building capacity through gender-sensitive training to get into dialogue on traditional norms and empower women and men to participate more equitably. Furthermore, dedicated funding is essential to support the meaningful involvement of grassroots and marginalised actors by covering travel and logistical needs. Establishing decentralised MAP structures ensured that decision-making is brought closer to local communities, while institutional guarantees, such as legal quotas, create formal mechanisms to secure the presence and voice of women and vulnerable groups within governance processes. Examples from Liberia and Sierra Leone show how country teams tackled the challenges.

Impact

Sierra Leone: Radical Inclusion: Achieving 35% women's participation in DMSPs

In Sierra Leone, the challenge of including women in Multi-Actor Partnerships (MAPs) stemmed primarily from entrenched customary norms. Over 95% of the land is governed by customary law, which has traditionally excluded women from land ownership and decision-making. Women were rarely consulted in land transactions, often overshadowed by male family members and chiefs. Moreover, MAP representation based on institutional or formal roles further marginalised women, who hold fewer public and leadership positions due to lower levels of education and restrictive customary laws.

To overcome these challenges and reach 35% women's participation across District Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (DMSPs), a set of interlinked strategies was employed:

1. Radical Inclusion Independent of Institutional Membership

Recognising that status-based selection would continue to exclude women, the DMSPs decided to reserve seats for women that are not tied to institutional representation. This can include women who assume a leading social role in their communities or have had prior exposure to land-related issues. In addition, Sierra Leone's Customary Land Rights Act (2022) mandated a minimum of 30% women's representation in land governance structures at the community and chiefdom levels. This legal guarantee created a formal entry point for women, independent of traditional or institutional status.

2. Advocacy and Empowerment Through Land Rights

The Land for Life Initiative actively supported over 40 communities by promoting women's land rights and training women in legal literacy. This empowered women to claim family land, sometimes after decades, demonstrating that legal awareness can lead to practical change. The community initiative also paved the way for including more women and other vulnerable groups (like persons with disabilities) directly in DMSP structures, ensuring their voices influenced land decisions and community disputes.



Photo: Land for Life Sierra Leone - VGGT meeting in Freetown with key stakeholders



Photo: Land for Life Sierra Leone - Woman speaking up on inclusion

3. Women Champions to Mobilise and Shift Attitudes

Women leaders, such as Zainab Sheriff in Kenema, a media gender activist, and Amie Kemokai, a disabled member of the DMSP in Pujehun, became key advocates. Through media outreach and community organising, they inspired more women to join platforms and shifted male perceptions of women's or disabled people's roles in governance. These champions helped normalise the presence and leadership of marginalised groups within traditionally dominated spaces, including the DMSPs. Their voices were amplified by communication campaigns within and outside the MAP.

Today, 35% of DMSP members are women, marking a significant shift from previous exclusion. It highlights how legal reform, targeted advocacy, and grassroots leadership can work together to dismantle deeply rooted gender barriers in customary land governance and MAP representation.

Key Success Factors and Lesson Learned

Liberia: Enhancing Women's Participation in Liberia's Multi-Actor Platform (MAP) through Collaboration and Resource Sharing

In Liberia, women's participation in the Multi-Actor Platform (MAP) was initially constrained by limited outreach to decentralised levels, a lack of community representation, and insufficient funding for engagement at the grassroots level. As a result, rural women and community-based organisations (CBOs) were underrepresented, and their concerns were not reflected in national-level discussions, rendering the MAP process non-inclusive and disconnected from local realities.

To address these barriers, platform members adopted a collaborative and resource-pooling approach. A pivotal strategy was the co-organisation of the third National Rural Women Land Conference, which brought together over 100 women and CSO representatives to identify priorities and shape a roadmap for inclusive land governance. Further, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between national and international MAP members facilitated joint funding and technical support for scaling decentralised MAP structures and processes. This partnership enabled district-level women's land initiatives (such as WOCI in Bomi county) to build additional decentralised MAP structures. It also helped to institutionalise community participation in the MAP's national Steering Committee. Funds for these activities were redirected to local MAP members at the grassroots level, enabling the above-mentioned processes and shifting resources and power within the MAP to the grassroots level.

This case illustrates the complex challenges MAPs encounter in fostering inclusive processes. By pooling resources and decentralising both decision-making authority and funding, it became possible to strengthen inclusive leadership at national and subnational levels. This coordinated approach also enhanced shared ownership among stakeholders, diversified funding sources, and supported the long-term sustainability of decentralised engagement.

Principle 6:
Embrace Adaptive
Management

“

You have to be fast on your feet and adaptive, or else a strategy is useless.

Charles de Gaulle

Why is adaptive management critical?

Adaptive management is a structured and iterative process of robust decision-making in the face of uncertainty, aiming to reduce uncertainty over time through system monitoring. The management process is well described with the German term "auf Sicht fahren" (translated as "driving by sight"), which means our driving is guided by what we can see.

Management focuses on the shorter term while keeping the larger process and the goal or vision in mind. The adaptive management process requires extensive coordination and feedback loops, replanning and strategising, experimentation, and learning—something many hands-on NGO managers or civil servants need to get used to.

Why adaptive? Because it is complex!

SIMPLE - COMPLICATED - COMPLEX

COMPLICATED INTERVENTIONS

Examples:
"Sending a rocket to the moon"
"Connecting small scale producers to markets"

Cause-Effect
There are many variables. The relationship between cause and effect requires analysis and expertise. If well analysed and planned, we have a good probability that we predict the effects of our actions.

How to manage a complicated interventions?

- Use of Management by Objective, and careful planning.
- Logframes, and periodic reviews

SIMPLE INTERVENTIONS

Examples:
"Baking a cake"
"Building a small water supply system"

Cause-Effect
The relationship between cause and effect is simple, and obvious to everyone. We can easily foresee the effects of our action.

How to manage a simple intervention?

- Clear command chain of hierarchy is usually used
- Recipes, blueprints or best practice provide guidance for success

COMPLEX INTERVENTIONS

Examples:
"Raising a child"
"Improving land rights"

Cause-Effect
There are too many variables and interests. The relationship between cause and effect can only be perceived in retrospect (though we try to anticipate)

How to manage a complex intervention?

