



Engaging Government for
Policy Influence Through
Multi-Stakeholder Platforms



CoRe

INTERNATIONAL
LAND
COALITION

ENGAGING GOVERNMENT FOR POLICY INFLUENCE THROUGH MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PLATFORMS

Guidance Note

Authors

Blake D. Ratner, Alberto Rivera and Andrea Fiorenza

Citation

Blake D. Ratner, Alberto Rivera and Andrea Fiorenza (2019). Engaging government for policy influence through multi-stakeholder platforms. Guidance Note. Collaborating for Resilience and International Land Coalition: Rome.

Acknowledgments

This Guidance Note is the result of the collaborative engagement of the global network of ILC NES facilitators, in particular a convening aimed at cross-regional exchange of experiences held in Quito, Ecuador, in July 2017. ILC is a global alliance of civil society and intergovernmental organizations working together to put people at the center of land governance. The shared goal of ILC's over 250 members is to realize land governance for and with people at the country level, responding to the needs and protecting the rights of women, men and communities who live on and from the land.

The authors would like to give special thanks to the following facilitators who provided detailed input and commentary and review of drafts: Bernard Baha (Tanzania), Jagat Basnet and Dharm Joshi (Nepal), Kate Chibwana (Malawi), Carmen Collado (Nicaragua), Joseph Désiré Zebaze (Cameroon), Frédéric Djinadja (Togo), Alhora Kacani (Albania), Miluska Carhuavilca (Peru), Shanjida Khan Ripa (Bangladesh), and Anu Verma (India). Unless otherwise noted, direct quotes with reference to country cases are personal communications of the NES facilitator for that country. Thanks also to colleagues at the ILC Secretariat, Annalisa Mauro, Sara Manetto, and Selmira Flores, for additional, critical feedback, and for sharing NES annual reports and other documentation that further provided rich descriptions and insights from a diversity of national contexts. Lastly, we are indebted to external reviewers Isabelle Providoli, Albrecht Ehrensperger, Ariane de Bremond (Global Land Programme); Edward Heinemann (IFAD); Ruth Meinzen-Dick (IFPRI); Francesca Carpano (FAO); Barbara Codispoti (Oxfam Novib); Constanze von Oppeln, Sahr Nouwah, Abdulai Bun Wai, James Yarsiah, Bénéwindé Rouamba, Marion Aberle, Ewnetu Mekonnen and Yohannes Belay (Welthungerhilfe). All errors of fact or interpretation rest with the authors.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary	4
Introduction	5
1. Undertake a joint analysis of the scope for influence on policy design and implementation	7
2. Define the focus, role and composition of the NES platform appropriate to the national context	12
3. Plan NES development, evaluate progress, and adapt to changing conditions	17
Conclusion	21
Additional Reading	22
Notes	23

SUMMARY

Multi-stakeholder platforms are increasingly recognized as important vehicles to build sustained dialogue among actors aiming to improve policy design and implementation.¹ In the field of land and natural resource rights, the International Land Coalition has made perhaps the broadest global investment in such platforms, designed to promote people-centered land governance through national

engagement strategies in 22 countries. A key challenge concerns how to effectively engage government in the dialogue process to achieve maximum influence. Designing an effective strategy requires a solid understanding of the national context, a well-developed vision of the appropriate role of the platform within this context, and a willingness to jointly evaluate and adapt approaches based on experience.



Meeting with forest dwelling community from Kayarakhet village in Udaipur District, Rajasthan, part of a national campaign to secure rights to communal lands in India

Photo Credit: Jason Taylor / International Land Coalition

The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure signal a convergence of interest at the global level among a significant set of civil society organizations, development agencies, and multilateral institutions.² However, advances in securing land rights for rural people by reforming and implementing land tenure policies and practices rely primarily on the success of engagement at the national level. The International Land Coalition places engagement at the country level at the heart of its approach to achieving impact and has invested in building multi-stakeholder platforms as a cornerstone of its national engagement strategies (NES). Active in 22 focal countries in 2017, ILC plans to reach 35 countries by 2021.³

The ILC experience is perhaps the most extensive effort to date of a sustained investment in multi-stakeholder platforms for policy change across such a range of countries, with systematic efforts at monitoring and evaluating outcomes. By investing in platforms to build a common agenda, provide “backbone support” to coordinate joint action by diverse national players, and measure progress using shared indicators, the effort aims to fulfill multiple conditions for collective impact.⁴ As such, it provides a unique opportunity for learning. Evidence of NES achievements in recent years show that combined efforts by diverse stakeholders, with different expertise and sometimes distinct interests, can achieve positive outcomes in influencing

and accelerating reforms, and ensuring that these result in actual changes on the ground. Critical factors enabling such success include the ability to build and sustain dialogue among different actors, develop strategic alliances, and keep policy makers engaged, informed and influenced.

This Guidance Note is the result of a structured process of exchange of experience and lessons among NES facilitators from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe. Its focus is on choices that guide the design and evolution of the NES platform in its relationship to government to achieve influence on policy reform and implementation in support of people-centered land governance. The guidance is presented in three steps:

1. Undertake a joint situation analysis of the scope for policy influence and associated policy implementation to bring about the desired change.
2. Define the focus, role and composition of the NES platform appropriate to the national context.
3. Plan stages of NES development, evaluate progress, and adapt to changing conditions.

Throughout the text, you'll find ***In Practice*** boxes with case examples illustrating NES experiences and ***Insight*** boxes going into more depth on a particular conceptual issue.

Insight: Reflecting on policy influence in a cycle of action and learning

The lessons presented in this Guidance Note are drawn from a structured process of exchange among NES facilitators, reflecting upon their achievements, challenges encountered, and strategies that have evolved to address these. In designing their strategies, many NES facilitators have drawn upon the Collaborating for Resilience approach, which describes a cycle of action and learning simplified in three phases, as shown in the figure below.



Active reflection is embedded in each phase of the cycle. Such structured reflection on experience is especially important in the development and evolution of multi-stakeholder partnerships such as those organized to achieve the national engagement strategies. Choices about how most effectively to engage with government agencies and policy processes need to take into account the sometimes divergent interests and expectations of different members, and must be tailored to a dynamic institutional and policy context.

See Ratner, B.D. and W.E. Smith (2014), *Collaborating for Resilience: A Practitioner's Guide*. Penang, Malaysia: Collaborating for Resilience. Available at <http://coresilience.org/manuals/guide>. (French and Spanish versions also available.)

