The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) set out internationally-accepted principles and standards for responsible practices, providing a framework for governments, the private sector and civil society to use when developing policies and programmes for improving food security. FAO has been working in more than 58 countries, providing technical assistance for awareness raising, multi-stakeholder platforms, training and capacity development, and support to the assessment, formulation and implementation of national policies and laws.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are key partners in this effort. It has been recognized time and again that ensuring the same level of information and capability among stakeholders leads to more meaningful participation in dialogue processes.

In this project (2015-2018), FAO has worked in 21 countries (see map below) through partnerships with national CSOs in carrying out awareness-raising and capacity development workshops to:

- Enhance civil society’s knowledge and understanding of the VGGT;
- Increase network and advocacy skills to defend their tenure rights and strengthen partnerships for wider application of the VGGT at all levels;
- Build capacities for effective participation in policy processes related to tenure reform processes and national VGGT multi-stakeholder platforms.

The main product of this project has been the capacity development manual for CSOs, *Putting the Voluntary Guidelines on Tenure into Practice: A Learning Guide for Civil Society* in partnership with FIAN International, which draws upon the People’s Manual on the Guidelines on Governance of Land, Fisheries and Forests, developed by the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC). In 2017, an adaptation of this Guide was developed to integrate the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, the roll-out of which is currently in a pilot phase.

Local civil society partners played a key role in the successful implementation of the project. With their knowledge of the local context, the Learning Guide could be adapted to link the VGGT to on-going processes within the country.

As part of FAO’s global VGGT implementation programme, this project identified specific opportunities for potential or ongoing processes of tenure reform, and/or specific CSO networks or multi-stakeholder processes where FAO input would be most effective.
Tenure insecurity in Uganda is often considered impeding bottleneck for attaining the country’s development goals. Multiple factors threaten smallholders land rights, including aftermath of the civil war and unrest, demographic pressures, changes in consumption patterns, increases in food prices and competition for land and resources. However, despite these difficulties, Uganda has taken concrete steps to improve tenure security in the country. Since 1995, the government has undertaken a series of ambitious legal and political reforms, including the Constitution (1995) and the Land Act (1998), which are largely in line with the principles of the VGGT. These two legal reforms have both redefined land rights and provided an institutionalized framework for land management.

The ensuing legal framework is unique in that it recognizes equal dignity to formal and customary tenure rights. Though implementation presents many challenges, it has a potential to set an example of implementation of the VGGT principle for the Region and the word to follow.

Presently, the land sector is at a delicate juncture, with increasing competition for land, a push for investment, and individual and community rights are still to be identified. Among the challenges related to the implementation of the tenure framework, is the need to strengthen the capacity to manage and resolve conflicts over natural resources, as well as to develop the capacity of the different agents involved in tenure issues and to strengthen policy dialogue among stakeholders.

In addition, cross-cutting issues such as pastoralism, the presence of refugees to whom land is allocated on arrival, expanding urban centres and investment pressure among others present parallel challenges to be address together with securing tenure rights.

In 2013, the government approved the National Land Policy and has since been actively engaging in VGGT implementation. A series of national workshops successfully facilitated multi-stakeholder dialogue on tenure issues, especially on land and forestry sectors. A VGGT Secretariat was established to coordinate VGGT implementation in the country. FAO has been collaborating with the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD), which hosts the VGGT Secretariat, to provide technical support in this important process.

Partnering with civil society

Civil society has a critical and unique role to play in this process however its capacity and influence in the land sector dialogue might remain limited. For this reason, FAO has prioritized increasing capacities among CSOs on the VGGT and their use in order to further strengthen VGGT implementation at country level.

To achieve this, FAO collaborated with Trócaire and the Society for International Development (SID). Trócaire is an International NGO that has been active in Uganda since 2008 and is currently working in Acholi and Teso sub-regions and at National level, working through partner organisations. Trócaire’s network with local CSOs actors greatly contributed to outreach of this project.

SID is an international network of expertise with a strong presence in East Africa through their Programme Office in Nairobi, Kenya. SID’s programme initiatives are aimed at contributing in a tangible manner to policy processes in the region, by working with key constituencies drawn from academia, government, legislative bodies, civil society and social movements, and the domestic private sector. This strength in multistakeholder practices especially at regional level was a key asset to the project in connecting the specific country level activities with larger VGGT-related actions happening at regional level.