- Use of adaptive management, which is responsive to changes
- Theory of Change, and regular reflection if our intervention move us into the right direction

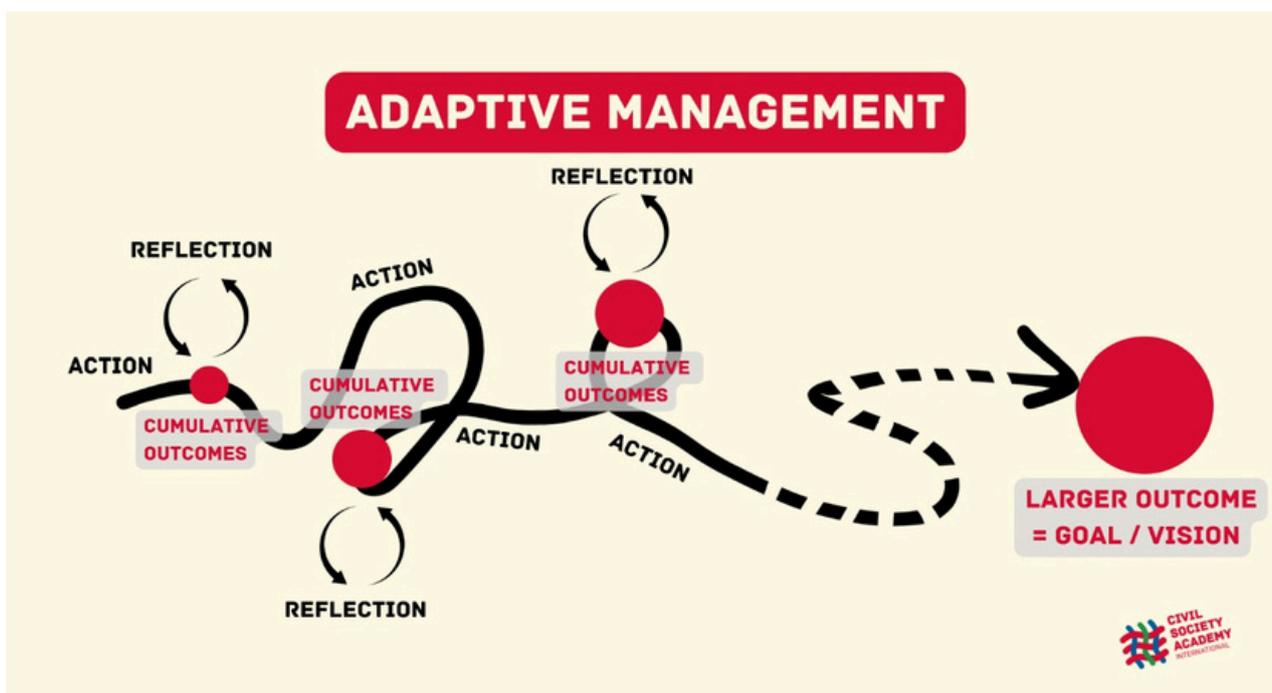
Reference: Herman Brouwer et al, 2015: The MSP Guide

It is worth reiterating the differences between simple, complicated, and complex interventions here. Complex interventions work in a context where we cannot predict the outcomes of our actions with certainty, because there are too many variables and conflicting interests. Most interventions that advocate for rights are complex, and so are the Land for Life MAPs. When we plan an action, such as a policy dialogue, it is usually impossible to foresee whether our dialogue will be successful. We will do our best to understand the context and the conflicting interests, and try to bring them under our control, but still there is so much that we can't control. A government breakdown, foreign interference, or a powerful investor, we had not reckoned with. All such events can change the chain of events. And this is normal. It is why we need to be adaptive.

An example of adaptive management is the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. In the 2014 movie *Selma*, we can see adaptive management in action. After each strike, protest, or small step forward, the movement's leadership, led by Martin Luther King, reflects on how it went, what other stakeholders might do next, and which new tactics can be applied now. However, despite the replanning and counteraction, MLK did not lose sight of his vision: building a powerful civil rights movement and achieving equal rights.

The Adaptive Management Process

The graphic below illustrates how adaptive management practices work. We act and achieve a small outcome, then reflect and replan, and then act again, achieving a cumulative outcome (the previous outcome plus the current one), and so on. There are many twists and turns, which visualise a new context, but also our imperfect planning. Then we reflect, learn and use another tactic. However, the large outcome we work towards remains the same, for instance, in the civil rights movement, equal rights for the black community, or in Land for Life, state accountability and access to land rights for vulnerable people. Apart from our vision, our path is also guided by our principles and overall strategies, for instance, non-violence and collaborative action.



In Land for Life, we have adopted the concept of adaptive management and applied various methods commonly associated with adaptive management, including reflection cycles, outcome harvesting, outcome mapping, and developing and monitoring a theory of change. Despite using those tools, we must concede that it has been challenging to introduce adaptive management. On most platforms, it is only partly adapted and mixed with more traditional management approaches.

We learned that the most significant barriers to embracing adaptive management are views and practices based on personal organisational experiences. For instance, many actors, especially those from hierarchical organisations, emphasise defining structures because one's place in the structure is more critical in hierarchical systems. In contrast, structures emerge more gradually in adaptive management based on the learnings and emerging needs. Such uncertainties in the structure make some people uncomfortable. They can become persistent barriers to adaptive management, as they continue to divert conversations from dialogue and advocacy work towards defining roles and structures.

Likewise, hands-on managers often focus on “doing” and less on analysing, learning, and re-planning. However, in adaptive management, more time is needed for regular reflection exercises. More traditional managers might see this as wasteful, so they don't do it.

If we want to adopt adaptive management, we must be aware of these barriers and raise awareness among MAP members and our colleagues about the need for different management systems for various interventions. The discussion around simple, complicated and complex interventions is, in our experience, a good entry point for such discussions.



The project frame improved over the years, but is still not flexible enough: The Land for Life project framework has evolved over the years, and Welthungerhilfe is now in the third funding round of the German Ministry for Development and Economic Cooperation (BMZ). Despite improvements, barriers to fully implementing adaptive management remain: a lengthy log-frame and a detailed budget that are too rigid, and procurement rules that hinder subcontracting local organisations, which are not donor-mandated partners, from running processes on a decentralised level.

As a result, some secretariats of platforms handled all the money and implemented activities that local partners could have handled more effectively. This hindered ownership and collective leadership, as it was not possible to distribute responsibilities, such as running a public hearing or conducting a smaller study, among MAP members.

Approachable staff of Welthungerhilfe has helped in moderating changes: A significant learning is that good communication between Welthungerhilfe and the MAPs was instrumental in amending activities, budgets, and even larger changes. In both Burkina Faso and Ethiopia, the secretariats have been registered as separate organisations, and partnership projects have been transferred to these new organisations. These are pretty unusual project changes for both Welthungerhilfe and the BMZ.