1. UNDERTAKE A JOINT ANALYSIS OF THE SCOPE FOR INFLUENCE ON POLICY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

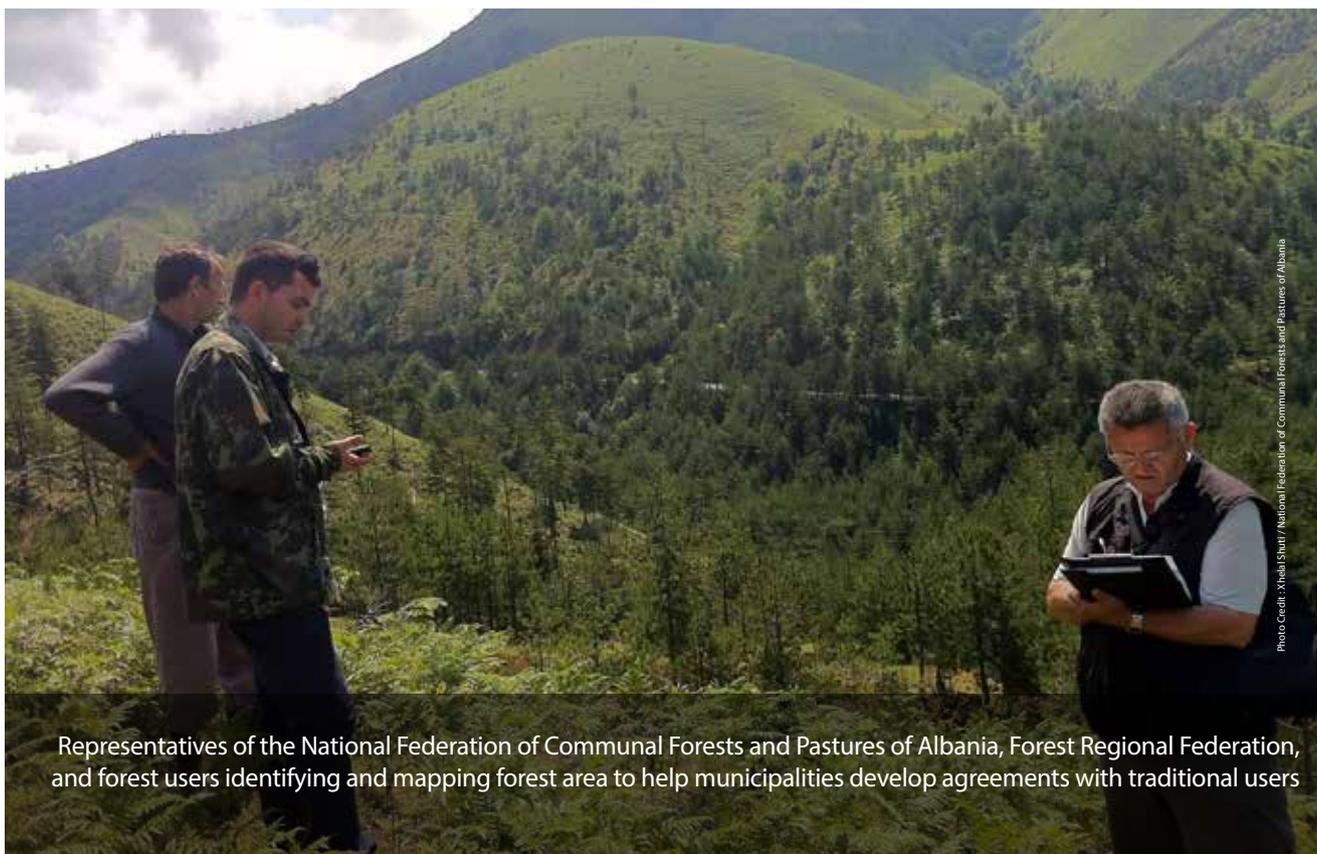
Determining the most effective route to engaging government for policy influence through the national engagement strategy requires a solid understanding of the context.

A situation analysis can be done by one or more specialists, but it is most useful (and most likely to contribute to a solid design) when the full spectrum of NES members is engaged in this analysis and contributes to a shared understanding of the challenges (see *Box In Practice: Approaches to joint analysis*).

Key factors to assess include:

- a. degree of alignment between existing policy priorities and NES goals
- b. public recognition or sense of urgency around the change targeted
- c. level of agreement or debate on policy directions among NES members
- d. government willingness to consult or cooperate with CSOs/NGOs/NES members
- e. level of legal protection for CSOs, NGOs and their degree of autonomy
- f. level of political stability

Where existing national policy goals are more aligned with the NES, the platform may seek a closer involvement of decision-makers early in the process. In the case of Bolivia, the NES goals coincide with government policy, while grassroots communities directly engage government units and participate in both the definition and the implementation of land-related policy. In sharp contrast, Nicaragua's government does not officially recognize the existence of a NES or share its goals. NES members are perceived as opponents to government, even though they are careful not to criticize official policy. For example, in 2015 and 2016, the NES platform invited local authorities to review a land market study, but they declined, commenting that they were not authorized by the national government. The platform has also sought to engage in dialogue on pathways to address the government policy goal of increasing agricultural exports, which can entail expansion of land area for export crops under cultivation versus increased productivity or product value added. Yet, officials have interpreted any proposal from the NES as a grievance regarding land related issues.⁵



Representatives of the National Federation of Communal Forests and Pastures of Albania, Forest Regional Federation, and forest users identifying and mapping forest area to help municipalities develop agreements with traditional users

Strong public recognition and sense of urgency around the proposed changes may also improve government responsiveness.

Social mobilization, fact-based awareness raising and public interactions on the NES goals can help to emphasize the pressing need for government actions to improve rural livelihoods. Public recognition of land issues in Cameroon, for example, achieved through a wide-ranging

campaign, led to a significant reduction in corporate land concessions and an increase in land lease rates, providing better compensation to communities where concessions were established.⁶ Heightened awareness of land grabs and land rights together with nonviolent resistance in communities forced the corporate palm oil business to abandon all operations in some concessions.

In Practice: Approaches to joint situation analysis

An in-house joint analysis can build relationships and quickly integrate findings into strategy.

