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Land governance in Latin America and the Caribbean

Innovation and inclusion
for economic recovery
and resilience

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1. Land governance: why is it key to the economic recovery agendas during and post-pandemic?

The effects of the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic continue to evolve and hit our societies hard. Although vaccination programmes against COVID-19 have already begun in many countries, it is still uncertain when the virus will actually be brought under control, and thus reach the desired “post-pandemia” period to which many analyses refer. In a global context of worsening economic, social and environmental asymmetries, the pandemic led the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) economy to experience the most significant contraction in growth domestic product (GDP) since 1900 (6.8 percent) and the worst performance among developing regions (ECLAC, 2021a). The total number of poor people in the region reached 209 million at the end of 2020, 22 million more than the previous year (ECLAC, 2021b). These figures compel us to develop better public policies to rebuild economies and increase the resilience of a region as vulnerable as LAC. These policies cannot afford to wait until that uncertain post-pandemic period arrives; we must start working on them during the pandemic itself.

Governments around the world have had to take on more debt than ever before to cope with and recover from the effects of the COVID-19 crisis; by the end of 2020, global public debt almost equalled global GDP (IMF, 2021), and Latin America is precisely the region with the highest weight of external debt in GDP (56.3 percent) (ECLAC, 2021a). Fiscal accounts have also deteriorated in the Caribbean countries. At the end of December 2020, the gross public debt of the central government exceeded 100 percent of GDP in some countries of the subregion (ECLAC, 2021a). In response, LAC countries have announced unprecedented fiscal packages to cope with the effects of the crisis. Consequently, there is an unavoidable responsibility to ensure that these resources are invested in the best possible way in sectors where they can have the highest transformative impact.

Land tenure is central to development in LAC; this issue like no other has led to war, displacement, social conflict, corruption, hunger and poverty. More particularly, extreme inequality in access to and control over land is one of the most significant unresolved issues in LAC; it is both a cause and consequence of hugely polarized social structures that have fuelled and continue to fuel the political crises that many of its countries suffer today (Oxfam, 2016). With public policies that continue to ignore this structural challenge, it will not be possible to reduce the economic and social inequality that the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated more brutally; nor will it be possible to achieve the recovery with transformation currently echoed in the discourses of various sectors.

The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) are the only negotiated international standard on the subject, negotiated and approved under the Committee on World Food Security by representatives of governments, civil society, academia and industry. Although ratified since 2012, the VGGT are now more relevant than ever in the current pandemic context for several reasons. First, because one of their main objectives is to address food insecurity, which by 2019 was already affecting one third (191 million people) of the total population of Latin America and which will be exacerbated by the effects of COVID-19 (FAO, IFAD, PAHO, WFP and UNICEF, 2020). Second, while designed to benefit all people in all countries, the VGGTs emphasize vulnerable and marginalised populations, which have been disproportionately hit by the pandemic.

Governments have been urged to focus their reconstruction policies on promoting welfare states and to take advantage of this moment to reorient their development path in line with the Sustainable Development



opment Goals (SDGs) (ECLAC, 2021b). In this context, improving access to land and ensuring its secure ownership are essential to achieving several SDGs, such as: ending poverty and hunger (SDG 1 and 2); achieving gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG 5); reducing inequalities (SDG 10); developing resilient and sustainable human settlements (SDG 11); and addressing threats to ecosystems (SDG 15), among others.

Land tenure is not only directly linked to the achievement of the SDGs and human rights. As the report *Índice Riesgo Político América Latina 2021* (Latin America Political Risk Index) (CEIUC, 2021) highlights, increasing foreign direct investment in the region (which fell by 25 percent year-on-year in the first six months of 2020) is necessary to generate the resources and jobs that are urgently needed to address the effects of the pandemic. However, legal certainty is essential to attract this type of investment, including land tenure security. Unfortunately, according to the Doing Business report (World Bank, 2014), LAC is among the regions where it takes the longest time to resolve land disputes, with more than 40 percent of its economies taking at least three years to resolve disputes, second only to South Asia in this regard. LAC is also among

the regions with the lowest land registration, mapping and cadastre coverage, with less than 10 percent of its economies having full coverage, surpassing only Sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, the lack of land administration systems with better policy, institutional and land information infrastructure frameworks has proven to be a sensitive Achilles heel in LAC's legal certainty and competitiveness.