However, internal cultural barriers within Welthungerhilfe, hosts of secretariats, or the MAPs were also observed: As mentioned above, people usually come with specific cultures and expectations on how projects should be managed. In Welthungerhilfe, for instance, Country Offices are often accustomed to traditional project management and sometimes hinder interventions with excessive compliance and rules. So, even if the donor grants us exceptions or flexibility, there is a need for the International Coordination Office to guide Country offices on the specific nature of the intervention.

Regular, well-prepared reflection meetings are at the centre of adaptive management. Land for Life Sierra Leone, for instance, has successfully implemented a highly adaptive system, featuring quarterly reflection and planning meetings with all partners and transparent decision-making processes for planning and fund disbursement. An internal communication platform and annual strategy meetings complement the quarterly meetings.

A key learning point from the initiative is that each MAP must develop its adaptive management system, including routines and an effective internal communication system.

If things are in motion, we need to be alert and proactive: There are times when each of us needs to be alert to the contextual changes, for instance, a new opportunity to influence legislation, or to bring a new law finally over the finishing line. Pro-activeness or having a sense of urgency is a personal habit. In Land for Life, we can see that the main successes were based on people who had a good grasp of the context and were ready to step out of their comfort zone when opportunities arose.

In essence, everyone is part of the adaptive management process. The more people who are proactive and feel the urgency to respond to changes, the more likely we will be successful.

Adaptive management requires a high-capacity team: Adaptive management and collective leadership have been regular topics in our multi-country meetings and were also underpinned by training activities and facilitated processes. However, in some countries, adaptive management practice is still not regularised. Some facilitators fell back into management habits they were familiar with from other organisations, which were also more familiar to other secretariat members and MAP stakeholders.

Retrospectively, we should have placed more emphasis on adaptive management, as well as training and mentoring the teams to reflect on their practices and further develop the systems.

Outcome-harvesting as a tool is great, but to be effective, it must be combined with other analyses. In our classification from simple to complex, we would position outcome harvesting as one of the tools in complex interventions and adaptive management. We have widely promoted it and described it in one of the tools listed below. It is a good tool for monitoring the intervention and assessing the Theory of Change.

Nevertheless, there is also a word of caution: (1) from the experiences in Land for Life, Outcome Harvesting has a positive bias as it merely looks at recognised outcomes of the intervention, and widely leaves out possible learnings from unsuccessful activities; (2) it is not a golden bullet, but it needs to be combined with other analysis, such as actor mapping, review of policy processes, a MAP assessment or a risk analysis; (3) regularising outcome harvesting requires method expertise and analytical capacities – just like other elements of adaptive management.

Tools

Tool 12:
Assessment of your Adaptive
Management Practice

Tool 13:
Proposed Meeting Schedules

Tool 14:
Top Tools, Games and Strategies for
Adaptive Management



Tool 12: Assessment of your Adaptive Management Practice

Just like other management practices, adaptive management is not a system that can be implemented in isolation. It also requires a particular mindset from those participating in management, as well as a flexible framework that allows the team to be adaptive.

To assess how adaptive your team is, we are looking at those three spheres:

- A culture in the team and the organisation which emphasises self-management, collaboration, collective leadership, and forward thinking. A culture where people are proactive and fast on their feet.
- A flexibility in the framework, in our case mostly given through the intervention design, or a strategy. The framework should provide the team with space to breathe and react to changes, both in terms of budget and the intervention plan.
- At the centre, the actual system, with regularised meetings and communications to collectively analyse the context, reflect, learn and adapt the action to evolving risks and opportunities.

In our experience, most organisations in the development sector are medium adaptive, as this reflects the more traditional project management approach, with annual reviews and learning meetings, and few amendments to the project frame being necessary in a typical context. However, there are also some which are highly adaptive. These are often exceptional advocacy organisations or networks which use adaptive management to navigate a complex environment. Or innovative organisations, which emphasise user feedback and learning to develop new approaches or products.

DO YOU PRACTICE ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT?			
	Not adaptive	Medium Adaptive	Highly Adaptive
Culture of adaptive management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low trust in the team • Little or no challenging each other • Directive leadership or indifference by the leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people are self-managed, others less • Some debate and challenging of leaders • Rather hierarchical, with decisions limited to a few 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly self-managed staff who trust each other • Culture of collaboration • Collective leadership and forward thinking
Purposive Learning and Adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No systematic learning • No or very basic context or risk analysis • Adaptation limited to activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ad hoc context and risk analysis • Periodic learning i.e. annually • Adaptation are reactive and within narrow limits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular context and risk analysis • Continuous reflection and learning in the team • Highly responsive or anticipatory
Flexibility in intervention design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design focuses on activities • No flexibility in adjusting plans and allocating resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured intervention design with limited flexibility • Little contingencies to accommodate changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible design focusing on outcomes rather than activities • Planned contingencies for risks and unforeseen changes

Adaptation of - DT Global: Guidance Note: Practical Introduction to Adaptive Management



Exercise:

Ask the participants to assess the following questions individually and make notes:

- *How adaptive is the organisation's work for (not necessarily the MAP)?*
- *How adaptive is the Multi-Actor Partnership?*

Emphasise to the participants that they should not exaggerate their rate. Be honest with yourself.

- Ask the participants to reflect on their assessment with their neighbours in groups of 2-3 people.
- Add the question: Are you satisfied with the adaptive management of the MAP, and how could it be further improved?
- Collect some insights and conclusions from the group in the plenary.