It is possible to conduct the analysis in-house if the NES facilitator has the appropriate training and skills. This was the case in Cameroon, where a facilitator with capable technical profile and good connections with government and CSOs worked with well-qualified representatives of both CSOs and government in a formulation workshop that identified land governance challenges and potential actions. A first position paper summarized the results of this workshop. The platform then called for policy proposals from all stakeholders, and a second position paper presented them with one voice, building credibility and coherence of the emerging NES platform, and greatly facilitating engagement with government.⁷

An outside facilitator can provide a mirror to reflect on the NES. An experienced resource person from outside the platform can also effectively guide the NES members in joint analysis of the scope for policy influence and associated policy implementation. It's helpful if the expert has a good understanding of national politics, excellent contacts in government and research institutions, plus experience with grassroots communities and land rights and use in the country. It's also desirable that such an expert know the goals, resources, and activities of the NES members so that they can better orient the joint analysis using the complementarity of capacities and the members' understanding of the context in which they operate. Whether or not this is the case, it's essential that they have the ability to draw out, compare, and help analyze the perspectives of different actors on the national context.

This was the case in Togo, where an influential and capable resource person with a wealth of experience and ample contacts with key stakeholders aided the NES platform to gain credibility in a short time. His expertise in land reform, including his ability to approach the analysis from a comparative perspective drawing on his experience in other African countries, plus his sharp understanding of stakeholder dynamics and his handling of the inception workshop demonstrated the appropriate skills to carry out the joint analysis and to document the findings.⁸

In either approach, whether using 'in-house' NES resources or outside facilitators, NES members need to actively contribute to a good background analysis to define strategies.

The main purpose of the background analysis is to inform the national engagement strategies. To this effect, a thorough knowledge of land issues—land distribution, land rights, land use, and social arrangements to access land, involvement of political stakeholders, formal and informal distribution of power in decision-making, including level of corruption and entitlement culture—plus a broad network of connections in government, academia and grassroots organizations connected to land matters is necessary. This information is key to effectively carry out a stakeholder analysis, a main input in the definition of strategies to influence policies, processes and agendas of people-centered land governance.



Farmers plow the fields in Amuru District in northern Uganda, where the Uganda Land Alliance is working to halt forced evictions

Photo Credit: Jason Taylor / International Land Coalition

The level of policy agreement among NES members increases their scope for collective influence. Sometimes NES members do not share the same information and perceive policy opportunities and risks differently. They may work with distinct constituencies, such as smallholder farmers, peri-urban workers, forest communities or indigenous people's networks. They may also have different core interests, such as women's rights, youth employment, or environmental protection. There may be competition for funding, which highlights the need for donor transparency and donor coherence. Research institutions, grassroots organizations, and NGOs that support social mobilization can have different priorities that respond to the individual organization's orientation. Multiple NES facilitators describe a gradual process of convening and dialogue that, over months and sometimes years, has led to a greater degree of trust and shared understanding among the NES members themselves, and as a result a more coherent policy agenda (see *Box In Practice: Seeking convergence on a policy agenda*). This is why it is critical to assess and acknowledge the degree of agreement as well as to understand the

points of ongoing debate among NES members regarding the goals of policy engagement—and the strategies to achieve these. In advance of achieving a certain level of coherence, it may be counterproductive to engage government too closely.

Government readiness to consult with civil society and other non-state actors on policy matters also favors a closer relationship. This concerns both the general stance of government towards civil society involvement in the policy process, as well as the specific relationships cultivated by the NES platform or its members. In some instances, such as Nepal, the prior strong relationships of members with government provided a foundation for close engagement from the start of the NES process. At the other extreme, in Nicaragua government has excluded civil society from land policy deliberations, preferring to engage private sector players, and the consolidation of the NES platform has not changed this.⁹ More often, there is some scope for engagement at the start but also a strong need to build legitimacy of the NES as a credible actor in policy processes. This was the case in Albania and Togo, where state agencies

or parliamentary bodies became closely engaged in NES activities, and in Tanzania, where government has recognized and grown to appreciate the NES platform as a reliable source of expertise and information.¹⁰

Where legal protection for CSOs and NGOs involved in land issues is not well established, they may need to be more cautious. In

India, while NGOs have historically enjoyed strong protections, recently there are more restrictions on freedom of expression. The central government is increasingly sensitive to organizations involved in defense of human rights, particularly when it entails dissent from government policy, making work on land issues progressively difficult.¹¹ Bangladesh and Cambodia have each seen increased legal restrictions on NGOs in recent years, including a heightened risk of losing legal status for criticizing government. In Tanzania, government promotion of a large corporate agricultural project has generated strong opposition by NES members, who must be careful not to be perceived as “inciting the public or painting a negative view of the government and its policies” for they can be decertified and, in the case of individuals, their cases taken to the police. Alliances with international development NGOs (such as Oxfam and CARE) may provide some measure of protection to domestic CSOs and NGOs engaged in land policy advocacy, as is the case, for example, in Tanzania and Cameroon.

Political and institutional instability may also limit the scope for sustained engagement with government counterparts. In an exceptional case such as Bolivia, where the Constitution recognizes the pluri-cultural character of the country and respect for indigenous communities, relations between grassroots organizations, policy makers, and government functionaries are relatively stable. More commonly, NES members face a more dynamic situation. Elections and shifting alliances in a parliamentary democracy result in frequent changes in government officials and politicians who can affect policy. In Nepal, nine Prime Ministers and their cabinets have ruled in the last eight years. There, just as in Tanzania, Togo, or Guatemala, the NES platform has cultivated relationships with the more stable functionaries in technical and advisory roles in government departments, who tend to have more longevity than political appointees.¹² Nevertheless, bureaucratic instability affects the continuity of grassroots organizations’ struggle to gain and protect land rights. Sometimes functionaries sensitive to the cause of the landless are removed or transferred to other posts. There’s also a risk that opposition politicians may seek to mobilize civil society organizations for narrow partisan gains, so leaders need to be mindful of maintaining broad legitimacy in the eyes of their constituency.



Pastoralists in the Western Foothills of Mongolia, home to one of the newest National Engagement Strategies

Photo Credit: Joann Taylor / International Land Coalition

In Practice: Seeking convergence on a policy agenda

Clarity, coherence and shared commitment to a policy agenda is critical for influence. However, it is often precisely because these are missing that different groups are motivated to create a NES platform in the first place. So, how do these shared conditions emerge?

