



A good practice on the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure A multi-actor and multi-sector approach in Sierra Leone

Context

In Sierra Leone, the well-being and livelihoods of many people, particularly the rural poor, are based on secure and equitable access to land, fisheries and forests. Increasing pressure on these resources in recent years has led to an escalation of conflict over access to natural resources. On 1 February 2014, in response to this challenge, the Government of Sierra Leone, with technical support from the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and financial support from the Ministry of Agriculture of the Federal Republic of Germany (BMEL), launched a project to kick-start national implementation of the **Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT)**.

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Methodological approach

With its inclusive multi-actor and multi-sector approach, VGGT implementation in Sierra Leone is an example of changing the business-as-usual method. State and non-state actors collaborate across all VGGT relevant sectors (land, fisheries and forests) in an institutional framework to implement the guidelines and improve responsible tenure governance in the country. This participatory process has created remarkably strong national ownership and led to improved collaboration and coordination among tenure stakeholders in the country. VGGT principles are also being mainstreamed as part of the mandate and functions of a number of relevant Government institutions in the land, fisheries and forestry sectors.



Key success factors

A space for people to discuss tenure governance

The first step towards implementing VGGT in Sierra Leone was the creation of an inclusive **Multi-stakeholder Platform** for improved dialogue on tenure governance. The platform has more than 100 stakeholders, including traditional leaders, representatives from national and local government, civil society, the private sector, academia and international development partners. It convenes annually to present recommendations related to tenure governance priorities for the land, fisheries and forestry sectors, and to discuss the way forward for implementing VGGT in Sierra Leone. The platform provides a forum where members of a constituency can actively engage in tenure governance and discuss with the Government in a public arena how to improve the way in which land, fisheries and forest resources are managed in Sierra Leone. It also plays an important role in monitoring, tracking progress and achievements. This creates a strong **accountability mechanism**, as all stakeholders, including FAO, have to report back to the Multi-Stakeholder Platform once a year.

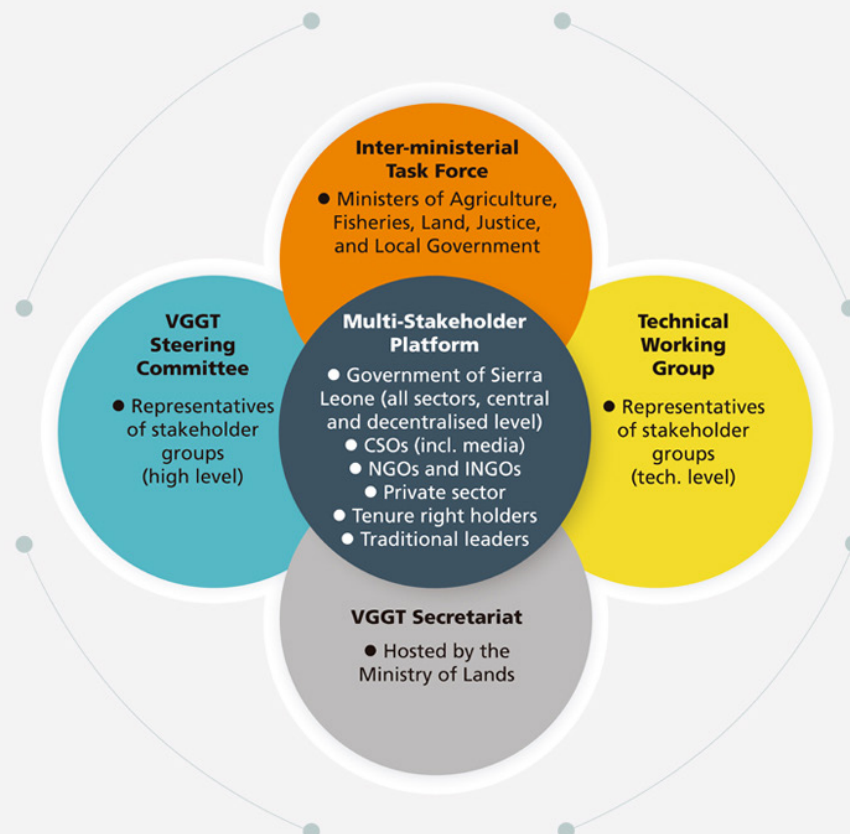
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An institutional framework for action and ownership

