



LANDCOLLABORATIVE

INFORMATION NOTE

Learning needs assessment for
the MSP/MAP learning cycle on
private-sector engagement



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 **LAND FOR LIFE**
Dialogue for Change

Developed by the Natural Resources Institute (NRI), this document forms part of a set of learning products for use by Multi-Stakeholder Platforms (MSPs), which emerged from a 'Learning Cycle on Engaging the Private Sector' commissioned by the LandCollaborative and facilitated by NRI. The LandCollaborative is a global community of practice that supports the role of national land coalitions, and other forms of multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) and alliances to help deliver system change for people-centred land governance by stimulating innovation, building capacities, providing tools and connecting practitioners and change makers with one another.

Introduction

This InfoNote explains the processes used by NRI to assess the learning priorities of learning cycle participants. This includes a [learning needs assessment and planning tool](#) that was developed for use at a co-planning workshop held in May 2021 to assess the participants' own learning priorities. This note explains the steps taken before and after the workshop to define the potential learning topics and how the learning priorities defined through participatory discussion fed into the design of learning sessions and activities delivered during the following 6 months of the learning cycle from during June to November 2021.

This note is intended to be used for reference by participants and partners in the LandCollaborative or others involved in design, planning, delivery and facilitation of learning resources and programmes for MSPs or on responsible private-sector investment. The note complements other tools and resources developed during the learning cycle, notably a Diagnostic Tool, [Guidance for MSPs on private-sector engagement for responsible agricultural investment](#), an [InfoNote on social learning](#) and a [Theory of Change tool](#).

Approaches to learning needs assessment

The NRI learning cycle team used the following processes and activities to assess learning needs, each of which is further explained below:

1. A process of diagnostic assessment of country-level agricultural investment situations and the associated policy and stakeholder engagement context, undertaken by each participating country team during March–April 2021.
2. Preliminary design of learning activities and listing of potential focus topics and skill areas, shared with all participants.
3. Completion of a learning needs assessment and planning tool by all participants.
4. Participatory discussion and agreement on priority topics and activities with all participants and LandCollaborative partners at a co-planning workshop, held in May 2021.

Learning needs assessment activities

1. A diagnostic process of agricultural investment situations and participants' practical engagement with RAI issues and the private sector at country level. This was done using a prototype version of the [diagnostic tool](#) devised for use by participants to compile an initial analysis of private-sector agricultural investment in each country and to reflect on their existing knowledge, information and skills in relation to the challenges of responsible investment and engaging with private-sector actors. NRI met with each country team to provide support on how to complete the diagnostic analysis, and the results were used to make a broad assessment of the content and potential learning topics and skill areas to be covered in the learning cycle. The diagnostic tool has now been re-designed in a modular format, to facilitate self-completion by participants with access to relevant learning materials and guidance of a learning facilitator.

2. Preliminary design of learning activities: The diagnostic process fed into the design of two parallel and inter-related streams of learning sessions and activities, in line with the participatory

social learning approach intended for the learning cycle, and adapted to the limitations of delivering it entirely online during the COVID pandemic: The two streams were:

- a) *Interactive learning sessions*: exploration of key topics through teaching presentations by NRI and other resource people, with provision of learning resources, case study material and opportunities for participants to discuss and share their own experiences for the whole group.
- b) *Issue-based collective learning activities*: participant-driven learning on key learning themes, involving cycles of planning, creative learning activities, and reflection. Creative learning activities included interviews with private-sector actors, field visits and analysis of online documents. These activities aimed to strengthen participants' skills, experience and capacity to engage with the private sector on specific RAI and land governance issues. Progress and outcomes were reviewed at periodic learning meetings

3. Completion of a learning needs assessment tool: Following the diagnostic process, all learning cycle participants were informed of the outline plans for the two streams of online learning sessions and the range of topics that could be covered, and asked to complete an assessment tool to indicate their priorities for each of the two streams of learning activities planned. The tool (which appears on pages 5-7) provided a short list of 6 key topics for the interactive learning sessions and a longer list of potential specific practical topics and skill areas for issue-based learning meetings from which participants could choose and to which their own suggestions could be added.

Participants' responses on the topics of greatest interest for each type of learning session were assessed and scored by the NRI team, weighted according to the level of priority given and the frequency with which each topic was prioritised. The results were ranked in order of the aggregated priorities given and shared and discussed at the co-planning workshop.

4. Participatory discussion and agreement of priorities at the co-planning workshop:

The outline plans and options for the two streams of learning sessions and activities were explained to participants and the preliminary rankings of topics and skill areas compiled were shared at the workshop which took place in two three-hour sessions over two days. Those participants who had not been able to complete the learning needs assessment tool in advance provided their responses at the workshop so that NRI could prepare a complete and updated ranking of priorities.