Sometimes convergence comes from a long process of advocacy, opposition and adjustment. Before the Nepal NES platform convened the present members, their different priorities and goals diluted the effectiveness of social mobilization. It has taken years to shape a strategy that is modified as the social movement matures, NGOs reorient their goals, and government responds to the changing conditions.

Other times, a more structured approach to dialogue yields rapid progress. In India, organizers recognized the great diversity in challenges and priorities across different states and regions. They used the NES platform to identify and focus on shared policy priorities through deliberation, thus connecting stakeholders from diverse social and cultural groups, NGOs and intergovernmental bodies.

Such a dialogue can explicitly address points of tension and conflict. In Togo, the platform developed guidelines for stakeholder cooperation that included very targeted requests to diverse experts. In particular, the conflictive relationship of government with civil society was overcome by inviting functionaries to contribute their knowledge of specific issues. This gave them a positive role to play by contributing to a shared base of information and analysis, rather than responding from the start to demands and critiques. The policy agenda continues to evolve with regular discussion and reflection around challenges and achievements by civil society members and the ministries participating in the NES.



Training on mechanisms for land access with community representatives and local government officials in the Sierra Norte region of Ecuador

2. DEFINE THE FOCUS, ROLE AND COMPOSITION OF THE NES PLATFORM APPROPRIATE TO THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

A range of options for the role and composition of the NES platform may be suitable depending on the country context, from a NES that is in fact convened by government, one that includes government representatives within the NES as full members or in advisory roles, to one that has members of government or parliamentarians as members of the platform or a governing body but acting in a personal capacity. In other instances, it may be appropriate to build a NES that cultivates government relationships through dialogue processes only, or, in contrast, one that acts in a more confrontational advocacy role vis-à-vis government. (See Box *Insight: Mapping strategies for engaging government.*) The situation analysis will help guide the choice.

When appropriate, inclusion of government can accelerate adoption of changes in policy and implementation. Government participation in the NES can facilitate access to key information on rural people, land rights, and resource use. Most importantly, when government representatives help define goals of the NES platform and debate options for policy reform and institutional strengthening, they are more likely to champion the adoption of these reforms. Direct access to decision-makers also aids follow up on effective implementation of policy and regulatory reforms. This is the approach found in Albania, where the depth of NES members' experience, knowledge, and grassroots representation is recognized by government. Key members of parliament are part of the NES coordinating committee and part of the parliamentary group responsible

for submitting the draft law on forestry. Having them in the coordinating committee is crucially important to the NES platform's policy influence.¹³ Similarly, in Togo, multiple ministries are formally represented in the platform, and the NES is chaired on a rotational basis—a choice made explicitly to build mutual trust.

When government officials are not directly involved as members of the NES platform, they may still maintain a strong connection.

This is the case, for example, in Bangladesh and the Philippines. The example of Nepal is particularly interesting in this regard, because a strong record of policy engagement by NES members led to direct involvement in electoral campaigns. Strong grassroots representation among the NES members, combined with a record of oppositional advocacy, put NES platform members in a position to negotiate with political parties that share their goals to name three candidates for parliament during the 2017 campaign. Most recently, with growing government recognition of the role the platform provides as a trusted forum for dialogue, there is now a move to explore a formal role for the Ministry of Lands as convener.

Where there is strong agreement among members, a focused agenda can be more effective in bringing about change. NES member organizations that agree on specific priorities can concentrate their efforts and combine their expertise and skills to sway public perception and better influence decision makers.



Group of experts identifying forest pilot areas in Golaj Village, Albania as part of participatory annual planning

Photo Credit: Xhebi Shatri / National Federation of Communal Forests and Pastures of Albania

Agendas may be oriented and aligned around specific resource sectors, such as forest lands or common property pasture lands. In Nepal the main focus of the NES is on access to agricultural land, given the concentration of land with large landowners. In Albania, the focus is on communal forests and pastures and the elaboration of a new forestry law. Individual forest rights and pastoralist rights over grazing lands have emerged as a central focus in India.

The NES may focus on a particular policy initiative. In Cameroon, the main concern, as part of the new law on land policy and land tenure, is implementation of land reform aimed at fulfilling a set of fundamental rights of local and indigenous populations to land management. In Peru, the government's emphasis on private investment in mining has posed a serious threat to community lands, backed by a legislative norm enabling the practice. Members of the NES platform informed and influenced policy makers, and in May 2017, with the support of two parties in Congress, the norm was rescinded.¹⁴

The NES may also focus on a specific social sector, such as women's land rights or indigenous peoples' rights. In Malawi, as in many countries, "customary law in land administration perpetuates gender imbalance and prevents both men and women . . . from accessing or owning land."¹⁵ Recognition of women's rights is in the hands of local traditional authorities, often introducing considerable obstacles. The NES platform has enabled conversations with local chiefs, and broader dialogues empowered women and men to demand more clarity and equity in inheritance rights. The new land laws represent a significant advance, though regulations to operationalize them are still pending.

Cross-cutting issues such as such as land dispute resolution can serve to build a NES agenda. In Bangladesh, cases of land grabbing from poor and disadvantaged communities are common, and over 70 percent of court litigations result from conflict over land ownership.¹⁶ Advocacy by the NES platform, coordinating 21 organizations with different and complementary actions, has contributed to recognition of land

rights and more equitable land and natural resources use, particularly by indigenous communities. Conflict over land has been a constant in the Guatemalan countryside as well. As a result, grassroots organizations prioritized the implementation of conflict resolution mechanisms and constitutional requirements of justice in land ownership. The recent disposition of government to dialogue with indigenous organizations stems from this sharp focus.