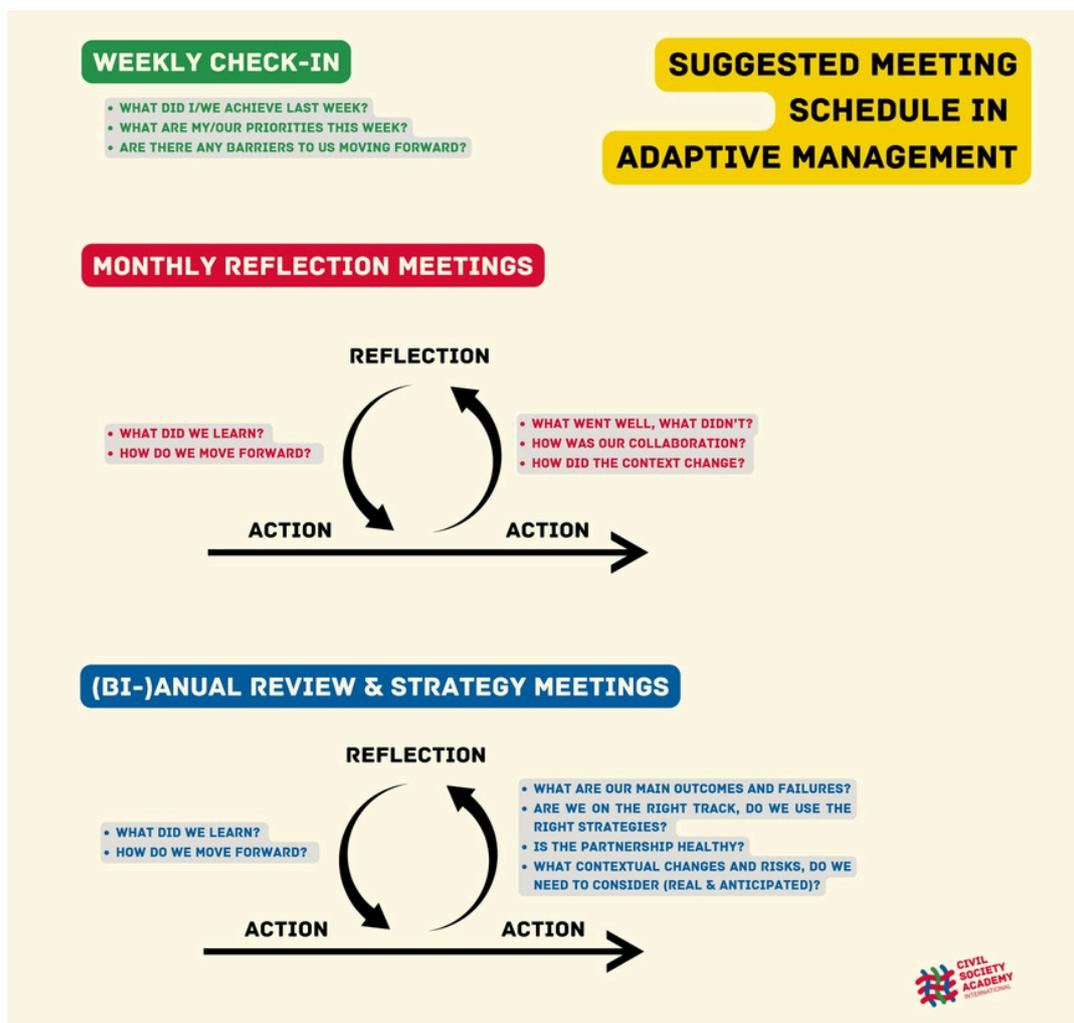
Tool 13: Proposed meeting schedules

Meetings are the central part of any management process. If conducted well and with a clear purpose, meetings can accelerate processes and foster great collaboration within the team.

Here is a proposed meeting schedule for an adaptive management system with:

- weekly check-ins for information sharing,
- monthly reflection meetings that focus on tactical considerations, efficiency and collaboration, and
- bi-annual meetings that zoom out and look at the larger picture, and ask the big questions on effectiveness, strategy and larger contextual changes.

This separation in meetings with different objectives is common in many organisations, and some have developed their meetings over decades. At the Civil Society Academy, we follow the holacracy system, which includes tactical, governance, and strategy meetings. Other teams follow the Agile Scrum processes, which include stand-ups, Scrum meetings, and strategy meetings. For advocacy processes, we have developed the following schedule.



Please note: This schedule applies to circumstances where policy and contextual processes operate at a normal pace. If the context is very dynamic, other schedules and ad-hoc meetings may also be necessary to be highly responsive.

Exercise:

- *Introduce the proposed meeting schedule*
- *Ask the participants to reflect individually on the following two questions:*
 - *How effective are the meetings in your MAP, and do they follow any specific system?*
 - *Are there aspects of the suggested schedule that you can use in your initiative? Why?*
- *Please share your insights in groups of 2-3.*
- *Ask a few groups to share in the plenary.*



Tool 14: Top Tools, Games and Strategies for Adaptive Management

Element	Tool, Game, Strategy	Purpose
Culture of Adaptive Management	Onboarding people who embrace an adaptive culture. Here is an article on agile hiring	<i>Onboard people who bring behaviours and values corresponding to an adaptive management culture. This can accelerate your transition.</i>
	Culture Cards This link is to the CSA International Website.	<i>To understand your culture and the culture of your team interactively. The cards are based on the concept of Spiral Dynamics (Beck and Cowan)</i>
	Feed forward	<i>Feedforward is a philosophy of learning and positively giving suggestions. It can be used after presentations and in one-on-one conversations.</i>
	Check-in and Checkout exercises tcheck.in , https://www.dialog.org.in/	<i>These are cards and questions designed to help you open up in the group and remain non-judgmental.</i>
	Games: Paper plane game , The ballpoint game , Calculator	<i>To improve adaptiveness or agility in the team, and in a playful way. These games are great for Team workshops.</i>
Culture of Adaptive Management	Meeting schedule with Reflection Cycles – Tool 13 is described above	<i>Regularise a system of information sharing, learning, and re-planning</i>
	MAP maturity assessment: see Tool 5 in this toolbox	<i>Analyse how mature your MAP is, with 16 statements that include your partnership's culture, impact, resource mobilisation and purpose.</i>
	SCRUM framework	<i>Please be inspired by the most widely used agile project management system, which is now employed by millions of teams, including businesses, social enterprises, and non-governmental organisations.</i>
	Kanban board	<i>A kanban board is a great way to organise and follow up on your weekly or monthly activities. There are many software options to use Kanban, but you can also use a pinboard or a whiteboard.</i>
	Outcome harvesting This link is to the CSA International Website.	<i>This is a valuable tool for identifying and narrating the key outcomes of the intervention and learning from them. In Land for Life, Outcome Harvesting has been one of the primary monitoring tools.</i>
	Regular context analysis and target group feedback – Incl. Stakeholder Analysis	<i>Context analysis and target group feedback should be collected regularly, according to the parameters in principle 2. That analysis should be reflected in the adaptive management meetings, see also tool 13.</i>
Flexibility in Intervention Design	Theory of Change	<i>A ToC is a framework used to understand and explain how a program or intervention is expected to lead to desired outcomes and impact. It is more flexible than the log-frame in terms of how it can be visualised, how it is used, and how it can be amended.</i>
	Outcome Mapping This link is to the CSA International Website.	<i>Outcome mapping is a participatory planning, monitoring, and evaluation method that focuses on behaviour change as the most helpful result to monitor, providing a set of tools for development initiatives to map the system they are working in and agree on whose behaviour needs to change and how.</i>
	Risk Assessment and Contingency Planning	<i>This includes identifying risks, their probability, severity, and planning for mitigation and contingencies. In flexible intervention designs, contingencies in terms of funding and flexibility in use should be significant, and changes to the plans should be easily manoeuvred.</i>

