

PROGRESS TOWARDS THE SDG LAND RIGHTS COMMITMENTS

WHERE ARE WE AT?

2024



IT IS 2024. WHAT HAVE MEMBER STATES ACCOMPLISHED?

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW THE LAND AND SDG MOMENTUM GROUP IS
SUPPORTING SDG REPORTING WORK ON LAND DEGRADATION AND RESTORATION**
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Secure land rights for all—women and men, regardless of ethnicity or religion, or civil, economic, social, or political status—are foundational for achieving a world free of poverty, hunger, and systematic gender discrimination. So, in 2015, we celebrated when world leaders recognized the critical importance of land rights within Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Member States' ambitious written commitments, however, have not been followed by on-the-ground action. Since 2020 we have reviewed countries' Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) annually to ascertain what steps toward meeting land rights targets countries are making. While we found some promising steps—some countries have localized their commitments into their national plans, allocated new resources, or advanced ambitious reforms—the majority have not prioritized land rights in their development agendas or undertaken significant action.

In this year's review of VNRs we found even less reported action than in previous years. It is now more critical than ever to direct the focus of world leaders on land rights. As Member States reconvene for the 2024 High Level Political Forum, this review of VNRs and related indicators paints a stark picture of the lack of action.

SDG LAND RIGHTS TARGETS

Target 1.4

By 2030, *ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable*, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, *ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources*, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.

Target 2.3

By 2030, *double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land*, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.

Target 5.a

Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national law.

WE ALL NEED TO DO OUR PART

Strengthening land rights is a complex and long-term endeavor — we want to acknowledge and highlight the steps that several countries have taken. As we do that, however, we must be unambiguously clear: the current rate of progress is utterly insufficient to close the tenure security gap by 2030. Reaching the SDG land rights targets will require strong political commitment and dedicated resources in all countries in order to enact concerted, deliberate, and multi-sectorial efforts.

It is past time for governments, development partners and civil society practitioners, experts, and researchers to come together and pool their experience, expertise, resources, and institutional reach.

In parallel, it is essential for countries to invest in the data infrastructure needed to diagnose the challenges in reaching the land rights targets, provide guidance to policy makers and decision-makers, track progress or lack thereof, and hold those vested with authority accountable. Progress on the SDG land rights targets is measured by 3 indicators (1.4.2, 5.a.1, and 5.a.2), which we elaborate on in the final section of this brief.

It also requires shifts in the culture of the land rights sector so that we (a) make decisions based on data; (b) consider data that is centered on people rather than on farms, economic units, businesses or land plots; (c) acknowledge that data about the household head or provided only by the household head is insufficient and likely to be biased; and, (d) accept complementary sources of data that can fill important data gaps – including but not limited to global polls, research studies, and data collected from community based organizations or grassroots groups.

Finally, the highly visible and powerful platform provided by the SDGs only works if it catalyzes action. It has to provide governments with incentives to act, it has to offer effective advocacy levers to civil society organizations, and it has to help the broad array of stakeholders working on land rights remain strategically aligned. This requires clear and accessible information on what countries have done – what we should celebrate – as well as on what countries could and should be doing to fulfill their SDG land rights commitments. Such reporting must come from governments, civil society, and community-based groups around the world.

To address this need, the SDG Land Momentum Group and numerous partners are encouraging and supporting government and civil society organizations interested in leveraging the SDG land rights commitments through impactful and strategic reporting.

2023 VNRS AND REPORTING ON LAND TARGETS

The following sections provide a detailed description of the analysis we carried out to assess what progress countries have made toward their SDG land rights commitments (targets 1.4, 2.3, and 5.a) and what they have reported about the indicators that track these commitments (1.4.2, 5.a.1 and 5.a.2).

For the analysis that follows we have relied on two sources of publicly available information managed by the SDG platform:

- » The *39 publicly available Voluntary National Reviews (VNRS) submitted* for the 2023 High Level Political Forum by Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Central African Republic, Chile, Comoros, Croatia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, European Union, Fiji, France, Guyana, Iceland, Ireland, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Maldives, Mongolia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, and Zambia.
- » The [Global SDG Indicators Database](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/)¹ which contains annual entries for each SDG indicator for each country.

WHAT STEPS HAVE MEMBER STATES TAKEN TO ADDRESS THEIR SDG LAND RIGHTS COMMITMENTS?

While *many of the 39 VNRS we reviewed included comments around land*, land access, land use or land rights, frequently these mentions were limited to descriptions of the country's context, history, or challenges. Thus, to gauge the extent to which governments are moving toward fulfilling their SDG land rights commitments, we first screened for countries whose VNRS mentioned concrete actions such as a new or revised national strategy, legal or policy reforms, programmatic action, or similar measures.