When NES membership is diverse, a nested approach may be suitable, with a broad shared agenda and more focused sub-groups organized by priority issue. In India, for example, issues raised in the NES platform may be specific to pastoralists as a group or women pastoralists in particular; others may be specific to smallholder farmers or forest communities. Often NES members can jointly differentiate issues that need attention from



A pastoral woman in Kayarakhet Village, India

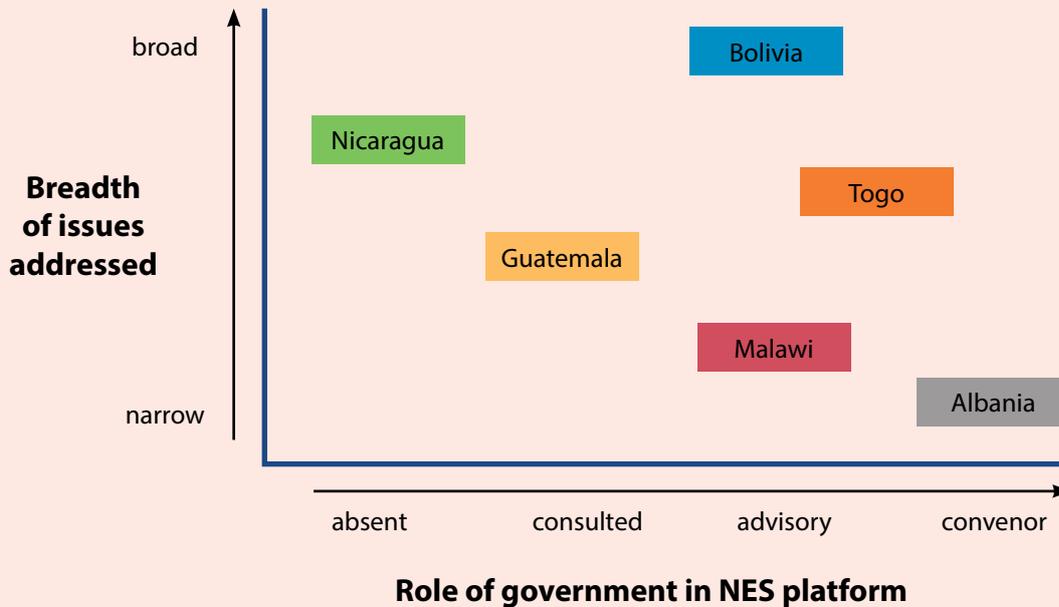
local government authorities from those that require consideration from central government, and act on each accordingly. This is the case with NES platform in Tanzania, with a coordinating body playing an advocacy role at the national level, while thematic working groups focus on issues like women's land rights, rangelands and pastoralism, and land-based investments.



Secure access to shared forests has helped farmers in Kayarakhet village, Udaipur District, Rajasthan, boost their modest farming income

Insight: Mapping strategies for engaging government

No single approach to the national engagement strategy would be suitable for a wide range of diverse country contexts. The aim instead is to tailor an approach that fits the particular context. The graphic below illustrates the diversity of approaches to NES development on two related vectors: the breadth of issues addressed and the role of government (as represented by particular agencies or officials) in the NES platform.



Consider, for example, the sharply contrasting cases of Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Albania. In **Bolivia**, the present government is aligned with the people centered land governance priorities of the NES. For this reason, the platform has cultivated a close, advisory role, focused not on debating policy goals but on assisting government to improve implementation. For example, collective land rights defined by community use are recognized by the state, so members aid local stakeholders to sort out overlapping claims and regularize land titles. NES members have chosen to downplay the distinct identity of the NES so as to maintain this special relationship. They work on a broad set of issues, including land tenure and registration, water rights, the effects urban growth on indigenous communities, communal management of the archeological and cultural endowment, community tourism, approval of land related decrees by municipalities, and supporting the Land Reform Institute of Bolivia.

In **Nicaragua**, by contrast, land policy issues are hotly contested on many fronts. The Nicaraguan Canal and Development Project, for example, has driven speculation in the land market, with the participation of high government officials and private investors, both domestic and international. The government exercises tight control over land issues and the president’s office restricts the interactions of ministers as well as technical and midlevel functionaries. In the absence of direct access, the NES platform works with communities to raise public awareness, share ideas and propose research-based policy recommendations and programs related to land rights. In addition to addressing rapid commercialization of the sector, they work to strengthen family farming and access to land by disadvantaged groups, mainly women and youth.

At the other end of the spectrum, the NES in Albania is both tightly focused and integrated with government. The platform maintains a narrow focus on forest users' rights, working to build synergies among actors in forest governance. Because the policy issues are relatively non-contentious, the NES platform has been able to cultivate a climate of joint education and experimentation, building evidence around solutions. Environment and agriculture ministries, as well as members of parliament, are part of the NES platform.

Other examples are more intermediate. The NES in **Malawi** has focused on land bills that decentralize decision-making and promote public participation in the administration of land related matters. It has worked closely with the Ministry of Land and some members of parliament. In **Guatemala**, the NES platform works to inform rural communities about the agrarian policy and enable them to effectively participate in public debates over land conflicts. Through the platform, ILC signed a letter of understanding with the government regarding land disputes and conflict resolution. In **Togo**, the NES has engaged policy-makers and grassroots communities on the participatory development of a land and property code, promoting equitable access to land between men and women and sensitisation of local and national policy-makers. The platform has facilitated dialogue between civil society and the government and created an important space for exchange and cooperation, with ministries often chairing dialogue events.



The Miskitu indigenous community in Wangki Tangni, on the North Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, has organized to fight encroachment on their collective land rights

3. PLAN NES DEVELOPMENT, EVALUATE PROGRESS, AND ADAPT TO CHANGING CONDITIONS

The effectiveness of a NES platform is influenced by the diversity and depth of its membership. Though a powerful grassroots movement can exert pressure to achieve results on specific issues, connecting with NGOs and research and academic institutions broadens the base of knowledge, capacity, and opportunities to shift public opinion and influence decision makers. As documented in numerous African cases, NES members that already benefit from a good reputation nationally and internationally can be an asset to the platform.¹⁷ The NES platform in Tanzania, for example, involves the Ministry of Lands, legal aid organizations, and research institutions that help to review land use and implementation, ensuring a broad base of information and analysis, as well as the presence of grassroots perspectives. The participation of international and multilateral institutions has created an environment for more effective advocacy and consideration of these organizations as part of the NES platform. Recently, international donors to the Land Tenure Support Program have insisted that the NES platform participate fully in implementing it, a testament to growing legitimacy of the platform.



