

# A blue print for change: Promoting responsible investments in land in three countries

As part of the Responsible Governance of Investments in Land project, NIRAS developed tools and trainings for government officials, investors and the local community to ensure sustainable administration of agricultural land in Ethiopia, Lao PDR and Uganda.

In rural parts of the world, land is a key resource in ensuring food security and the livelihood of communities. Investments in land have the opportunity to be major drivers in sustainable development and reducing poverty through the creation of infrastructure and stable jobs. However, when land investments go unchecked, they also run the risk of falling into unsustainable land use practices as well as creating conflict and harming community welfare.

Recognising these potential outcomes, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) implemented the project Responsible Governance of Investment in Land (RGIL) within the Global Programme on Responsible Land Policy as part of the German Special Initiative “One World No Hunger” of

the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. RGIL is co-funded by the European Union and was active in Ethiopia, Lao PDR and Uganda, all of which have committed to upholding good practices in the governance of land. According to GIZ, the objective of RGIL is “to ensure that investments in land are productive, contribute to sustainable land management and respect the rights and needs of local populations, in particular vulnerable groups and women.” The overall goal was to increase agricultural productivity and development in these three countries.

To this end, GIZ tasked NIRAS with strengthening the capacities of key stakeholders namely government authorities, land investors and local communities in land investment.





**This project has created a great impact in the communities. Previously we've been having investments, but now, the key term is responsible investment in land.**

Harrison Irumba, Assistant Commissioner, Policy Analyst  
Ministry of Lands, Uganda



## Encouraging sustainable land use through proper policies and better regulatory oversight

The Gambella region in western Ethiopia covers 3.4 million hectares of land rich in natural resources. It is highly suitable for agriculture, especially large-scale mechanised farming. It is also home to a vast national park contributing to the high biodiversity in the region.

However, a number of challenges, which include institutional weaknesses in land identification and transfer, gaps in legal and policy frameworks and inadequate enforcement of existing regulations, have led to environmental damage, displacement and disputes between land investors and local communities.

"Many investors start operations without environmental impact assessments," says Jack Joseph Miyong, an official in Gambella's environment bureau. Irresponsible land investments have had an impact on the biodiversity in the area, including deforestation and the migration of animals from the national park to neighbouring Kenya.

Issues with the financial aspects of the investments are also present. "Some investors took loans from the development bank and misused the money," explains Bithow Dak Tut, another government official. "Though we transfer lands for investors, they failed to invest the huge loan money they took in the name of agricultural investment in Gambella."





Through RGIL, government authorities' capacity to intervene in the land investment processes were greatly improved. They were trained to administer and guide land investments in accordance with established legislation and recognised principles, such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT) and the Committee on World Food Security's Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (CFS-RAI).

"The regional government has chosen a consultative approach to the management of deserted, deforested lands and conflicts," Bithow says. "Another future direction is integration policy. We have defined who is responsible for what in transferring land to the investors."

With the cooperation of all stakeholders, especially government authorities at the local, regional and national levels, RGIL has been able to support the crafting of effective policies that contribute to the sustainable use of land from the top down.

## Making a lasting impact through responsible land investment

Land investors are a central agent in the RGIL project, as they are the primary actors when it comes to the direct use and administration of the land. Through RGIL, they were given guidelines on complying with internationally recognised principles for land investment which were easy to understand and act upon.

"Sometimes, policies are made behind the desks, and they never get down to the community," says Loy Kitamirike, a land investor. "But through RGIL, we've been able to bring those things down to the community."

Loy operates a farm in the Mityana District in the Central Region of Uganda. Through the learnings from RGIL, she was able to mobilise the local community to benefit from her farm, going so far as to find markets for everyone's goods.

"Auntie Loy is not selfish, she advises and shows you what she does," shares Yunia Nakawooya, one of the small-scale farmers working with Loy.

Another farmer, Nabulime Winfred, says "I had never harvested a sack of beans before, but now I can because we share ideas."

It is also significant to note that a fair number of the farmers Loy works with are women, accounting for the gender sensitivity dimension of the RGIL project.

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# 490

investors, community  
representatives and government  
officials trained

# 1,027

individuals participated in  
stakeholder dialogues

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## Promoting the needs of local communities through dialogue

Communities often stand to benefit from local land investments. But in order to maximise these benefits and avoid friction with the land investors, open communication between communities and local land investors is necessary. The communities were empowered to advocate for their needs in land investment processes through open dialogue.

In Lao PDR, for example, RGIL has facilitated a dialogue between owners of a tapioca processing plant in Bolikhamxay Province and the local community. The community needed help extending and renovating the meeting hall of nearby

Nonsomboun village, as well as concrete pipes for a road construction project that would help villagers go to the market. Through this dialogue, the company was able to act quickly to support these endeavors.

“They are happy with our help because now they have a good road. It also makes tapioca transportation much easier, easy for any vehicle to commute,” says Nguyen Van Hoe, a representative for the company. “The company is trying to help as much as it can. It makes the people happy and so are we.”



## An integrative approach to building skills

NIRAS created several capacity development (CD) products in support of RGIL; these included an introductory guide to responsible land-based investments for all stakeholders, as well as more specific manuals for each of them. NIRAS also designed training for the key stakeholders based on the principles of national and international frameworks, guidelines and best practices, particularly those defined in the VGGT and CFS-RAI. All of these were developed by applying a participatory approach that enabled an open dialogue between the stakeholders, ensuring they were all able to listen and respond to each other’s perspectives and needs.

Throughout the project, NIRAS’s goal was that the resulting CD products and training material would be designed with full local integration in mind. The challenge here was that each of the three countries had its own systems as well as unique capacity gaps and needs that must be filled. To address these needs efficiently and maximise synergy from all three countries, a toolkit approach was taken at the global level alongside the development of documents contextualised for each country’s specific needs.

The first step was to identify and analyse existing international and regional reference documents and suitable CD tools for the different stakeholders. NIRAS collected relevant materials, guides and courses that could be used, as well as legally binding and non-binding instruments, principles and standards to be taken into consideration.

The team then conducted needs assessments for each country to identify capacity gaps and needs, which provided valuable information regarding the development of the general CD products on a global level. Additional CD products were then developed in accordance with the different needs of each country.

Apart from the creation of CD products and training material, as part of the project's integrative approach, annual multi-stakeholder dialogues were held, bringing together representatives from all of the stakeholder groups alongside other relevant actors from civil society, academia and international organisations. A total of nine dialogue events were organised, with three in each country.

To further push forward the project's aims, knowledge products such as reports and documentary videos were produced for all three countries to document RGIL's outputs, raise awareness and provide information about the principles of responsible land-based investments to stakeholders and the general public.

And to maximise effectiveness of the entire intervention, the project prioritised accessibility by adapting CD and knowledge products to local languages and designing user-friendly formats according to the needs of each target audience. All products are available in English through the and in English and local languages on local portals.

The success of RGIL has meant all stakeholders now hold a comprehensive understanding of responsible land-based investment and their roles in making it happen. Much still needs to be done in order to fully realise the long-term goals of this project, but the solid foundation it has built through the creation of high-quality CD products, training, and awareness-raising means the road ahead will be much clearer and smoother. A more sustainable and ethical use of land that benefits everyone involved is within reach.