Two break-out group exercises were held as key steps in reaching agreement on the detailed content and focus for each stream of learning cycle and activities. Participants were divided into mixed groups with people from different regions and countries in Africa and East Asia:

- Day 1: discussion and feedback on the overall content and selection of priority topics for the interactive learning sessions
- Day 2: Assessment of the detailed practical focus and opportunities for exploration in issue-based learning activities for each of the three topic-areas scored most highly by participants:

The findings and conclusions of each breakout group exercise were shared and discussed in plenary at the workshop. They were then processed by NRI alongside the detailed results of the ranking exercises conducted to feed into the overall planning and rolling detailed design of the

subsequent learning sessions and activities delivered over the following six months, through to November 2021.

The full results of the learning needs assessment are summarised on pages 8-9, following the learning needs and planning assessment tool which appears on pages 5-7.

LEARNING NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING TOOL

IDENTIFICATION AND PRIORITISATION OF LEARNING NEEDS TO INFORM DEMAND-DRIVEN LEARNING ACTIVITIES THAT SUPPORT COUNTRY MSP TEAMS' PLANS AND STRATEGIES FOR PRIVATE-SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

PROPOSED LEARNING APPROACHES

NRI proposes two types of online learning activities during the next stage of the learning cycle (Stage 2: May–September 2021) which are complementary and connected:

A. Interactive learning sessions: Online sessions for all participants exploring key themes and topics on private-sector agribusiness investment including presentations by NRI and other resource people, sharing of information and resources, with opportunities for participants to share their own experiences, findings, and case studies.

- *NRI organises and delivers these sessions and gathers information and resources.*
- *Timing: Up to six 2-3-hour learning sessions approximately every two weeks from late May–end July. Specific dates to be confirmed.*

B. Issue-based participatory/ collective learning: Participants agree on specific questions and issues they want to work on and explore linked to ongoing MSP activities, plans and emerging priorities. All participants are encouraged to consider how these activities can support their own current work relating to private-sector engagement, research and analysis, alongside shared cross-country interests. The learning theme activities may involve, for example, planning and conducting additional data collection, field visits, interviews, and preparation of participant-led case studies, videos or other resources.

- *NRI facilitates a number of learning themes identified by participants, involving specific country or cross-country groups, to be discussed and jointly identified.*
- *Participants take the lead in organizing activities and meetings and feeding back to NRI; NRI assists in coordination (hosting some meetings if necessary) and making links with the wider learning cycle, the whole group and relevant NRI/external resource persons.*
- *Timing: Flexible, to be agreed in co-planning workshop.*

Further information is given on next two pages about the possible main themes and specific topics for these learning sessions and activities, with space for you to include your comments and feedback.

Please indicate your learning priorities on the following pages and send to NRI by Wednesday 5th of May, if possible, in advance of our Co-Planning Workshop

Your priorities for the next stage of the Learning Cycle will be discussed during the Co-planning workshop on 6th and 7th May.

A. INTERACTIVE LEARNING SESSIONS

As individuals, or as a country group, please indicate which of the following are high, medium, or low priority themes for you for the interactive learning sessions. *Feel free to add additional comments on the suggested content.*

Suggested themes to be addressed during Learning Cycle Stage 2: May-June-July 2021	Priority [High; Medium; Low] / Any comments?
<p>1. Understanding internationally recognised principles (e.g. CFS RAI and VGGT frameworks) and international standards relevant to responsible private-sector agricultural and / or forest investment), including questions related to FPIC, human rights and sustainability.</p>	
<p>2. Understanding and engaging with national policies and processes for planning and management of private-sector investment in agricultural and forest land, in relation to international standards, land rights issues, and civil society demands and objectives.</p>	
<p>3. Understanding private-sector thinking and perspectives: how private-sector investment operates, company and investment bank policies and practices e.g. for risk assessment, due diligence, and social and environmental assessment, with learning from private investment cases.</p>	
<p>4. Understanding the diversity and nature of private-sector actors in your country, different business models applied, how agricultural supply chains and agribusiness investment chains are organised and potential opportunities for small farmers and rural communities to benefit.</p>	
<p>5. Strengthening customary, community and indigenous land and forest tenure rights including women's rights, in the context of private investments: private-sector impacts and practices on land tenure and tools / incentives to manage and address conflicts and disputes, including legal awareness raising and support, improving land rights data documentation, strengthening locally based official land administration to improve recognition and protection of rights to land and natural resources.</p>	
<p>6. Utilising legal and technical support and strengthening country and regional networks to support rural communities through legal empowerment, build capacity, influence outcomes of project negotiations, and promote improvements in policy and private-sector practice.</p>	

B. ISSUE-BASED PARTICIPATORY/ COLLECTIVE LEARNING

Please list here the issues of greatest interest to you, if possible, in order of priority. The aim is to jointly identify and agree on a small number of learning issues which Learning Cycle participants can choose to join and contribute to.