Women leaders from indigenous Kayambi and Afro-Ecuadorian communities gather to strengthen ties among their networks in Imbabura and Carchi provinces, northern Ecuador

Investing effort in consolidating the NES agenda early can help build a more effective platform. NES members often come to the platform with diverse aims, from grassroots organizations and civil society networks with

experience in collective advocacy for land rights, to women's rights organizations, to academic and research institutions working on land issues. Often there are NGOs with national scope providing support to grassroots organizations and facilitating access to resources and information. In Cameroon, NES members recognized from the start that the wide range and often contradictory nature of advocacy coming from civil society could jeopardize their chance for influence at a critical window of opportunity for land policy reform. This realization motivated a sequenced set of dialogue activities resulting in a unified set of position papers for clearly defined thematic areas, dramatically improving the responsiveness of government to the NES agenda. This coincided with the explicit demand from both parliamentarians and government for a unified civil society voice, and the platform was able to fulfill this need, becoming a trusted interlocutor for the government.¹⁸ Government agencies now have a defined role in the NES platform and the platform contributes position papers, advocacy documents and case studies as inputs to drafting the new land law.¹⁹

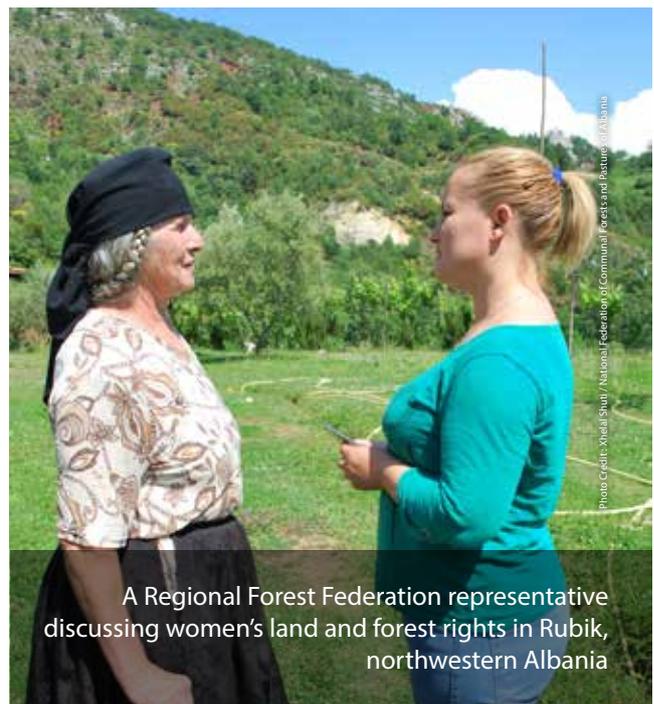
Government presence in the NES platform can be desirable once there is a shared agenda and common goals. In the case of Albania, a mature NGO focused on the forest sector had previously established its legitimacy vis-à-vis both government and international agencies. This enabled the involvement of the World Bank, the Swedish development cooperation agency (Sida), and key government institutions early in the NES development process, resulting in a platform seen as inclusive and well-informed, and ultimately influential in the policy process.²⁰ Facing a very different policy context, the NES platform in Nicaragua has focused on expanding grassroots support and linking this to solid academic and research organizations in order to build the evidence base for reform, aiming over the medium term to consolidate a common agenda. The platform is betting on a future when direct policy dialogue with government is possible.

Collaboration with government too soon, however, may narrow the options for independent analysis and voice. In Tanzania, while there are openings for policy influence, NES members struggle to reach a common position on key trends affecting local land rights. Substantial debate is focused on responses to the government effort to expand corporate investment through the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania. Some grassroots organizations representing pastoralists and small farmers reject any engagement with the initiative, while other NES members advocate engaging to monitor investment activities and their results. In the absence of such agreement on strategy, including government directly in NES platform is unlikely to be helpful. There is an understanding that NES members need to convene and jointly evaluate the project's pros and cons and consider the implications of a monitoring role, in order to have a common voice and remain independent.

A range of strategies can be used to moderate and sequence the degree of engagement.

Early activities may be limited to a defined scope such as joint awareness, addressing information gaps, or assessing specific challenges of policy implementation (see *Box In Practice: Sequencing engagement with government*). Support and sponsorship from well-recognized international NGOs may also help create the political and institutional space for dialogue, important in building credibility of the NES platform. In Tanzania, Malawi, and Cameroon, international NGOs have facilitated government presence and participation in NES dialogue activities. In Togo, NES members recognized the need for government in the platform but were also concerned that the presence of ministries that could limit frank exchanges among civil society members. As a result, the Civil Society Committee was created within the NES platform to provide a forum for this unfiltered dialogue and debate among civil society members. At the same time, the platform has obtained representation within the high-level inter-ministerial committee, providing a way to track and have a voice in a wide range of policy discussions that may impinge upon land and natural resource rights.

Past experience should also inform the choice of how to engage government. In Nepal, NGO leaders have learned that cultivating close relationships with government offers both benefits and risks. In particular, the close government ties of some NGO leaders can create inroads to the policy process and at the same time also lead to a conflict of interest that jeopardizes grassroots mobilization. In the words of the NES facilitator, "Social movement is not possible by jobholders," because their professional interests and expectations sometimes differ from the aspirations of grassroots movements, so they become unwilling to contribute with their full potential. Recognizing this tension, the NES as a platform maintains a diverse mosaic of both grassroots membership-based organizations and professionalized NGOs, coordinating the engagement with government without sacrificing the autonomy of each actor. In India, similarly, NES members have identified the need to adopt a blend of approaches to influence policy. Some work closely with government to develop policies and implement acts effectively, while others adopt strategies of mass mobilization, campaigning and showing strength of masses to hold government publicly accountable. Others generate evidence for advocacy highlighting land struggles, social movements and on the ground implementation of the land reform agenda.



A Regional Forest Federation representative discussing women's land and forest rights in Rubik, northwestern Albania

In Practice: Sequencing engagement with government

To have influence, civil society actors need to agree on coherent and defined policy messages and proposals. Yet it's also vital to understand and gain access to policy decision making processes. What are some of the ways to engage with government in advance of advocating specific policy solutions?

Consult to build appreciation for the policy process. Early engagement can signal a willingness of NES members to recognize government's authority over land matters while offering knowledge and capacity, and thus avoiding the perception of antagonism over such issues. This was a critical step, for example, in Togo and Madagascar, and more recently in Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia.

Help officials gain a deeper understanding of local realities. In Albania, local consultations with forest users served to identify common challenges in land and forest management and develop a shared understanding of the most pressing issues. Then members of parliament were brought to rural communities, so they could learn firsthand. Research institutions and academia also partnered to develop a trusted evidence base to support such shared understanding and help appraise implementation of land laws, and identify failings and gaps in policy.