The objective of this document is to highlight concrete policies needed to ensure that the VGGT are not overlooked in the current reconstruction processes during and after the pandemic and that they contribute to the achievement of the SDGs — highlighting that the VGGT seek to incentivise and guide responsible investments, especially in the agricultural sector. It also reaffirms the commitment of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to continue providing technical support to countries in achieving better land governance that strengthens the resilience of the region, its business and investment climate, and generates more benefits for all its productive sectors, especially for the most vulnerable populations and sectors that lag behind.



2. Key challenges in land governance for an inclusive and sustainable economic recovery in Latin America and the Caribbean

2.1 Limited modernisation of Land Administration Systems

According to the Doing Business report (World Bank, 2014), **integrated and secure land registration systems are associated with more significant access to credit, lower income inequality and less corruption. Still, the region continues to get generally unfavourable scores related to Land Administration Systems (LAS).**

One major obstacle to the integration and technologicalisation of LAS in the region is the segregation between registry systems — usually run by the Judiciary — and cadastre systems — generally administered by the Executive. Thus, one of the most significant challenges is to articulate the different agencies not only electronically, but also institutionally. The precarious infrastructure for digital connectivity in rural areas, the availability of resources to acquire the necessary technology and the skills required to design, implement and maintain the databases are challenging as well.

More than before, the devastating effects of COVID-19 on the economies of the countries press to get out of this stagnation and take ambitious actions to raise the investment climate, business and competitiveness of the region. This will be even more difficult to achieve if we have obsolete and disintegrated property registries and cadastrals that are not compatible with the modernisation and digitalisation demanded by citizens, economies and current challenges.

A concrete example of this is Colombia, where between 2010 and 2018, due to the outdated cadastre, the country's capital cities lost about USD 4.8 thousands million Colombian pesos in property tax revenue, when according to estimates by the authorities, updating the country's cadastre could cost less than half of that figure, about USD 2.2 thousands million Colombian pesos (La República, 2020). At the same time, experts point out that between 2014 and 2018, cities that updated their cadastrals increased their property tax revenues by 60 percent, more than twice as much as cities that did not (26 percent). In Barranquilla, between 2016 and 2018, the city's update and direct adoption of cadastral management allowed it to generate additional revenues that leveraged new

investments for a value ten times higher than that collected (Actualícese, 2020). Generating these resources is urgent to promote the investments that are so much needed to combat the current crisis; especially in rural areas where the outdatedness of the cadastre and the intensity of multidimensional poverty is much higher compared to Colombian cities (DANE, 2018).

2.2 Lack of access to land and legal security for rural households and vulnerable groups

LAC is the region with the most unequal land distribution in the world. Some estimates indicate that, as a whole, the one percent of the largest estates account for more than half of the region's agricultural land; conversely, 80 percent of the smallest farms occupy less than 13 percent of productive land (Oxfam, 2016). This inequality is not recent, its origins go back as far as the colonial period; however, disparity has been reinforced by the new processes of hoarding and concentration of land ownership that all countries in the region have been experiencing to a greater or lesser degree (FAO, 2018). In addition to the above, a recent study indicates that in Latin America, one in five people feel insecure in their rights over their housing and land. In the case of some countries such as Guatemala, this level of insecurity rises to one in three people (PRINDEX, 2020).