Case Studies

Case Study 7:
Adaptive Management in Practice: Burkina Faso
PMAF Case



Case Study 7:

Adaptive Management in Practice: Burkina Faso PMAF Case

Background

The Plateforme Nationale Multi-Acteurs sur le Foncier (PMAF) was established in 2019 as part of the Land for Life initiative to address critical challenges in land governance in Burkina Faso. The platform was created in response to the absence of a coordinated framework to address issues such as food insecurity and insecure land tenure, particularly in rural areas where agriculture is the primary livelihood. PMAF brings together government ministries, civil society organisations, traditional authorities, private sector actors, and research institutions to foster inclusive dialogue and collaborative action on land governance.

Burkina Faso's land governance system is complex, combining customary and statutory legal frameworks. Despite laws such as the 2009 Rural Land Tenure Law (Law 034-2009/AN) and the 2012 Agrarian and Land Reorganisation Law (RAF), implementation has been weak due to institutional capacity gaps, lack of transparency, and conflicts between traditional authorities and state institutions. PMAF's overarching goal is to contribute to the realisation of the right to food by securing the land rights of smallholder farmers. One of its strategic priorities is to enhance land tenure security by promoting the effective implementation of Law 034-2009 nationwide.

The Challenge: Reforming the Real Estate Law

The Real Estate Promotion Law (Law 0057-2008/AN), enacted in 2008 to regulate urban development and promote housing, was initially not part of PMAF's strategy. However, over time, its relevance to PMAF's objectives became evident, as the law contained significant loopholes. Growing pressure on land due to climate change, conflict-induced displacement, and rapid urbanisation has enabled real estate developers to acquire over 300,000 hectares of rural land, often dispossessing farmers without delivering the promised affordable housing. The number of real estate companies active in Burkina Faso increased sharply from 13 in 2008 to 275 in 2021, leading to land dispossession, conversion, and fragmentation not only in urban areas but also in surrounding rural agricultural regions. This led to land grabbing, loss of agricultural land, and threats to rural livelihoods.

The Ministry of Urban Development, Housing, and the City (MDUHV) investigated the issue and drafted a law reform proposal in 2021 aimed at curbing developer abuses, protecting agricultural lands, and refocusing housing efforts to better meet population needs. However, the reform faced strong resistance from influential real estate developers, who were allegedly involved in corruption and lobbying, which delayed progress. The draft law was withdrawn in December 2021, reportedly due to pressure from the real estate cartel.

Approach: PMAF's Strategic Engagement and Adaptive Response

Although reforming the Real Estate Law was not an original advocacy goal, PMAF recognised its critical importance for rural land security and adapted its strategy accordingly. The platform shifted focus from solely supporting the implementation of rural land laws to actively engaging in the real estate law reform process, understanding the close link between rural land governance and urban development. While initially not involved in the reform process, the withdrawal of the reform sparked intense discussions within the platform.

The political context was highly dynamic. The January 2022 military coup dissolved the National Assembly, but it also created an opportunity for PMAF to re-engage with the transitional government, which appeared more open to reform. With internal consensus to advocate for the reintroduction and improvement of the Real Estate Law, PMAF mobilised civil society organisations and other stakeholders to advocate for it, emphasising the protection of rural lands and sustainable urban planning.

PMAF's technical assistance team played a central role in coordinating advocacy efforts, facilitating dialogue among diverse actors, synthesising research and evidence, and maintaining trust. Regular meetings of the Steering Committee and General Assembly enabled continuous reflection, alignment, and strategic adaptation. For example, after the draft law was withdrawn, PMAF quickly obtained the text, organised a civil society workshop in March 2022 to analyse it, and prepared targeted advocacy actions.

Key Milestones and Advocacy Actions



- March 2022: Civil society workshop to analyse the withdrawn draft law and plan advocacy.
- November 2022: Submission of a memorandum to the transitional government, emphasising the urgency of reform.
- January 2023: Meeting with the Minister of Urban Planning and Housing to express concerns and propose improvements.
- February 2023: Press conference calling for responsible real estate development to protect rural lands.
- February 2023: Participation in a national workshop validating the draft law.
- June 2023: Formal adoption of the new Real Estate Promotion Law (Law 008-2023/ALT) by the Transitional Legislative Assembly.

Impact

The new law introduced significant protections for agricultural land and improved regulation of the real estate sector:

- Limiting real estate projects to a maximum of 5 hectares per project and promoter, down from the previously proposed 25 hectares.
- Excluding rural lands from real estate promotion activities, protecting them for agricultural and pastoral use.
- Restricting urban planning and land mobilisation to state and local authorities, preventing private developers from unregulated land subdivision.
- Increasing sanctions for violations and introducing mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation every five years.
- Prioritising social housing and requiring proper urban planning documents before project approval.

Following adoption, PMAF supported implementation through training for real estate promoters, public awareness campaigns, and facilitating dialogue between communities, government, and private sector actors.

Lesson Learned from Adaptive Management in Action

The Burkina Faso PMAF case illustrates how adaptive management, combining flexibility, structured reflection, and a clear vision, is essential for navigating complex land governance reforms in dynamic contexts. Key lessons include:

- **Strategic Flexibility:** PMAF adapted its advocacy focus in response to emerging challenges, shifting from rural land law implementation to real estate law reform when the latter became a critical priority.
- **Continuous Reflection and Replanning:** Regular Steering Committee and General Assembly meetings provided spaces for reviewing progress, analysing political shifts, and adjusting tactics accordingly.
- **Effective Government Engagement:** Designated ministry representatives ensured continuity despite political instability. Regular bilateral meetings and joint workshops strengthened relationships and aligned objectives.
- **Building Trust and Inclusivity:** Transparency, consistent communication, and evidence-based advocacy fostered confidence among government and stakeholders. Engaging a broad coalition, including marginalised groups, enhanced legitimacy.
- **Use of Credible Evidence:** PMAF synthesised existing data on land grabbing and governance challenges, presenting clear and targeted messages that resonated with policymakers.
- **Balancing Flexibility and Focus:** While adapting to political upheavals and security crises, PMAF maintained focus on its core objective, securing land rights for vulnerable populations.
- **Challenges:** Limited financial and human resources, personnel turnover, and security constraints required ongoing adaptation and resilience.