Yet *not all land-related actions align with the spirit of the SDG commitments*. Thus, we further narrowed our focus to land-related actions that attempt to ensure secure land rights for all, in particular the poor, the vulnerable and the small producers; or to eradicate gender differences in land rights.



1 <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>

Lastly, important as past actions might be, we look for actions that have taken place after the SDGs have been agreed upon and set in motion; that is, since 2015.

Within the batch of 39 VNRs available for 2023, only two countries—Rwanda and Zambia—report taking significant action since 2015 to enhance land rights. By contrast in 2022, 15 out of 43 reporting countries reported action on land rights and in 2021, 21 out of 43 reporting countries reported action on land rights.

Rwanda and Zambia report the following actions in their 2023 VNRs:

» ***Rwanda***

Since 2015, Rwanda reports amending already strong legislation to further support women's property rights in marriage and in inheritance. The country also started significant efforts to secure land rights prior to 2015.

» ***Zambia***

Zambia introduced a National Land Policy in 2021 which promotes women's equitable access and control over both state and customary land. The policy calls for 50 percent of land that is available for alienation to be granted to women. Finally, Zambia reports that some chiefdoms are taking special steps to distribute and certify land rights over customary land to women.

INSUFFICIENT STEPS

While a few countries have reported promising steps in the last few rounds of VNRs, considerably more work is needed even by countries who report new policies and laws but who still require more work to ensure they translate into changes on the ground.

Unfortunately, aside from Rwanda and Zambia, the other 37 VNRs submitted in 2023 made no mention of actions to grant or protect land rights since the SDGs were launched in 2015.

Land rights, being foundational to poverty reduction, food security, livelihoods, and climate action, are in dire need of greater attention by Member States. This requires a greater understanding of the important links between land rights and multiple SDG targets and political will to work on land rights issues that can be complex and difficult to quantify. Countries who have committed to action on land rights, such as Rwanda and Zambia have reported this year, show that this can be done if there is focus and political will.

Going forward, for all countries committed to working on land rights, it will be critical to know what steps governments have taken to grant and protect secure tenure rights for all, and especially for women, for small producers, for Indigenous Peoples, and for those who are poor or vulnerable:

- » What legal gaps in tenure rights have they addressed? How did they do it? Why was it important to address this policy gap?
- » How are they ensuring that these legal reforms translate into real changes on the ground?
- » What programmatic actions have they started, expanded, or adapted to close the gap in tenure rights?
- » How many people among those targeted by the SDGs have benefited from these measures?
- » What else will they do to achieve their land rights commitment of secure tenure rights for all by 2030?

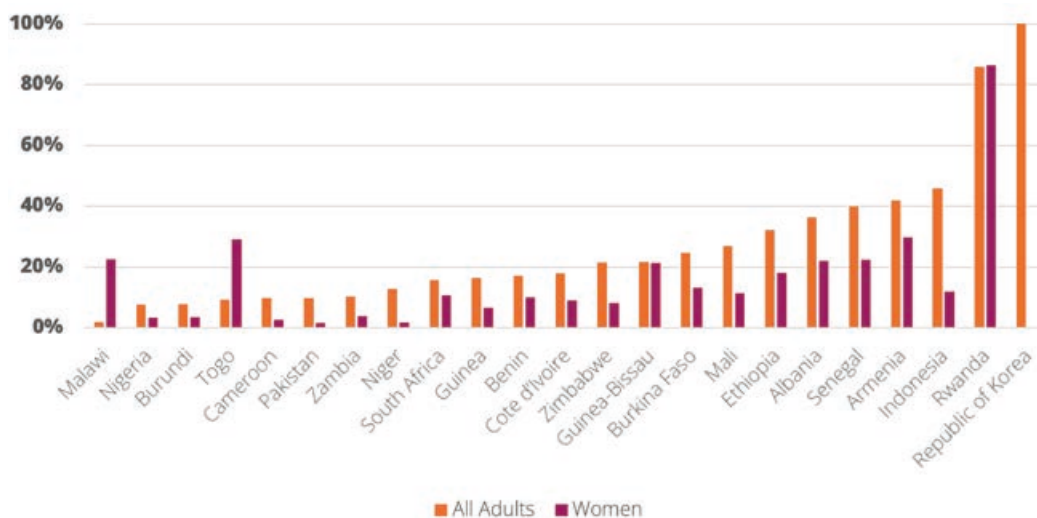
WHAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE SO FAR ?

The SDGs includes several indicators to track Member States' progress on their land rights commitments. Under Goal 1, **SDG 1.4.2** tracks progress towards ensuring *secure tenure rights for all*: countries agreed to report (a) the % of their adult population who have documents to prove their rights to land; and (b) the % of the adult population who perceive their rights as secure.