This widespread inequality and insecurity of land and natural resource tenure in the region conditions the direct and indirect impacts caused by COVID-19. Inequality magnifies and aggravates these impacts, thus creating even higher inequality and poverty (FAO, 2020), especially for the poorest and most marginalised individuals and households, with special emphasis on the following groups:

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especially for the poorest and most marginalised individuals and households, with special emphasis on the following groups:

► **Indigenous and tribal peoples:**

The devastating impact that COVID-19 is having on these peoples goes beyond the threat to health. The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples has reported with concern how in some countries, consultations with indigenous peoples and environmental impact assessments are being abruptly suspended in order to force the implementation of mega-projects in their territories.

Indigenous peoples who lose their lands and livelihoods are pushed into further poverty, malnutrition, lack of access to clean water and sanitation, which in turn makes them particularly vulnerable to pandemics (OHCHR, 2020).

A recent study by FAO and FILAC (FAO and FILAC, 2021) highlights that approximately 404 million hectares are occupied by indigenous peoples in Latin America (Garnett *et al.*, 2018), and their collective ownership or usufruct rights have not yet been recognized for 135 million hectares. By gaining formal recognition of their territorial rights and support for their livelihoods, indigenous and tribal communities can delimit their forests so that outsiders know they cannot use that land, control illegal encroachment on their forests, coordinate with authorities to have intruders removed, and undertake various types of forest management activities to keep their forests in good condition. This is an urgent action considering that between 2000 and 2016, for example, the area of intact forests in indigenous and tribal territories decreased by 20 percent in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, 30 percent in Honduras, 42 percent in Nicaragua and 59 percent in Paraguay (Fa *et al.*, 2020). The pandemic did not halt these deforestation processes in the region; on the contrary, in several cases, it has led to increased deforestation due to less environmental oversight (ECLAC, 2020).

In addition to the above, at least 331 murders of human rights defenders were recorded worldwide in 2020, 247 of them in just five Latin American countries and 170 of the victims (69 percent) were defenders of indigenous peoples, land or the environment (Front Line Defenders, 2021). This mourns families, entire communities and groups, and undermines the peace and credibility of democracies and, therefore, legal security in Latin American countries.

► **Women:**

In Latin America, only 20 percent of agricultural units are owned by women, but their participation in agricultural work is relevant.

In Central America, this figure drops to 15 percent, and in the Caribbean and South America it rises to 23 percent, according to data from the latest available censuses (FAO, 2017). Not having secure rights to the land they work on or to real estate induces, among other things, limited access to credit, technical assistance and other productive resources needed to promote their enterprises and improve their living conditions. This may also limit their access to productive relief measures and emergency loans provided in the current context of the pandemic, thus affecting their capacity for recovery and resilience in the face of this crisis (OAS, 2020).

► **Youth:**

One of the barriers to the inclusion of young people as protagonists of sustainable rural development is their limited access to land tenure and natural resources. In LAC, only about 14 percent of those employed in agriculture (own-account farmers) and about 10 percent of farmers (farm managers) are young people (FAO and SUR, 2019). **While the inclusion of rural youth in some employment measures**



initiated by several governments has been assessed, so far, the literature does not show any specific measures responding to the impact of COVID-19 on rural youth (FAO, 2020), let alone one aimed at improving their access to land.

2.3 Weak land governance over priority areas and natural resources for the region's resilience.

Sensitive areas for the resilience of communities' livelihoods and countries' economies — such as wetlands, forests and water basins — are being strongly threatened by deforestation, degradation, overexploitation and other unsustainable uses. The lack of regularisation of land tenure and access to land in the aforementioned areas, coupled with contradictory policies that promote environmentally irresponsible investments, have encouraged these practices that are incompatible with the SDGs. The deterioration of the region's natural resources affects not only the global environmental balance, but also the productive base on which agriculture and other sectors essential for development and social well-being depend (FAO, 2020b).