Photo: PMAF Burkina Faso

Principle 7:
Develop a Secretariat that Serves
and Facilitates the Multi-Actor
Partnership

“

A good system shortens the road to the goal.

Orison Swett Marden

Why Secretariats are Important

Even committed and passionate leaders engaged in Land Rights usually have too little time to invest in the Multi-Actor Partnership. They are busy. This means that their time must be used effectively. Someone needs to ensure that meetings and processes are effective, hold things together, communicate, monitor, organise and facilitate professionally. Also, having a neutral secretariat that is not explicitly tied to one of the actor groups can contribute to levelling unequal power relationships, ensuring that all voices are heard.

In Land for Life, Hettie Walters of the Dutch NGO ICCO participated as a resource person in one of the early program workshops in 2018. ICCO has transformed its organisational model from a traditional NGO to one that works exclusively through multi-actor processes. Since 2021, ICCO has been part of Cordaid. One of Hettie's key messages was that an effective backbone structure is a critical success factor in MAPs. She stated that failure is likely if the backbone functions are not done well.

When we refer to the backbone structure, we typically mean a secretariat, which consists of a small team of people and performs vital functions to support the operation of the Multi-Actor Partnership. Often, the secretariat is hosted in an NGO or a government office. Sometimes, the secretariat is also registered as a separate entity and can become the centre of a larger and sustainable initiative.

In our discourse with actors who worked on MAPs in other sectors, apart from Land, we were sometimes confronted with the question of whether a secretariat is needed. Is it not just possible to work with the core group?

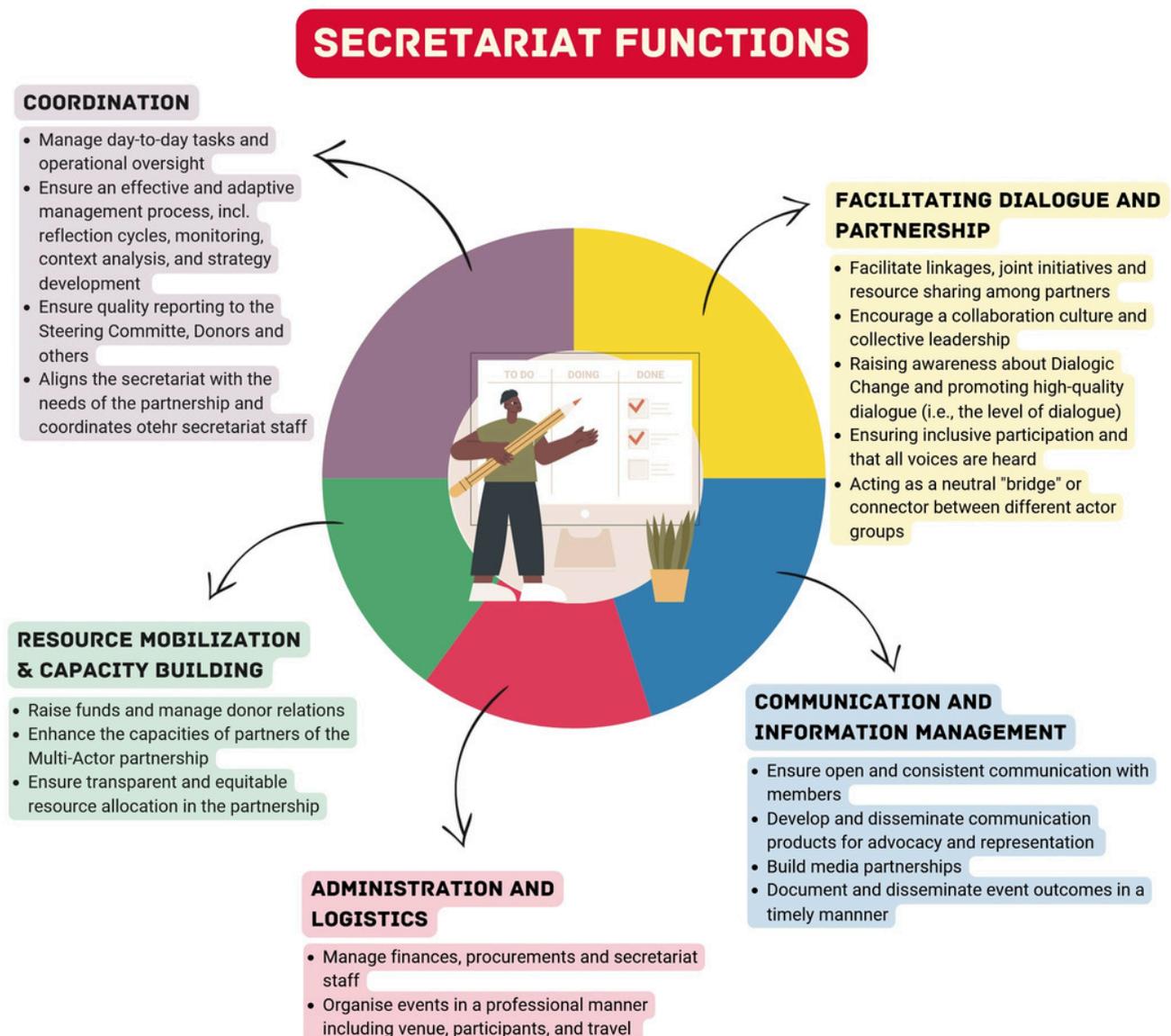
For larger MAPs on the national or sub-national level, we support the notion that a secretariat is needed. The secretariat has essential functions and sets the partnership on an equal and transparent footing, outside the ambit of one organisation that otherwise would hold the money and perform secretariat functions through a project office. Without the secretariat, it is also tricky to gradually develop the partnership and create its structure and systems.

Furthermore, there is a substantial body of experience in various networks and partnerships on how secretariats operate. The idea of secretariats that are accountable towards a steering structure is also supported by other organisations working on MAPs, such as the Partnership2030 of GIZ or the International Land Coalition.