Address information gaps. In Cameroon, for example, the NES platform responded to a specific request from the Ministry of Land to learn about policy options from other African countries with successful land reforms. The result was an international workshop to enable this exchange of experience, with officials and researchers from the region participating.

Assess policy implementation obstacles. With Tanzania reviewing its national land policy, NES members gathered information and organized a series of dialogues, examining measures to protect community lands and options for regulating the leasing and acquisition of such lands,²¹ and assessing the future of rangelands, including 35 pastoral organizations that take part in the platform.²²

Members should regularly evaluate progress in development of the NES platform and adapt strategies for engaging government.

Given the diverse character of NES platform members, the evaluation of strategies employed should identify and take into account diverging perspectives, for example, between leaders of local grassroots networks and national NGO leaders with connections to government. The annual progress review, requiring a structured assessment of goals, achievements, obstacles, and outcomes of the NES, provides a great point of departure for this internal dialogue and critical reflection. Regular reporting on performance and impact measures can build trust and commitment among members and elicit discussion of unanticipated areas of progress or constraint. When done in a participatory way,

the evaluation of progress can deliver significant capacity building for NES members as they reflect on ways to improve on the strategies employed in prior years.

Such joint reflection may also prompt reassessment of the vision of the NES platform, and the composition of its membership. Based on the evaluation and experience acquired in the previous year, NES members may reconsider what the platform can achieve, or refine the vision of the relationship with government. NES activities also put members in contact with non-member organizations, providing an opportunity to assess their contributions and to consider whether inviting them to join the platform would strengthen shared effectiveness.

Diversity in the NES platform often brings complementary skills, resources, and contacts, which can strengthen the scope for influence on decision-makers. Examples include international NGOs, media organizations (online, print, radio or television), research institutions, and industry associations. Depending on the types of communication networks and relationships that new members bring, this may open new possibilities to jointly address policy priorities that in the past were deemed beyond the scope of NES influence.



A strategy session of Afro-Ecuadorian organizations addressing ancestral land rights and land use in the Chota Valley of northern Ecuador

Insight: “Representing” versus strengthening local voices

Does the NES platform claim to “represent” local voices? Or does it aim to provide a channel that ensures local voices are more directly heard in policy deliberations? The difference may hinge on the character of the NES member organizations, and the policy context.

There can be a tension between the multiplicity of pressing grassroots issues and the need for a unified, powerful voice that represents community concerns at the national level. Activists in Guatemala, along with CSO and NGOs, do frequently present a joint position on land grabs and access to land. Before a public pronouncement is made, they consult extensively with grassroots organizations. By contrast, in Nicaragua limitations imposed by government make it impossible for NES members to represent grassroots in their struggle over land, much less provide a direct route to policy stakeholders. Their work with communities instead aims to raise awareness of land rights and support grassroots networks to be more effective in their own advocacy efforts.

Where the policy context is favorable, an emphasis on strengthening local actors to access their rights makes good sense. In Bolivia, the Taller de Iniciativas en Estudios Rurales y Reforma Agraria (TIERRA), accompanies indigenous communities in normalizing land tenure and obtaining land titles from the state. The NGO, a NES member, supports the processes of traditional communal conciliation that sort out family and communal rights to land. Once regularized through these traditional mechanisms, the communities then obtain individual or collective titles from the state. TIERRA is developing communication tools and procedures so the process can be completed successfully without the accompaniment of an NGO.²³ The goal is to ensure the communities have their own voice without an intermediary to represent or translate their institutional arrangements and decisions.

Within a single NES, there may be room for both modes of engagement. In Tanzania, issues specific to pastoralists differ from those of women smallholder farmers or hunter-gatherers. NES members identify and act on issues that need attention from local authorities as well as those that require responses from central government. Local support often translates into assisting local groups with technical skills, documentation, targeted capacity building, or other resources. By contrast, where lobbying is required at the level of ministries or parliament, significant coordination is needed to consult all platform members regarding issues and priorities. The NES platform explores the best options from the grassroots and then validates its positions, as it did in providing responses to the draft National Land Policy. The Tanzania NES platform eventually issued a declaration incorporating the concerns raised by all members but with a single voice. The final document was circulated among members and delivered to government representatives.



Photo Credit: Jason Taylor / International Land Coalition

Miskitu indigenous women in Wangki Tangni, Nicaragua, have spearheaded efforts to secure collective land rights, while also championing gender equality

Conclusion

Despite the force and vibrancy of social mobilization, protest and advocacy, a broader range of routes to influence land governance is often needed. Conditions vary dramatically across countries, and there is no sole 'right way' to engage. The political economy, government interests, strength and involvement of grassroots organizations, NGOs and research institutions, the composition of the NES platform, as well as the characteristics of the issues at stake, demand specific courses of action adapted to the evolving context. Efforts to monitor and evaluate progress in securing land rights for rural people around the world demonstrate that multi-stakeholder platforms can effectively channel and accelerate the collective influence of civil society and other stakeholders on policy reform and implementation.

The exchange of experiences among NES facilitators from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Europe is part of the ILC's investment in a continuous cycle of action and learning. Decisions on when and how best to engage government in the work of the multi-stakeholder platforms emerged as a top priority for more detailed comparative analysis. The reflections and emerging lessons presented here reflect both the diversity of national contexts and the convergence on underlying principles of engagement. These principles include building collective understanding of the national context based on dialogue among diverse actors, jointly defining a strategy to engage decision-makers, and consistently reviewing progress and adapting approaches.

ADDITIONAL READING

Brouwer, H., and Woodhill, J., with Hemmati, M., Verhoosel, K. and van Vugt, S. (2016). *The MSP Guide: How to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships*, Wageningen: Wageningen University and Research, CDI, and Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3362/9781780446691>. (French version also available.)

Brouwer, H., and Brouwers, J. (2017). *The MSP Tool Guide: Sixty tools to facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships. Companion to The MSP Guide*. Wageningen: Wageningen University and Research, CDI. Available at <http://www.mspguide.org/resource/msp-tool-guide>. (French version also available.)