The various shocks from climate change and environmental degradation, including the accelerating diversification and evolutionary processes of zoonotic diseases such as coronaviruses (UNEP, 2020), are forcing governments to put their forests, wetlands and nature reserves at the top of their investment priority lists in terms of land regularisation. As recently stated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2020), *"insecure land tenure affects the ability of people, communities and organisations to make changes to land that can advance adaptation and mitigation. Limited recognition of customary access to land and ownership of land can result in increased vulnerability and decreased adaptive capacity"*.

Various experiences have shown that if the tenure problem is not solved, it is improbable that any environmental restoration initiative will be successful; on the contrary, when issues of legal security and land tenure are resolved, this represents an optimal result that facilitates any conservation action, especially when it comes to market-based schemes (INTE-PUCP, 2016). Despite the above, an analysis of the stimulus packages announced in LAC to address the COVID-19 crisis reveals a discouraging reality: these total around

USD 318 thousand million, of which only USD 51 thousand million are earmarked for long-term recovery; of these, only USD 1.47 thousand million are destined to green initiatives, that is, less than 0.5 percent would be consistent with environmental and climate goals (ECLAC, 2021a). **"To date, no packages of measures and incentives for green or other initiatives have been identified in the literature that are specifically aimed at improving land security and tenure.**



3. Recommendations: main lines of action

The challenges are diverse and complex, and the resources to address them are even more limited in the context of an economic and social crisis unprecedented in modern history. The following are a number of critical land governance issues that are recommended to be integrated into the “build back better” agendas countries are developing. These actions are framed within the VGGT principles, and governments, international agencies, the private sector and civil society can count on FAO's support and experience in their design and implementation.

3.1 Investment in technological innovation for Land Administration Systems

• **Information and communication technologies (ICTs) not only facilitate and energise sustainable land management; they also help to make available the economic capital locked up in lands without legal certainty.** We are currently living in an unprecedented moment for the digitalisation of land administration. With the three core components of ICTs — the internet, global navigation satellite systems (GNSS) and geographic information systems (GIS) — come unparalleled opportunities to create cheaper, more accurate and more effective LAS (Maclaren and Stanley, 2011).

The benefits of technologisation in land administration are diverse: improved security of tenure and records, reduced corruption and falsification of documents, as well as increased capacity to mobilise revenue for the state. In the specific case of LAS, it allows for better administration of land tenure, valuation and use, thus facilitating governance and efficient land markets. To this end, lines of action are proposed, depending on the countries' level of modernisation:

▸ **Digitalisation and satellite imagery.** An initial phase, which should be ensured as a foundation for the modernisation of LAS, focuses on the promotion of large-scale programmes that allow to digitise records, GPS-based data collection and automation

of administrative systems in land institutes, with a particular focus on rural areas. The *Doing Business* report (World Bank, 2016) has identified several benefits for digitalisation, such as increased efficiency by avoiding duplication, establishing workflows that are not possible in physical format, and facilitating the transfer of property rights and mortgages. Digitalisation also generates more accurate data, security of backups, and improvements in transparency by facilitating access to data.

▸ **Transparency and online services.** Digitising cadastres and registries allows moving towards a more direct link between land institutes and users. It is necessary to promote services provided through online tools, which can initially be focused on information and accountability, and then evolve to more complex tools that allow, for example, online transactions, within the limitations allowed by privacy definitions. Software developed by FAO such as SOLA — which supports the cadastre and registration system for land institutes — or *Open Tenure* — which allows the recognition of people's tenure rights at the community level through mobile devices — represent a direct improvement in the transparency of tenure rights.

▸ **Institutional architecture and interoperability.** One of the elements in which LAC most needs to move forward is related to interoperability among the different government agencies involved in land administration. This allows for the creation of data infrastructures not only to share information, but also to increase efficiency in the generation and maintenance of up-to-date information, and to facilitate the conversion of rights to more secure forms of tenure. Interoperability has been widely associated with the creation of a national spatial data infrastructure, which aims to connect people and institutions with geospatial information that enables them to make better and more informed decisions (UN-Habitat, 2016).