In order to ensure effective follow-up and implementation of recommendations made by the platform, VGGT stakeholders created an institutional framework (Figure 1), which clearly defines the mandates, roles and responsibilities of each actor. The VGGT institutional framework consists of a **Multi-stakeholder Technical Working Group**, a **Steering Committee** and an **Inter-Ministerial Task Force**. The Technical Working Group follows up on stakeholder commitment and monitors implementation of recommendations through the respective ministries. The Steering Committee is the focal point for liaising with the Government, and the Inter-Ministerial Task Force establishes high-level political support for implementation of VGGT. The Inter-Ministerial Task Force is made up of the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security, the Minister of Lands, Country Planning and the Environment, the Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development.

Figure 1

VGGT Institutional Framework in Sierra Leone



For Sierra Leone, the design of the Inter-Ministerial Task Force represents a shift from traditional ways of doing business in government. For the first time, relevant ministries now meet on a regular basis to discuss tenure governance issues:

“Since I have joined the ministry service, I saw how people work in silos. We work in isolation without consulting each other. It meant a lot of confusion. With VGGT, we see the benefits of addressing tenure governance across sectors. It has improved collaboration, information sharing and coordination among us and we are now working in the same direction.” (Kadijatu Zainab Bangura, State Counsellor, Ministry of Justice).

Representatives of **civil society organizations** (CSOs), **national and international non-governmental organizations** (NGOs/INGOs), the **private sector** and **academia** are also members of the institutional framework and can make their own proposals to the policy formulation process. Civil society organizations have three representatives on the Technical Working Group and three on the Steering Committee. This inclusive framework increases ownership and the quality of outputs, nurtures trust between stakeholders and enhances the chance of proposals attracting political buy-in.

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Box 1. A secretariat as a hub for VGGT coordination

As VGGT related activities increased in Sierra Leone, a VGGT Secretariat, hosted by the Ministry of Lands, Country Planning and the Environment, was established in 2015. The VGGT Secretariat was established as a response to the demand for a physical space, so that the different actors could meet on a regular basis and contribute to the implementation process. It offers an open workspace for people to meet face-to-face and serves as a one-stop shop for information sharing on VGGT related matters, as well as a centre for coordination of VGGT activities in the country.

Political will and champions

In order to make VGGT implementation effective, political commitment from the government is essential. Without political will to drive the process, the policy and legal reforms needed to create substantial changes on the ground will be very difficult to achieve. However, political will is often unpredictable. The presence of strong VGGT champions within the Government is therefore important, so as to ensure that VGGT becomes mainstreamed and remains high on the agenda, despite political changes and crises, such as the outbreak of the Ebola virus disease.

A **high-level commitment to work together across sectors** is considered one of the key success factors in Sierra Leone. The country's former Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security, Dr Sam Sesay, has acted as a champion for VGGT, convincing other relevant ministers of its national importance, and bringing them together to take action. **Strong VGGT champions from CSOs** are equally important, to hold the Government to account and help to disseminate information on VGGT within communities.