Heinemann, E., and Phillips, L.M. (2017). *Country-level policy engagement in IFAD: Guide book*. Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development. <https://maintenance.ifad.org/documents/10180/b360d3a9-e8db-4de4-9af7-babc08075953>

Monitor Institute. (2013). *Gather: The Art and Science of Effective Convening*. <https://assets.rockefellerfoundation.org/app/uploads/20130626174021/Gather-The-Art-and-Science-of-Effective-Conveing.pdf>.

Ratner, B.D., and Smith, W.E. (2014). *Collaborating for Resilience: A Practitioner's Guide*. Penang, Malaysia: Collaborating for Resilience. Available at <http://coresilience.org/manuals/guide>. (French and Spanish versions also available.)

Suefert, P. (2017). *Policy dialogue spaces and multi-actor platforms in the context of tenure governance: A civil society perspective on experiences and criteria to advance human rights-based governance of tenure*. Working Paper. FIAN International.

- ¹ Country-level policy engagement is understood as “facilitating and informing nationally owned policy processes, so as to enable governments and other national stakeholders to determine themselves the policy change required” (Heinemann and Phillips 2017).
- ² For information on the Voluntary Guidelines, visit <http://www.fao.org/cfs/home/activities/vggg/en>.
- ³ For a description of the NES approach and list of current countries, see: <http://www.landcoalition.org/en/national-engagement-strategies>
- ⁴ Kania, J. and M. Kramer. (2011). Collective impact, Stanford Social Innovation Review. Winter 2011: 36-41. https://ssir.org/images/articles/2011_WI_Feature_Kania.pdf
- ⁵ Estrategia Nacional de Involucramiento para el Acceso Democrático a la Tierra en Nicaragua. (2016). ENI Nicaragua. p. 4.
- ⁶ “Lessons from Herakles: sorting out a road map for palm oil in Africa”, <https://news.mongabay.com/2016/04/lessons-herakles-sorting-road-map-palm-oil-africa/>. Accessed March 4, 2018.
- ⁷ Learning from NES Cameroon: Good practices from a multi-stakeholder platform. Nov. 2017
- ⁸ Learning from NES Togo: Good practices from a multi-stakeholder platform. Nov. 2017
- ⁹ Estrategia Nacional de Involucramiento para el Acceso Democrático a la Tierra (ENI) Nicaragua. Propuesta de Plan Anual 2017-2018, p. 10.
- ¹⁰ Learning from NES Togo: Good practices from a multi-stakeholder platform. Nov. 2017. <https://www.landcoalition.org/en/regions/africa/goodpractice/learning-nes-togo-good-practices-multi-stakeholder-platform>.
- ¹¹ “Three times rise in killings of India’s land, eco-defenders,” Ecologise.in. 15 July 2017. <https://www.ecologise.in/2017/07/15/three-times-rise-in-killings-of-indias-land-eco-defenders-modi-govt-blamed-for-stifling-opposition-by-any-means/>; Vengurlekar, A. (2017). “Police Firing on Anti-Mining Protesters in Hazaribagh Kills Four,” The Wire. <https://thewire.in/70306/hazaribagh-four-dead-police-firing-anti-mining-protest/amp/>
- ¹² Learning from NES Togo: Good practices from a multi-stakeholder platform. Nov. 2017
- ¹³ Learning from NES Albania: Good practices from a multi-stakeholder Nov. 2017. <https://www.landcoalition.org/fr/resources/learning-nes-albania-good-practices-multi-stakeholder-platform>.
- ¹⁴ Miluska Carhuavilca, Perú NES facilitator, March 7, 2018. Email.
- ¹⁵ International Land Coalition. (2016). “ILC hails long awaited land reforms in Malawi after nearly 15 years of advocacy work by LandNet,” <http://www.landcoalition.org/es/regions/africa/news/ilc-hails-long-awaited-land-reforms-malawi-endorsed-member-landnet>.
- ¹⁶ Bangladesh Final Narrative Report, Jan 2017
- ¹⁷ Sulle, E., Ka I., and Dio, A. (2017). “Multi-Stakeholder Platforms on Land Governance in Africa: Review and Analysis of ILC’s Experience,” International Land Coalition and Initiative Prospective Agricole et Rurale (IPAR), p 2.
- ¹⁸ Learning from NES Cameroon: Good practices from a multi-stakeholder platform. Nov. 2017.: <https://www.landcoalition.org/en/regions/africa/goodpractice/learning-nes-cameroon-good-practices-multi-stakeholder-platform>
- ¹⁹ Sulle et al., *ibid*.
- ²⁰ Learning from NES Albania: Good practices from a multi-stakeholder platform. Nov. 2017
- ²¹ Luhula, M., (2018). “Tanzania: multiple stakeholders debate land governance challenges,” International Land Coalition. <http://www.landcoalition.org/en/regions/africa/blog/tanzania-multiple-stakeholders-debate-land-governance-challenges>
- ²² Tesfaye, B. Tanzania rangelands: National dialogue proposes new measures for sustainable land use and conflict-free use of rangelands. <https://livestocksystems.ilri.org/2018/03/15/tanzania-rangelands-national-dialogue-proposes-new-measures-for-sustainable-land-use-and-conflict-free-use-of-rangelands/>
- ²³ Sanjinés, E., y Claps, L. (2015). Saneamiento interno para la regularización de tierras comunales y privadas, departamento de la Paz, Bolivia. Caso de estudio de la Base de Datos de la ILC. Roma: ILC.



This publication should be cited as:

Blake D. Ratner, Alberto Rivera and Andrea Fiorenza (2019). Engaging Government for Policy Influence Through Multi-Stakeholder Platforms. Collaborating for Resilience and International Land Coalition: Rome.

Collaborating for Resilience supports exchange of experience among practitioners, researchers and policy stakeholders working to build dialogue among groups competing over environmental resources, launch innovations that reduce the risk of social conflict, and strengthen institutions for equitable environmental governance.

© 2019 Collaborating for Resilience. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. This publication may be reproduced without the permission of, but with acknowledgment to, Collaborating for Resilience.

Front cover photo credit: Xhelal Shuti / National Federation of Communal Forests and Pastures of Albania

Back cover photo credit: Jason Taylor / International Land Coalition



Collaborating for Resilience
www.coresilience.org



100%
RECYCLED

Paper made from
recycled material

INTERNATIONAL
LAND
COALITION

With the financial support of



RESEARCH
PROGRAM ON
Policies,
Institutions,
and Markets

Led by IFPRI