Land banks in the Caribbean: advancing innovation in LAS

The Eastern Caribbean has been facing significant obstacles to food and nutrition security since a large proportion of agricultural land became idle or underutilized following the collapse of banana cultivation.

Thus, in the late 2010s, the Governments of Grenada, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines decided to jointly explore alternatives to improve inter-sectoral coordination and modernise LAS in order to enhance agricultural development. These countries sought FAO's support for developing national land banks, thereby boosting the market for leasing state and private land, reducing transaction costs, providing greater security and legal certainty of tenure and greater trust between private parties (owners and lessees). Likewise, this experience has shown that it is key to advance in political agreements for the implementation of this type of initiatives. To progress in the modernisation of the administration systems beyond the necessary resources, the fundamental pillar is clearly the generation of consensus that allows sustaining these processes in the medium and long term.

The three countries are at different stages of implementation of pilot zones that have been incorporated into the national agricultural land bank. Implementation has included, first, an institutional design that allows for the necessary intersectoral articulation between land administration, agricultural services, rural extension services and planning agencies. Model lease contracts and bank procedure manuals were designed, and in all three countries the project was supported by a campaign to raise awareness and transparency of the process, targeting both the general population and the initiative's target audience. One of the main innovations was a software designed specifically for land bank administration, but with utilities that transcend it broadly, and that can represent a significant advance in the modernisation of LAS for these three countries, and can also be replicable to other Caribbean nations.



3.2 Investment in multi-purpose cadastres in targeted areas

Broadly speaking, a country's cadastre is defined as the mapping and registration of all real estate, both urban and rural, within its territory. This registry is fundamental for territorial and fiscal planning, since it provides basic information for territorial and other related taxes; it is also beneficial to consolidate fair, progressive and transparent fiscal systems. **“This type of internal revenue collection, especially through taxes on property and natural resource use, can provide important financial and operational muscle, especially for subnational and local governments in the post-pandemic context, without having to create new taxes.**

The cadastre is also extremely useful for the operation and monitoring of the real estate market, legal security, planning and location of productive investments and economic activity in general. However, special attention must be paid to ensuring transparent and participatory processes at all levels, which adequately link the interested parties in the cadastral process.

“Technological innovations are undoubtedly a determining factor in strengthening cadastral processes, but it is also necessary to strengthen their legitimacy by considering methodological variants and processes with a rights-based and territorially relevant approach (for instance, indigenous peoples, gender, protected areas, public goods, among others). Failure to do so could exacerbate phenomena known as digital land grabs; studies in some countries in the region argue that digitalisation and interoperability processes between cadastre and registry systems have affected the communal rights of indigenous and local communities (GRAIN, 2020).

Undoubtedly, a major challenge for the region is that cadastre and land access processes require adequate financial resources for their implementation, resources that are even more limited today. In the framework of FAO's work, it is recommended to prioritise the following areas and population groups that are key to achieving the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda and its principle of *“leaving no one behind”*:

a) Rural areas historically marginalised in development processes. FAO has identified the rural areas most affected by poverty and hunger in LAC. These territories require the most urgent interventions and “tailor-made solutions” to catalyse land-use planning processes, land regularisation and, with this, improved legal certainty for the public-private investments that

these areas so urgently require. This is in line with *Hand-in-Hand*, a global FAO initiative that seeks to promote the development of new economic opportunities in these rural territories (FAO, 2020c).

b) Key natural areas for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Among these, the following are prioritised:

▸ **Water supply basins:** The clear interdependencies between the agendas of water and sanitation, health and the agri-food sector, especially to face the effects of crises such as COVID-19, are unquestionable.

“Consequently, it is imperative to have policies, strategies and budgets specifically aimed at land use planning and land tenure regularisation in water supply basins. Concrete measures are also required to support organisational strengthening and provide financial incentives in favour of the nearly 80 000 community organisations that manage and provide drinking water to more than 40 million people in rural areas of Latin America. These organisations are also community systems that operate autonomously from the public and private systems that supply urban areas (Nicolás-Artero, 2016).