Trócaire is an International NGO established in 1973 by the Catholic Church in Ireland as way for Irish people to contribute to development and emergency relief overseas. Trócaire works with local and church partners to support communities in over 20 developing countries with a focus on food and resource rights, women’s empowerment and humanitarian response. In Uganda, Trócaire works to support those affected by conflict, developing sustainable livelihoods, gaining access to land, improving the rights of women and holding the government more accountable to its citizens.

Society for International Development (SID) is an international network of experts and organizations with an interest in development, policy and governance research and dialogue. Since 1957 SID has provided key fora for actors of the international community.
Activities in the country

Through this project, capacity development activities were organized in order to create a common understanding among civil society on the VGGT, in particular on the Uganda Land Law and Policy, with a focus on the unique contexts of West Nile, Acholi, Lango and Karamoja subregions of Northern Uganda where customary law is still predominantly used.

A consultative meeting was held in Kampala in March 2017, with 15 participants from among CSOs and the MLHUD, to identify key aspects and links between the national context and VGGTs.

The project supported the mapping of key CSO actors in the abovementioned subregions to support a further rollout of the understanding of the VGGT, Uganda Land Law and Policy among local communities, local authorities, and customary institutions.

A national Training of Trainers (ToT) was organized in May 2017 to discuss the overall context of the VGGT and the Uganda Land Law and Policy, training 42 representatives from CSOs and the MLHUD. Following this, four subregional trainings were held in Acholi, Lango, West Nile and Karamoja, training an additional 113 representatives from CSOs and government offices. Each of these subregional trainings resulted in the development of specific action plans for VGGT implementation in their respective subregions.

To complement the training efforts within the country, a specific capacity development and awareness-raising workshop was organized in Entebbe, bringing together 23 small-scale farmers, fisher-folk and pastoral community groups from all over the country in which links were made to two East Africa regional workshops (see below), addressing national, regional and cross-boundary issues related to the tenure of natural resources.

Links with other VGGT initiatives

The results of the project have shown positive impact in other VGGT projects and initiatives (both directly and indirectly connected) which were taking place in the country.

The work specifically undertaken through this project was closely linked to a set of capacity development and awareness-raising activities undertaken by the Society for International Development (SID) and FAO at regional level. These events consisted in the organization of five workshops (three at country level, and two at regional level), focused on the VGGT in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, bringing together a range of civil society actors, including small-scale farmers, fisher-folk and pastoral community groups. The regional level workshops provided key opportunities to find connections between the three country-level workshops, and to engage with parliamentarians on the possible role that the national and regional legislatures could play in promoting the adoption and implementation of the VGGT within the national and regional contexts.
Main areas of impact

Along with the strong links with other VGGT initiatives, the concrete capacity development given through this project has positively impacted a number of areas within civil society’s work on tenure issues at country level, in particular: building stronger CSO networks; opening dialogue with government officials; and identifying links to key national policy.

Strengthening CSO networks

Through the workshops, CSOs were able to develop networks connecting various organizations, which previously had difficulties in liaising, and had the opportunity to share ideas and experiences on issues related to tenure governance, as well as other actors (i.e. government officials, legislators of the East African Legislative Assembly). Through these networks, CSOs have now the capacity to become a sound counterpart at local, national and regional level to move forward the tenure governance agenda.

Following the country and regional levels workshops organized by Sid, key Ugandan CSOs also managed to liaise with CSOs in neighbouring countries, discussing cross-border tenure governance issues. The local level workshops undertaken in the Acholi, Lango, Karamoja and West Nile sub-regions allowed for a better understanding of the VGGT and their links to the specific local needs of the communities.

Opening dialogue with government

The workshops also provided space for CSOs dialogue with other stakeholders, particularly officials of the Ministry of lands Housing and Urban Development (MLHUD), who participated in both national and local activities thanks to the existing strong partnership with FAO through the VGGT Secretariat.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

✓ Positive collaboration with two different organizations: Trócaire and SID, strengthening ties between local, national and international actors.
✓ Effective linkages created between local, national, and regional contexts through national and regional workshops.

For more information on this project and FAO’s work on the VGGT see:


All information included in this leaflet is based on documentation produced through the project by FAO and implementing partners.

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