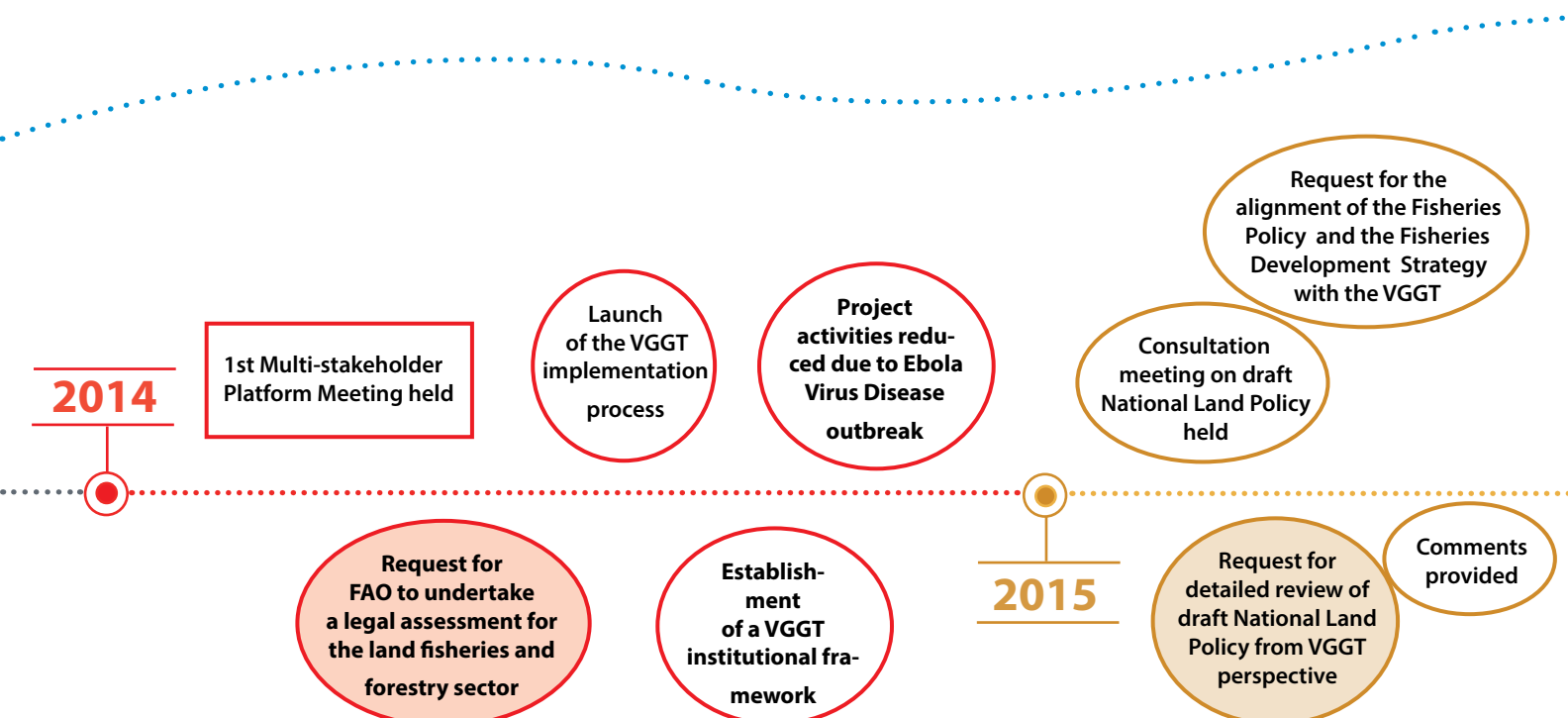
Key results

Making effective use of VGGT to improve national laws and policies

During the first Multi-stakeholder Platform meeting, held in Sierra Leone in April 2014, stakeholders agreed to start VGGT implementation with a comprehensive assessment of the land, fisheries and forestry sectors, exploring the reality on the ground and identifying existing gaps and inconsistencies with the VGGT principles. The assessments' recommendations were validated during the second Multi-stakeholder Platform workshop in 2015, and used to guide the design and revision of several national laws and policies.