A look at the SDG Global Database reveals that most adults lack government-recognized land documentation.

As the graph below illustrates, with the exception of Rwanda and Korea, countries who reported on **SDG 1.4.2** indicated that at least half of their adult population lacks documentation to prove their land rights. In fact, 14 of the 23 countries who have reported since 2015 indicate that at least 75% of their adult population lacks documentation in their names.

Figure 1: Percentage of adults with land documents.



Under Goal 5, **SDG 5.A.1** tracks progress towards ensuring secure tenure rights for the agricultural population, paying special attention to gender equality. Reporting on 5.a.1 has been more robust, but it is still quite low: only 20% of the countries who agreed to the SDGs have reported and most of them have reported only once. No new data has been added to the official database since our review last year.

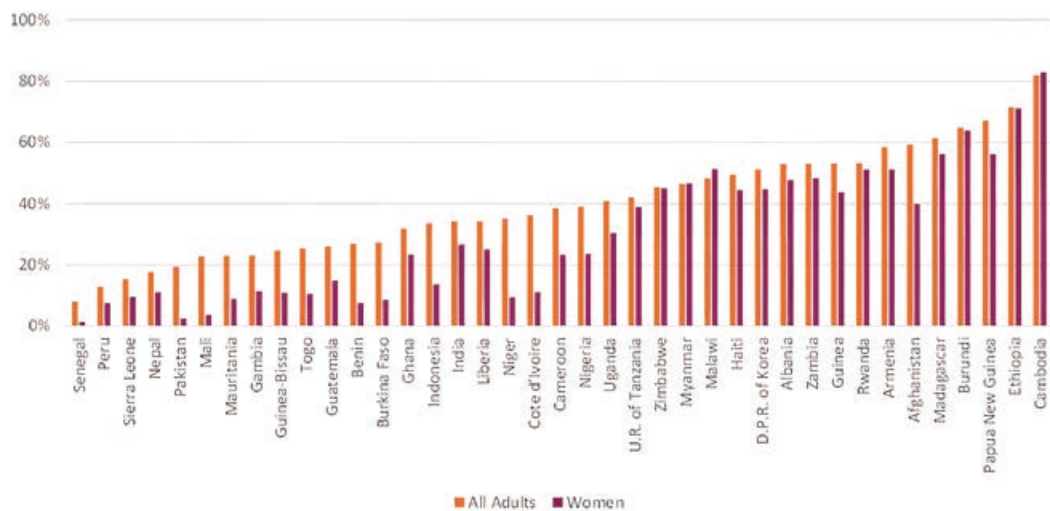
» ***Much of the agricultural population lacks secure rights to land.***

At least three-fourth of the agricultural population lacks secure rights to agricultural land in Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Only slightly better, more than half of the agricultural population lacks secure rights in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Liberia, Malawi, Myanmar, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

» ***Among the agricultural population, there is a gender gap in who has secure land rights.***

This is the case for all but 6 of the 39 countries who reported on indicator 5.a.1. The gender gap is particularly stark in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Pakistan, Senegal and Togo.

Figure 2: Percentage of rural population with secure land rights.



Finally, under Goal 5, **SDG 5.A.2** tracks progress towards ensuring that countries' legal frameworks guarantee women equal rights to land. This indicator ranges from 0 to 6 with the number increasing depending on how many types of protections for women's land rights are enshrined in law².

2 Degree to which the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control (1=No evidence to 6=Highest levels of guarantees)

As the table that follows indicates, many of the countries who agreed to the SDGs and have reported on this indicator lack legal provisions that are foundational to granting and protecting women’s land rights. This is particularly the case for countries whose 5.a.2 indicator is less than 4. No new data on this indicator has been added to the official database since our review last year.

SDG 5.A.2

1	Ghana, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Myanmar, Qatar, Santa Lucia, Sierra Leone, State of Palestine, and Yemen
2	Chile, Guyana, Madagascar, Niger, Pakistan, Senegal, and Suriname
3	Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Central African Rep, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Moldova, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe
4	Armenia, Chad, Italy, Liberia, Mongolia, Montenegro, Nepal, North Macedonia, Slovakia, Switzerland, Thailand, Togo, Uruguay, and Viet Nam
5	Benin, Bolivia, Georgia, Guatemala, Hungary, Kenya, Namibia, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Serbia, Sweden, Tanzania, and Uganda
6	Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lithuania, and Rwanda

SUPPORTING SDG INDICATOR 1.4.2

Reviewing the SDG data for indicator 1.4.2, we share the following impressions:

- » **Troublingly, no data has been added after 2018.**³ This means that there is no publicly-available official data to determine what progress, if any, has been achieved in the past 6 years—over one-third of the life of this extraordinarily ambitious agenda. This indicator relies on data from national level statistical surveys conducted by government agencies, which are then compiled and shared by UN Habitat and the World Bank.
- » **The uptake for this indicators has been worryingly slow.** Only 12% of the countries who agreed to the SDGs, have ever reported on land documentation. This dismal level of reporting precludes data-informed assessments of the magnitude of the challenge. Furthermore, among the 23 countries who ever reported on land documentation, only 7 have submitted data for more than 1 year. It is therefore impossible to use this data to identify any trends in tenure rights.