▸ **Indigenous and tribal peoples' forests:** Forests in indigenous and tribal territories in LAC are critical to global, regional and local climate stability and resilience. A recent study by FAO and FILAC (FAO and FILAC, 2021) highlights that, of the approximately 404 million hectares occupied by indigenous peoples in the region, about 80 percent are covered by forest (Garnett *et al.*, 2018; Fa *et al.*, 2020). This area represents 35 percent of Latin America's forests and contains almost 30 percent of the carbon stored in the region's forests. The study also points out that indigenous territories receiving full collective property rights have up to 66 percent lower deforestation rates than other territories.

Despite the above, LAC governments have yet to formally recognise the collective ownership or usufruct rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples over approximately 127 million hectares. Securing the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities over these territories is a cost-effective measure on which to focus climate change mitigation efforts (RRI, 2016). The VGGT provide a guiding framework to carry out these processes in coherence with existing international human rights instruments in favour of these peoples.

▸ **National Systems of Protected Areas (NSPA):** NSPA cover almost a quarter (24 percent) of LAC's total land cover and almost a fifth (18.9 percent) of its marine and coastal zones; this adds up to more than 8.8 million km², which, in terms of surface area,

makes it the most protected region on the planet (Álvarez *et al.*, 2021). Paradoxically, *** NSPA are often some of the least registered and regularised territories, with limited updated and systematised information on land tenure and governance, despite their unquestionable relevance for the economic, social and environmental development of the countries.**

For example, NSPA are home to some of the region's main freshwater reserves and energy sources; in Peru, almost 7 million people use water from 16 protected areas and 60 percent of the energy produced in the country comes from rivers within protected areas (Pabon-Zamora *et al.*, 2008). It is also imperative to note that a large number of the region's most isolated and marginalised communities (including many territories traditionally held by indigenous and tribal peoples) overlap with NSPA. Almost half (47 percent) of the indigenous area in the region has been classified as protected area, while in non-indigenous areas it barely reaches 17 percent (Garnett *et al.*, 2018). Likewise, in Central America, 37 percent of indigenous peoples' "areas of use and occupation" are within protected areas.

Ultimately, clear and secure land tenure rights are needed to motivate long-term public and private investments related to water, land conservation and restoration, and climate change, as well as for communities to receive fair benefits from such investments. In this regard, it is important to highlight the efforts that FAO and other organisations are undertaking to ensure that such investment programmes adhere to the VGGT and national laws. A concrete example of this is the work to integrate the VGGT with the Land Degradation Neutrality initiatives of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD, 2019).

c) Concrete initiatives to increase access to land for women and girls: Gender equality is one of the ten guiding principles for the implementation of the VGGT. In many contexts and countries, there is a need to undertake reforms and to create legal norms on property, land registration, family law, and inheritance law, among others, to ensure alignment with the VGGT. In particular, any process of land cadastre, titling and registration should have differentiated strategies, concrete and measurable gender affirmative actions and inclusion in terms of equitable access laws and policies.

First and foremost, it is necessary to create policies and programmes (with available budgets) specifically aimed at increasing the number of women and young

landowners. This is the only way to close the gap and historical debt that the region has maintained with these population groups, since this type of initiatives are still very scarce in LAC. The mechanisms to achieve this goal can be varied, from the most traditional to the most innovative, such as, for example:

(i) individual, joint and/or collective titling and registration programmes (for example, the cases of Bolivia, Nicaragua and Panama, which have implemented legislative changes and programmes for joint titling);

(ii) land banks, provision of credit for land purchase and technical assistance; reforms and incentives in inheritance laws (as in the cases of Nicaragua and Paraguay); and

(iii) legislative changes and the creation of policies that address the problem of inequality in the area of inheritance and property ownership within marriage (as in the cases of Argentina, Brazil and Mexico).