- ▶ One highly significant example of **VGGT application** to improve tenure governance is the **new National Land Policy approved** by the Cabinet of Sierra Leone in November 2015. It includes the full set of VGGT principles and refers to VGGT in more than 90 paragraphs. Worldwide, no other known policy refers as closely to the principles of VGGT as the new National Land Policy in Sierra Leone.
- ▶ In addition, the Government is using VGGT as the **main reference document for tenure governance reform** in Sierra Leone by screening acts and bills from a VGGT perspective. Examples are: the Fisheries Policy and the Fisheries Development Strategy, the Forestry Act, the General Registration Act, the Registration of Instruments Act and the Constitutional Review process.
- ▶ A **national plan for community-based forestry management**, which makes strong reference to VGGT, has also been developed, based on an inclusive consulting process across the country.
- ▶ To ensure an inclusive implementation process, a **VGGT sensitive implementation plan** for the new National Land Policy has been developed, with technical support from FAO. This places specific focus on strengthening land administration and capacities for effective land use management throughout the country.

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Innovative use of technologies to secure tenure rights

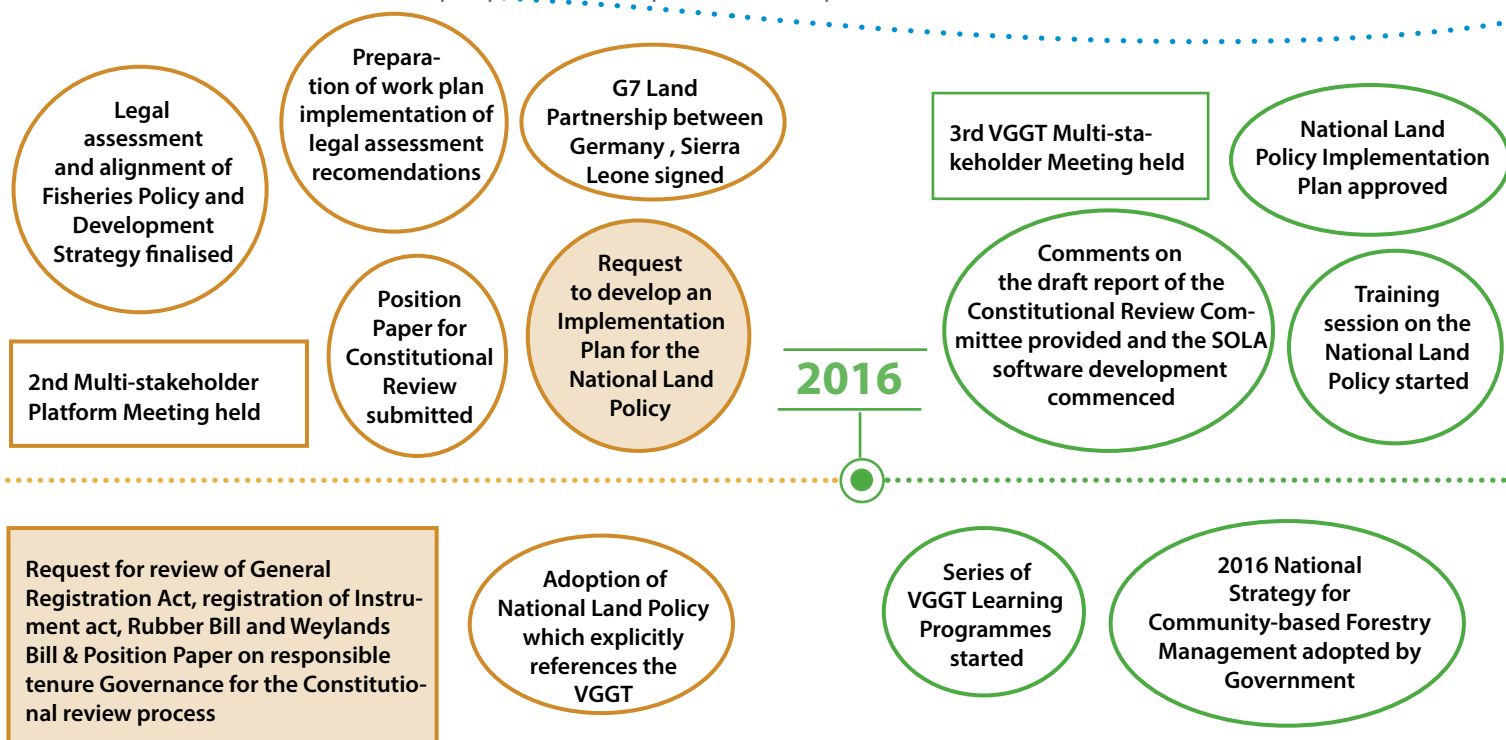
In Sierra Leone, the systemic conflicts that exist between the formal system in the Western area and traditional/customary land rights administration systems in the provinces are a major obstacle to securing guaranteed tenure governance. The current system of land administration and management is largely paper-based, leading to errors and inefficiency in the registration process. To build a more efficient and transparent registration process, FAO is supporting the Government in implementing **Solutions for Open Land Administration (SOLA)**, a land administration and registration software. The SOLA system establishes effective links between the Ministry of Lands, Country Planning and the Environment and the Office of the Administrator & Registrar General through a digital cadastre system that improves quality of data, helps to introduce transparency in land administration, and promotes reliability in protecting both private and customary rights in accordance with the law.