3 In their 2023 VNRs, Kuwait and Uzbekistan reported data on 1.4.2 that does not yet appear in the official SDG Global Database. Kuwait reports that between 2016 and 2021 the proportion of the total adult population with secure tenure rights increased by 14 percent for men and 8 percent for women. Uzbekistan reports that in 2021, 81 percent of the adult population had secure tenure rights. It did not provide a breakdown by gender. Rwanda reported data on plot ownership by women and men in 2022, but this is not the same information required by 1.4.2.

However, signs also indicate that the indicator is on the cusp of stronger uptake and is also serving an important purpose as a catalyst for greater data collection on land tenure security:

» ***Additional 1.4.2 indicator data is forthcoming in 2024.***

Informal discussions with the data custodians for 1.4.2 indicate that there may be a significant uptake in the coming year for the indicator and additional data may be made publicly available during 2024. This would provide countries and other stakeholders with important new information on land rights globally and would be a significant positive step.

» ***Indicator 1.4.2 is an important catalyst for increased data collection on land tenure security.***

There is growing application of the indicator's recommended survey questions for perceived tenure security and legal documentation and also parallel channels of collecting this information are growing. For example, Prindex, the Women's Empowerment Metrics for National Statistical Systems (WEMNS), and the Living Standards Measurement Study Plus (LSMS+) all support the collection of rich data on land tenure security in alignment with Indicator 1.4.2.⁴

Further, several actors are collecting data at the subnational level on perceived tenure security and legal documentation using approaches aligned with the recommended 1.4.2 questions. For example, the recommended survey questions (or slightly adapted versions) for one or both of perceived tenure security or legal documentation appear in several impact evaluations for land governance projects funded through the US Government and in collaboration with national governments, including in Colombia, Ghana, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. Funders and governments use these data to assess the effectiveness of the projects and inform future land governance policy and programming. These data are typically available for public use and representative of large sub-regions within a country.

4 Prindex currently has nationally representative and gender-disaggregated tenure security data for over 140 countries collected over 2018-2019 with a second round planned for over 100 countries. Both the WEMNS and LSMS+ survey modules align with the recommended methodology for collecting information for 1.4.2 for both legal documentation and perceived tenure security and have been validated for both rural and urban populations. The WEMNS module is designed to be incorporated into national, multi-topic surveys. Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania anticipate incorporating the WEMNS tool into national farming surveys to be collected in 2024. Since 2016, LSMS+ has partnered with national statistical offices to collect nationally representative survey data on land and other topics in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania, Nepal, and Sudan. Unlike Prindex and WEMNS, these surveys include questions about perceived tenure insecurity and land documentation at the parcel level for agricultural and non-agricultural land.

Finally, Rights and Resources Initiative' *Second Edition of Who Owns the World's Land* (2023) continues to provide key data on implementation of SDG 1.4.2 in the contexts of community-based tenure and Indigenous populations, impacts of which may not be sufficiently captured through household surveys.

We strongly encourage continued strong action to support governments in collecting data for SDG Indicator 1.4.2.

Continued strong support for the indicator is important because it is now gaining traction and increased uptake of the indicator is expected. Further, the indicator has a demonstrated positive and growing influence as a catalyst for expanded data collection by international and national actors. Expanded data collection, which in turn leads to greater awareness and understanding of both perceived land tenure security as well as legal documentation of land rights. Such data and awareness serve to drive action to increase tenure security in support of countries achieving SDG 1.4.



THE SDG LAND MOMENTUM GROUP is a coalition of civil society and multi-lateral organisations geared towards monitoring the progress of the SDG land targets and conducting advocacy to meet the same end. Currently the secretariat of the group is coordinated by the International Land Coalition Secretariat. Members of the group include Asian NGO Coalition, GLTN, Huairou Commission, IPAR, IWGIA, Land Portal, Landesa, Natural Resources Institute - University of Greenwich, Oxfam, Rights and Resources, TMG Think Tank, Transparency International and World Resources Institute



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