Note: Below is a list of possible specific issues that have emerged from regional information sessions, and bilateral discussions with country teams and LandCollaborative partners. Your choice may or may not come from this list

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Issues which have already come up in regional information sessions, and in discussions with country teams and LandCollaborative partners

- Continuing diagnosis as part of ongoing learning process
- Achieving greater transparency at country level in planning of land-based agribusiness investments
- Documenting and strengthening community and indigenous rights in an investment context
- Sustainable rubber initiative
- Addressing the impacts of other forest crops and commodities, such as oil palm
- Exploring practical strategies for and experiences of engaging the private sector
- Investments in rangeland management and livestock production
- Agricultural investments by public-private partnerships (e.g. World Bank with private investors) parastatal companies, and the role of government
- Facilitating dialogue and engagements between communities and investors at a local level, relating to individual investment cases
- Experiences of sub-national landscape, territorial or jurisdictional approaches and platforms to engage with the private sector and other actors (e.g. at regional or district levels)

RESULTS OF THE LEARNING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A. Priority learning needs for interactive learning sessions

The rank order of topics prioritised was:

1. Understanding private-sector thinking and perspectives`
 2. Strengthening customary, indigenous and women's tenure rights in investment context
 3. Understanding the diversity of private sector, business models, supply chains and opportunities to benefit
 4. Engaging with national policies and processes for planning and management of private-sector investment
 5. Understanding internationally recognised principles and standards for responsible investments
 6. Utilising legal and technical support and strengthening country and regional networks
- All of the topics were marked as high priority by a majority of participants; five of the topics also attracted medium priority scores from significant numbers of participants and four topics attracted low priority scores in seven responses.
 - The results broadly confirmed the NRI team's thinking on the key topics to be covered in class-room style online learning sessions in which NRI shared background material to explain key concepts and background and discuss practical case examples.
 - Accordingly, NRI designed a set of interactive online teaching and learning sessions that included lecture-based presentations, sharing and explanation of resource and case study material and facilitated interactive discussion of how lessons and available resources could be applied in their own context.
 - In practice, the topics were covered in an integrated way by five learning sessions. The learning materials and resources provided in these sessions are available through hyperlinks in the [Diagnostic Tool](#).
 - An intended sixth session was held as a workshop to discuss how participating country teams could apply the key concepts, experiences and lessons covered jointly by the earlier learning sessions and the issue-based learning activities on practicalities of private-sector engagement

B. Priority ranking of topics for practical exploration through participatory issue- based learning

1. Exploring practical strategies and experiences to inform development of private-sector engagement strategies through collective learning
2. Achieving greater transparency at country and global levels in policy, planning and regulation of land-based agribusiness investments
3. Understanding private-sector risk assessment, due diligence and working along investment chains to promote good practice by companies and investors
4. Documenting and strengthening community and indigenous rights in an investment context
5. Facilitating dialogue and engagements between communities and investors at a local level, related to individual investment cases
6. Experiences of sub-national landscape, territorial or jurisdictional approaches to engage the private sector and other actors

- Using the RAI principles to strengthen investment law and create incentives for responsible investors.

At the co-planning workshop, the three most highly ranked topics were selected for further consideration of learning needs, interests and opportunities. Break-out groups explored the possible content and practical opportunities presented for learning in the different countries on each of these three topics in greater depth. Although each group had a different focus, the results revealed considerable agreement amongst learning participants on the learning priorities and practical issues and experiences to be explored.

Due to the lack of time and capacity for NRI to manage and deliver multiple parallel online learning sessions, and for the participants to engage with them, it was agreed to focus the issue-based learning activities on the question prioritised most highly, i.e. *Exploring practical strategies for and experiences of engaging the private sector*.

Based on the results of the detailed findings of the break-out group exercise and participants' interests and suggestions, NRI drafted an overall learning objective, and three working groups were formed to explore three identified sub-themes and pursue associated learning outcomes, as detailed below.

Overall Objective for Issue-Based Learning	Sub-themes: for exploration in working groups	Intended Learning Outcomes
To explore practical strategies and experiences to inform the development of MSP private-sector engagement strategies through collective learning, which results in more equitable and sustainable private-sector land investments	1. Communication and learning to bridge differences in perceptions, build understanding and enhance trust amongst diverse civil society organisation (CSO), private sector and other actors.	Improved understanding and practical experience gained by participants of how to communicate and build trust with the private sector and amongst diverse MSP actors.
	2. Private sector motivation and willingness to engage in responsible investment.	Improved understanding gained by participants of private-sector perspectives and drivers of decision-making.
	3. Enabling environment for advancing responsible agri-investment by private sector (company obligations, legislation, capacity, policies, regional processes).	Improved understanding gained by participants of the enabling environment and how it can be informed/ changed by MSP members.

Efforts were made to address specific interests which fell outside these priority topics, and to introduce practical case examples of topics that could not be included (such as practical documentation of land rights in the investment context and investor incentives for RAI) through the interactive learning sessions.

In addition, two stand-alone webinars were organised and presented, where guest speakers from private-sector organisations and other collaborators were invited to discuss particular private-sector engagement experiences and opportunities:

- on responsible investment in South East Asia and the ASEAN RAI process, with GrowAsia and International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), organised in collaboration with Mekong Region Land Governance (MRLG)

- on practical experiences of CSOs–private company engagement in Sierra Leone, with Planting Naturals (a Netherlands-based agribusiness company) and Solidaridad, organised in collaboration with Welt Hunger Hilfe (WHH).