

IMPACT EVALUATION OF LAND CERTIFICATION PROJECTS IN ETHIOPIA

BACKGROUND CONTEXT AND INTERVENTION

In the late 1990s the Government of Ethiopia began to register and certify the land use rights of rural households in order to increase their tenure security. Generally viewed as a positive effort, “first-level” certification had some limitations (e.g., it did not map individual plots or support a computerized land registry). To address these and other concerns, USAID supported two programs to provide “second-level” certification to Ethiopian households in the states of Amhara, Oromia, SNNP, and Tigray: the Ethiopia Strengthening Land Tenure and Administration Program (ELTAP) (2005-08) and the Ethiopia Land Administration Program (ELAP) (2008-13). Although not a focus of this impact evaluation, these two programs also included other activities expected to strengthen tenure security, including support to policy reform, capacity building, and public information and awareness campaigns on land rights.



Ethiopian woman displaying land certificate. (Photo Credit: Jessica Nabongó / Cloudburst Group)

EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODS

To measure the effectiveness of these efforts, USAID designed and implemented an impact evaluation of the household-level impacts of second-level certification under the ELTAP and ELAP projects. The evaluation used a Difference-in-Difference design coupled with matching to strengthen comparability between the treatment and comparison groups and mitigate the potential influence of program targeting on estimates of the program’s impact. The evaluation estimates the impacts on households of second-level certification relative to first-level certification for indicators of: credit access; land disputes; land rental activity; soil and water conservation investments; land tenure security; and female empowerment and decision-making related to land. These impacts are estimated from panel data collected from 4,319 households, surveyed across 284 *kebeles* (villages). Surveys were conducted at the start of second-level certification and again 3-7 years later. The evaluation also examined how impacts of second-level certification varied by household or village characteristics, including gender, marital status, and age of head of household, total household landholdings, wealth status, distance to regional capital, and program round (i.e., ELTAP v. ELAP). The evaluation assessed four different sets of comparisons between “treated” and “control” groups (see box), because many of the households in the study had completed the second-level land registration and survey process but had not yet received a land certificate from Government at the time of endline data collection. This synthesis summarizes the evaluation’s key findings and policy recommendations. The full evaluation report, evaluation design, and baseline and endline data

Comparisons Assessed

- A) Full or partial 2nd level relative to 1st level certification
- B) Full 2nd level relative to 1st level certification
- C) Partial 2nd level relative to 1st level certification
- D) Full or partial 2nd level relative to no or 1st level certification

“Partial” 2nd level certification = Land was surveyed by program but no certificate was issued.

will be posted on USAID’s Data Development Library (www.usaid.gov/data) and USAID’s Land Tenure Portal (www.usaidlandtenure.net/data).

KEY FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The evaluation found small, positive, and potentially important impacts on household access to and amount of credit taken and indicators of female empowerment. The study found few differences in the impact of second-level certification for female-headed households over male-headed households, or between widows and non-widows. Findings also suggested that *kebeles* closer to cities and markets tended to experience stronger positive impacts than more isolated *kebeles*. There were few differences in impacts across households that received the full second-level process and those which had not yet received a land certificate. However, the evaluation does not conclude that surveying alone is sufficient to generate positive outcomes, as people in this group may still expect to receive certificates and make land decisions accordingly.

The credit results should be viewed with caution since land certificates cannot be used as collateral in formal lending situations in Ethiopia. The mechanism for this impact is not clear from the study data and may relate to informal sources of credit. Program information suggests that informal uses of the second-level certificate—such as within the context of micro-finance and group-lending processes that are common in Ethiopia—could play a role in demonstrating household landholding or creditworthiness to some informal lending organizations. This could contribute to a higher likelihood of loan approval or greater amount of credit provided.

EVALUATION CONSTRAINTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

There are some important constraints to note for this evaluation. From the household perspective, the change from first-level certification to second-level certification might be considered more incremental than the change from no certification to first-level certification. Thus, the impacts of second-level certification on households may be smaller or more difficult to detect over a short time frame. Also, the decentralized implementation of second-level certification across regions could mean that impacts varied across regions. The evaluation was not designed to examine this regional variation; thus, results assess the average impacts of the certification activities as a whole.

The evaluation found little evidence for additional household impacts of second-level beyond first-level certification for common indicators of tenure security: land disputes, land rental activity, or soil and water conservation measures, which can be mandatory for certain land users in Ethiopia. However, households already expressed very high tenure security at baseline on several of the indicators used by the study, and there may have been little space for the second-level process to further improve on tenure security gains achieved from first-level certification. Moreover, there are significant legal restrictions on land rental markets in Ethiopia that may constrain impacts.

Importantly, the ELTAP and ELAP certification activities were designed to provide benefits that extend well beyond the household level, such as support to land registration and record-keeping processes that contribute to the long-term sustainability of Ethiopia's land administration system. This evaluation was tasked with assessing only the household-level impacts of certification; therefore, it should not be considered a comprehensive evaluation of all aspects of the second-level activities. It is possible that benefits from technological improvements to the land administration system via the second-level process may not strongly accrue to households until a longer time period has passed, or perhaps until households are faced with particular kinds of less common land challenges.

Finally, the different timing of the ELTAP and the ELAP baseline data collection, differences in the granularity of data collected at baseline and endline, and the large proportion of second-level households that had not received a land certificate by endline also contribute to methodological constraints for the evaluation. In particular, baseline data collected at household level (vs. parcel level) precluded assessment of agricultural productivity impacts.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The impact evaluation findings suggest four key policy recommendations that policy makers may wish to consider:

1. Include a land tenure activity in agribusiness support projects to improve credit access;
2. Support regional legal reforms to promote “thicker” land rental markets in rural Ethiopia, for example to allow for longer-term leasing and leasing of larger percentages of a household's land;
3. Further expand emphasis on joint titling and certification in both husband and wife's names, for example to areas where joint titling may still be at the discretion of local officials;
4. Identify programming gaps and opportunities, for example around capacity, financing, or process for certificate provisioning, as well as enhanced donor coordination around land programming.

RESEARCHERS: Dr. Lauren Persha (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Dr. Dan Mattingly (University of California, Berkeley), Dr. Adi Greif (Stanford University/SRI), Dr. Heather Huntington (The Cloudburst Group)

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Key impacts, on average, for households with second-level certification over first-level certification:

- 10% increase in likelihood of household taking out any credit (from formal or informal sources) for farming¹;
- 11% increase in the likelihood of a woman possessing land in her own name²;
- 0.32 hectare increase in land held jointly by husband and wife or by female-headed households³;
- 44% increase in a wife deciding which crops to grow on land under her control¹;
- 11% increase in household belief in their right to bequeath land².

¹ Comparison A; ² Comparison D; ³ Comparison B.