Developing capacities

A series of joint learning programmes, combining online and face-to-face learning for state and non-state actors, has greatly contributed to strengthening capacities for VGGT implementation. In addition CSOs have, with support from FAO, organized **training workshops targeting civil society and grassroots organizations** at national level. Face-to-face trainings have been replicated at district level.

Stakeholders in Sierra Leone highlight the importance of anchoring VGGT implementation in participatory governance, allowing people from all segments of society to play a role and ensuring that 'no one is left behind'. In order to engage more and better with people in affected communities, national CSOs are currently in the process of translating technical VGGT documents into local languages and developing audio products to reach out to non-literate sectors of the population. Other CSOs are collaborating with radio stations to increase awareness of VGGT and build a direct channel for dialogue around land tenure issues. In addition, there is an **increasing interest from academic institutions**, such as the University of Makeni and Njala University, in integrating VGGT into university courses and academic curricula. Attempts to bring VGGT to the community level in Sierra Leone underscores the importance of considering and supporting local capacities, so as to ensure an effective and inclusive people-driven implementation process.

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Challenges

- ▶ **Private sector engagement.** To ensure that investments in the country are responsible and benefit people and the environment, more private sector representatives should be engaged.
- ▶ **Broadening participation.** There is a strong need to overcome current obstacles to engaging and informing women and Sierra Leone's large population of young people in discussions on tenure governance.
- ▶ **Effective implementation.** It remains to be seen how improved coordination, participation and transparency will translate into concerted efforts to implement the needed reforms.

Scaling up while ensuring sustainability

Sierra Leone is a particularly successful example of implementing VGGT through a multi-actor and multi-sector approach. The following elements are crucial for other countries seeking to learn from the VGGT implementation experience in Sierra Leone:

- ▶ Building a neutral space for people to discuss tenure governance;
- ▶ Setting up an institutional framework that fosters ownership and action;
- ▶ Mobilizing strong political buy-in from government;
- ▶ Setting up a secretariat that can support coordination on a daily basis;
- ▶ Capacity development and awareness-raising activities to engage all affected stakeholders.

The following elements are proven to be key for sustainability of the implementation process:

- ▶ National ownership of the VGGT implementation process;
- ▶ Identification and involvement of champions to ensure that VGGT remains on the political agenda;
- ▶ Building robust partnerships for coordinated implementation;
- ▶ Provision of sufficient financial resources for planned activities.

Conclusions

The experience in Sierra Leone shows how a combination of success factors can contribute to effective VGGT implementation. The main lessons learned from Sierra Leone are that political buy-in, strong will for partnership and collaboration and a range of different initiatives aimed at placing local people in the driver's seat, are all components that have contributed to strong national ownership of the implementation process. The experience in Sierra Leone shows how VGGT not only serves as a catalyst for countries to improve governance of tenure, but how fully embracing the VGGT principles can inspire stakeholders from different sectors and levels to engage in the process of building more inclusive, transparent and democratic tenure systems.



More information

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