The purpose of the secretariat in Land for Life

The purpose of a Multi-Actor Partnership secretariat is to provide coordination, facilitation, and operational support to ensure the network's effective functioning. It serves as the central hub for communication, strategic planning, and collaboration among members, facilitating the achievement of shared goals and priorities. This includes organising meetings, maintaining records, managing resources, and fostering partnerships. Furthermore, the secretariat can assume the mediating role of a neutral facilitator, countering unequal power dynamics, onboarding new actors, and ensuring that all relevant voices are heard.



Exploring Secretariat Setups in Land for Life Multi-Actor Partnerships

Effective coordination and facilitation are at the heart of any successful MAP. The experiences of four LfL MAPs—in Liberia, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone—illustrate diverse approaches to structuring and managing a MAP secretariat. Each secretariat has evolved according to its local context, resulting in varying levels of autonomy, institutional anchoring, and oversight. The choice between civil society hosting, independent registration, or government integration involves balancing trade-offs in neutrality, legitimacy, and sustainability.

1. Liberia – Secretariat Hosted by Civil Society (Rights and Rice Foundation)

In Liberia, the secretariat is hosted by the Right to Rice Foundation (RRF), a civil society organisation with long-standing experience in land reform and engagement in national land policy processes. RRF's credibility, donor relationships, and role in the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT) implementation were the basis for the choice. The Steering Committee oversees the secretariat. Like all other secretariat set-ups, a Civil Society host comes with advantages and challenges.



Advantages

Established Civil Society Organisations often come with existing donor and policy networks. In this case, RRF was already integrated into national policy processes, well-networked, and partnering with several development partners. They were already active members of the International Land Coalition and brought institutional experience in advocacy and facilitation into the MAP establishment.

Challenges

In many countries, civil society organisations are competing for space and funds. Choosing one of the Civil Society MAP members as the continuous host may lead to perceptions of monopoly and competition among MAP members. The ILC operates through a host rotation, whereas the General Assembly elects a new host every few years. This could be a good solution to counter the processes, especially if the secretariat staff remains the same, ensuring continuity. Still, it also comes with administrative hurdles in project contracting.

In the Land for Life experience, it also occurred that the separation between the secretariat and the host was not strong enough, leading to secretariat staff being utilised for host agendas or tasks – the reasons why some of the LfL MAPs felt the urge to institutionalise independently.

The task of employing secretariat staff also lies with the host, which in some cases raises concerns about inclusiveness. Lastly, the strong affiliation of the secretariat with the Civil Society can be a barrier to high-level government or private sector buy-in, and in the Liberian case, it was initially difficult to distinguish between the host and the MAP for other actors. It took a long time for the government to understand that this is, in fact, a multi-actor and not a civil society initiative.

2. Burkina Faso and Ethiopia – Registered Secretariat Entity

In Burkina Faso and Ethiopia, the secretariat has been established as a separate legal entity, offering a clear identity, neutral positioning and independence in advocacy and policy work. Besides the advantages, dangers and challenges also arise.

Advantages

An independent MAP secretariat has the benefit of standing solely for the goals of the MAP, allowing for targeted advocacy and positioning that is separate from association with any specific actor group or the host. In that function, it can also support cross-actor collaboration in a more neutral position, bringing the potential for direct resource mobilisation rather than relying on members to mobilise resources for it.

Challenges

- Establishing a new legal entity also means having young organisational structures that have support needs in financial administration and may not always be eligible for funding from donors that require experience and proven capacities.
- Institutionalisation also comes with high costs, including additional staff and office costs that could previously be shared with the host.
- Institutionalising a MAP can also lead to identity shifts, e.g., in Ethiopia, LfL had to register as a Civil Society Organisation and, over time, took on further Land Governance projects. While that is not necessarily a negative change, over time, LfL became instead a host of the MAP again, rather than an institutionalised MAP.

With independence, the MAP itself becomes a new actor in the land governance landscape, potentially causing further competition.



Photo: PMAF Burkina Faso



Photo: Land for Life Ethiopia



Photo: Land for Life Ethiopia

3. Sierra Leone – Government-Embedded Secretariat

In Sierra Leone, the MAP process at the national level is led by the government (referred to as MSP in Sierra Leone). Land for Life, on the other hand, is leading the establishment of MSPs at the district level and strengthening Civil Society and grassroots representations in the national MSP process.

In these functions, Land for Life Sierra Leone also institutionalised its secretariat by forming a Civil Society Consortium. This consortium is overseen by a board, with each member organisation responsible for facilitating the District MSPs (DMSPs) in its respective region.

To illustrate the third model, a government-hosted MAP, we refer here to the secretariat of the national government-led MSP, not the LfL-led consortium secretariat.

In Sierra Leone, the secretariat of the national MSP process (a thematic working group) is embedded within the Ministry of Lands, with key involvement from the FAO. The core functions are primarily clerical and coordination-based: managing communications, supporting concept notes and proposals, administering group communication platforms, and facilitating access to institutions.

Advantages

The most obvious advantage of having the secretariat placed within the government is the related political buy-in. The MAP is enshrined in its mandate, and the decisions of the MAP receive the necessary government backing and increased legitimacy. It also eases inter-governmental and multilateral cooperation and comes with the benefits of eligibility for public as well as donor funding.

Challenges

The most obvious advantage of having the secretariat placed within the government is the related political buy-in. The MAP is enshrined in its mandate, and the decisions of the MAP receive the necessary government backing and increased legitimacy. It also eases inter-governmental and multilateral cooperation and comes with the benefits of eligibility for public as well as donor funding.



Photo: Land for Life Sierra Leone - LfL Secretariat with German ambassador and representatives from Bengo and WHH

Key Takeaways

- Each MAP secretariat has evolved according to its local context, resulting in varying levels of autonomy, institutional anchoring, and oversight.
- The choice between civil society hosting, independent registration, or government integration involves balancing trade-offs in neutrality, legitimacy, and sustainability.
- Civil society hosts offer flexibility and strong grassroots ties, but may face challenges related to internal power dynamics or buy-in. Registered entities provide institutional clarity and focus but require robust oversight and financial stability. Government-embedded secretariats ensure policy traction and legitimacy but may reduce operational independence and inclusivity.
- The dynamics between oversight structures, such as steering committees and the secretariat, are critical.