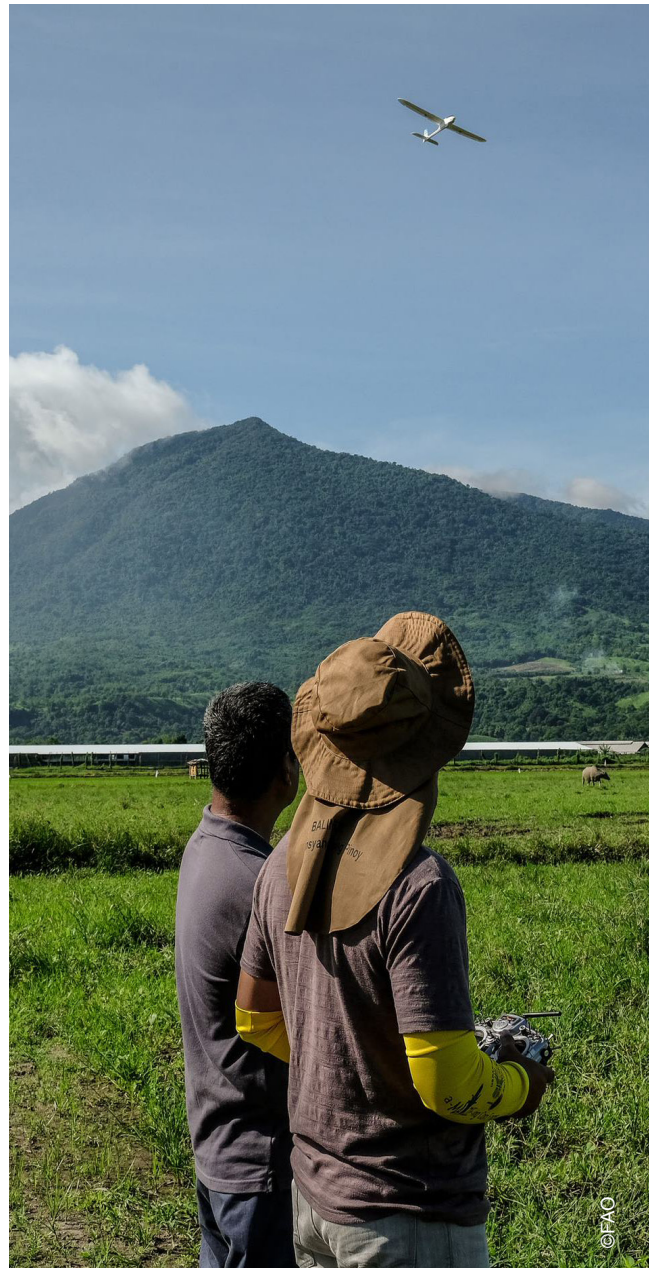
The above mechanisms need to be tailored to the particular needs and contexts of countries and women, but have enormous potential to strengthen sustainable and inclusive recovery processes in the region. According to UNESCO's World Water Assessment Programme (2019), *** "if women had the same access to productive resources as men, including land and water, they could increase their farm yields by 20 to 30 percent, raising total agricultural output in these countries by 2.5 to 4 percent. This would reduce the number of hungry people in the world by around 12 to 17 percent" (WWAP, 2019).**

3.3 South-South cooperation and policy dialogue for capacity building

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased uncertainty, along with the perception of competition for limited resources, highlighting the importance of international development cooperation in economic recovery and in strengthening the resilience of the countries in our region. In addition to the possibility of scaling up resources and technical assistance to address the immediate effects of COVID-19, South-South cooperation has worked to strengthen capacities through the exchange of experiences, information and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Cooperation work in the field of land governance can go even further, incorporating technology transfer or even collaborative action to bring about policy change at the national or regional level. The Second United Nations High-Level Con-

ference on South-South Cooperation highlights this form of collaborative work with "mutual learning and coordination of development policies and strategies among developing countries" to enhance "the sharing of knowledge, lessons learned and good practices, and the adaptation of such practices, including the voluntary exchange of experiences and expertise". Accordingly, the following actions are identified:

- ▶ Exchange of experiences between governmental institutions on technological innovations and institutional architecture for improvements in LAS, multipurpose cadastres and governance of tenure in protected areas.
- ▶ Articulation of country experience with the work carried out by the main cadastre and land registry networks and other related regional networks.
- ▶ Exchanges between governments aimed at the formulation of government policies and programs for the modernisation of LAS, articulating the availability of resources for strengthening technical and functional capacities in governments.
- ▶ Policy dialogue and joint advocacy platforms between the different actors in the field of governance of tenure in the region



4. Land governance: FAO's role in "building back better"

FAO has the experience, commitment and allies to provide technical support to countries to promote improvements and changes in policies, programmes, legal and institutional frameworks, as well as technological innovation that will enable the region's LAS to respond to the demands of today's economies and societies.

In this regard, we seek to continue collaborating in the following areas:

▸ With governments and cooperating organisations.

Contribute to the processes of inclusive and resilient modernisation of LAS that states are implementing, many of them with the support of international cooperation. The VGGT represent a guiding framework that contributes to the success and sustainability of such initiatives.

▸ With the private sector.

The close and undeniable link between the VGGT and initiatives such as the UN Global Compact, the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises should be consolidated and promoted more strongly in this process of "building back better" economies. Besides, partnerships between organisations such as

FAO and the private sector are highly strategic to promote technological innovation agendas in LAS and, thus, the competitiveness of the region.

▸ With civil society, indigenous and rural organisations.

Support these organisations in the construction and strengthening of joint advocacy agendas on land governance issues; the above under direct lines of action and strategically aimed at influencing decision-makers.

▸ With academia and the scientific community.

Continue joint efforts to generate and exchange relevant knowledge on key issues in land governance in the region, especially those that contribute to improve the effectiveness and impact of public policies and regulations implemented by the countries.



5. Look to the future, seize the opportunities of the present and do not repeat the mistakes of the past

The global food crisis of 2008 already encouraged speculation and land grabbing for agriculture, mining, infrastructure and other uses, leaving many communities suffering loss of livelihoods, increased food insecurity, and putting them in a weaker position to defend their rights to land and natural resources. Developing country governments in many cases incentivised investments such as those referred to above, even though most of them ultimately failed to deliver the promised social and economic benefits; on the contrary, they created more instability (FAO, 2020).

The current economic recovery processes must not repeat these mistakes. On the contrary, they must take advantage, for example, of LAC's demographic bonus, which constitutes a significant window of opportunity with a larger proportion of the population able to work, produce, save and invest. If the current or forthcoming policy packages and budgets approved for economic recovery have absent or weak access to land for women, youth, indigenous and Afro-descendant populations, and family agriculture, a golden opportunity to move forward in the democratisation of agriculture will be wasted.

The aspirations to *"transform development models"* and *"build back better economies"* have gained even more traction in the current context of the pandemic. However, these will not materialise unless affirmative action is taken to reverse LAC's

endemic trends of concentration and insecurity in access to and control of land and natural resources. The policy and investment packages developed by governments, investors and donors must not be indifferent to this reality; on the contrary, they must catalyse change and transformation, even more so if the countries are borrowing more than ever before to finance them.

***A recovery of traditional market economies, especially in the rural agricultural sector, that continues to be based on the current agrarian structures of inequality and insecurity, would not represent an inclusive, resilient and SDG-compatible reconstruction process, nor one that provides the climate of stability and legal certainty that is so necessary for the programmes and investments promoted by governments and the private sector. Insisting on the same political, institutional and legal patterns means heading towards the next crisis with the same vulnerabilities, without having learned from past mistakes.**



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