A strong, accountable secretariat is crucial to MAP's success: Land for Life experiences show that a well-functioning secretariat holds the partnership together, coordinates activities, facilitates dialogue, and manages communications. Without it, even committed leaders struggle to keep MAPs running. However, functionality requires more than performance—it demands accountability, especially to the MAP steering group, rather than the host organisation or donors. While secretariats are often housed within existing institutions, they must remain accountable to MAP governance. Usually, host organisations treat secretariat staff as their own, creating conflicts of interest and weakening MAP autonomy. This issue has led some Land for Life MAPs to form independent entities. The steering body must also demand accountability. In many cases, it lacked the capacity or will to challenge or guide the secretariat, creating a “petting zoo” effect—oversight in name only—limiting learning and strategic development. Donors, too, must be willing to let go of control. When donors attach rigid agendas to funding, they risk becoming de facto decision-makers. This undermines MAP's horizontal accountability and sidelines its members. Effective donor engagement means enabling secretariats to answer to MAP governance, not donors.

Secretariats often lack clear performance standards and roles: There is limited guidance on what MAP secretariats are expected to deliver and how. This ambiguity affects hiring, task prioritisation, and quality assurance. Without benchmarks for communication, facilitation, coordination, and monitoring, performance varies widely across platforms.

Facilitation and communication require deliberate investment: Effective internal communication is a critical function of the secretariat, but is often treated as secondary or delegated without strategic oversight. Where leadership took communication seriously—providing timely updates, using accessible platforms (e.g., WhatsApp), and fostering a collaborative tone—platforms saw higher engagement and cohesion. Conversely, when communication faltered, participation waned, and misunderstandings festered.

Balancing coordination and direction is a fine line: Secretariats must both serve (by enabling collaborative processes) and steer (by keeping the MAP on track). However, some risk taking over strategic direction rather than facilitating it, especially when other bodies are weak. Building facilitation skills and shared leadership is essential to avoid the centralisation of decision-making.

Secretariat models must fit the context, but trade-offs exist: Civil society-hosted secretariats offer flexibility and grassroots legitimacy but can alienate government and private sector actors. Independent legal entities enhance neutrality and facilitate resource mobilisation, but they are costly and may lead to identity shifts. Government-embedded models offer political legitimacy and policy traction, but may compromise inclusiveness and independence. Each model must be aligned with the MAP's purpose, maturity, and power dynamics. No model is universally ideal.

Case Studies

Case study 8:
Communication and Media Partnerships in
Sierra Leone



Case study 8:

Communication and Media Partnerships in Sierra Leone

Overview

An essential function of the secretariat in the Land for Life set-up is communication. Within the staff structure, a Communications Officer is responsible for keeping MAP stakeholders informed about decisions and progress, making the MAP externally visible and attractive, and positively reinforcing the MAP's objectives, such as advocacy, through effective communication. The years have shown how the quality of communication can both positively reinforce and paralyse the motivation and buy-in of actors, the effectiveness of collaboration, the attraction of new actors and additional support, and the achievement of impact. An example from Sierra Leone shows the positive effects of a strong secretariat communication approach. Rather than a support function, communication can be seen as a strategic tool for change, bridging gaps, building trust, and amplifying voices to increase legitimacy, participation, and impact.

Background

Often, communication is already at the centre of land governance issues. Following the civil war in Sierra Leone, for example, a boom in mining and agricultural investments led to large-scale land acquisitions. These were often facilitated through traditional leaders, leaving communities uninformed and unsupported. The absence of meaningful communication between stakeholders, especially affected communities, government entities, and investors, fuelled mistrust, conflict, and policy stagnation, which is why Land for Life became active in the country.

Following the launch of the multi-actor partnership, both at the national level through the thematic working group and at the district level via Land for Life, poor communication—both internally among MAP members and externally with the broader public—was a significant barrier to progress in land governance. Strengthening communication, both internal and external, became central to restoring trust, improving participation, and driving change.

The Challenge

The MAPs in Sierra Leone initially lacked a unified platform for sharing decisions and progress. Internally, this led to uncoordinated activities, top-down decision-making, and frustrated MAP members who felt excluded or saw little progress. Externally, the absence of accurate and accessible information meant that community concerns remained unaddressed, and media reporting on land issues lacked context and accountability. There was also a critical knowledge gap among media practitioners about land governance, which limited public awareness and policy pressure. Without a shared communication strategy, the legitimacy, functionality and impact of the MAP were at risk.



Photo: Land for Life Sierra Leone - Meeting with the press

Approach: A Strategic Communication Overhaul

To address significant communication gaps hindering collaboration and impact, Sierra Leone's Land for Life Multi-Actor Partnership implemented a strategic communication overhaul. This included the development of a comprehensive communication strategy, training MAP members in communication, and the establishment of a Media Alliance on Land Governance to strengthen public awareness and accountability.

The communication strategy was jointly developed by consortium members and outlined the cornerstones, including context, objectives, key messages, target audience, formats, and communication channels, leading to a work plan with clear responsibilities among the consortium members. Internal communication was streamlined through a WhatsApp group, fostering daily engagement and decentralised decision-making. For external communication, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were launched to share stories, updates, and community voices. Additionally, feedback mechanisms, including phone lines and social media monitoring, enabled communities and decentralised actors to raise concerns and resolve land disputes more effectively. Partnering with major media outlets, the MAP established a dedicated Media Alliance group trained in land governance. A formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed, and members began producing investigative reports and awareness campaigns. Together, these efforts transformed communication into a powerful tool for coordination, transparency, and systemic change.

Impact

The implementation of a targeted communication strategy within Sierra Leone's Land for Life Multi-Actor Partnership has led to notable improvements in internal collaboration and decision-making. MAP members now engage more inclusively and efficiently, fostering stronger coordination across stakeholders. Externally, the platform's visibility has grown through consistent media engagement, helping to raise awareness and accountability in land governance and positioning Land for Life as a central space for land governance dialogue. These efforts contributed to policy impact, notably supporting the passage of the 2022 Customary Land Rights Act, which advances gender equality and responsible investment. Communities have become more empowered, with women successfully reclaiming land rights and local disputes increasingly resolved through dialogue. Additionally, a strengthened media landscape has improved the quality of land governance reporting, amplifying community voices and influencing national discourse.

Key Success Factors and Lessons Learned

The Land for Life experience in Sierra Leone demonstrates that strategic, inclusive communication is essential for building effective Multi-Actor Partnerships. Key success factors included regular internal messaging that enhanced stakeholder engagement, active media collaboration to support national policy reform and external outreach, and the use of low-threshold, real-time tools, such as WhatsApp, to facilitate decentralised decision-making. Core lessons emphasise the importance of establishing a clear communication strategy early, treating media actors as partners rather than passive channels. Conversely, centralising communication or relying on top-down, technical messaging can undermine trust and participation.

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- [2] See especially LRA articles 7-8; 32.3-4; 33.3, and 48.



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