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LAND TENURE EVALUATIONS

There is a growing body of evidence that suggests stronger land tenure security has a positive impact on important development outcomes, such as increased agricultural investment, women’s empowerment, agricultural productivity, enhanced functioning of rental markets, and access to credit. While the initial empirical evidence is encouraging, important knowledge gaps remain. Compared with the positive economic and food security gains seen from land tenure formalization programs in Asia and Latin America, results from similar programs in Africa have been mixed. There is also little evidence on the impact of alternative approaches to strengthening tenure, such as supporting customary land governance institutions or communal land certification, as opposed to more common efforts focused on land titling and the formalization of individual property rights.

In this context, USAID is currently supporting or has recently concluded six rigorous impact evaluations in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Zambia, and a rigorous performance evaluation in Liberia, to test development questions relevant to eliminating extreme poverty, enhancing food security, improving natural resource management, empowering women, improving climate change resilience, mitigating conflict, and promoting democratic governance and resilience.

WHY EVALUATIONS?

Complex development challenges often do not have simple solutions. Land tenure, like many development topics, is a sensitive and difficult issue in many countries. Change often requires amending or creating new laws, recognizing customary rights, creating effective and accessible dispute resolution mechanisms, and building capacity at local, regional, and national levels. Accurately measuring the effectiveness of various approaches to solve these complex challenges, understanding how they affect change, and building a comparable global evidence base for what works best, and what does not, is one of the greatest challenges facing USAID.

Rigorous evaluations help answer these questions. They go beyond traditional project Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) generally designed to measure performance and maintain budget accountability. Impact evaluations help determine whether specific development outcomes can be attributed to specific development interventions—regardless of the complexity of the problem or intervention. This helps us understand which strategies achieve the greatest results while strengthening our understanding of local contexts and local needs. Impact evaluations serve as powerful accountability and learning tools to identify the most promising and cost-effective policy and programming options. In addition to filling critical research gaps, evidence from impact evaluations can be used to enhance policy decision-making and improve the effectiveness of USAID’s programming throughout all stages of the program cycle.

USAID IMPACT EVALUATIONS

1 and 2) Ethiopia Pastoral Land Project: Evaluating how a new approach to formalizing the land rights of pastoral communities in the Afar and Oromia regions of Ethiopia impacts land management, livelihoods, climate change resilience, and conflict.

3) Ethiopia Farmland Rights Projects: Evaluating the impact of land certification on access to credit, land conflict, land rentals, soil and water conservation, and women’s empowerment.

4) Zambia Community Forest Project: Evaluating how a Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) project impacts land tenure, livelihoods, and benefit sharing in forested areas.

5) Zambia Agroforestry Project: Evaluating the impacts of agroforestry extension and customary tenure strengthening on agricultural investment and other land use practices, including uptake of climate smart agriculture activities.

6) Tanzania Customary Land Project: Evaluating the impacts of documenting villagers’ land rights on tenure security, land investment, youth and women’s empowerment, and conflict.

DATA

USAID's impact evaluations yield rich datasets useful to a variety of sectors. Topics include:

- Economic Growth
 - Livelihoods
 - Rental Markets
 - Credit
- Agriculture
 - Agroforestry
 - Agricultural productivity
 - Food security
- Governance
 - Tenure security and documentation
 - Land allocation and expropriation
 - Transparency of governance
 - Accountability of local leaders
 - Land conflict and resolution processes
- Women's Empowerment
 - Access to economic assets
 - Influence on household decisions
- Climate Change Resilience
 - Land use change
 - Land management
 - Climate smart agriculture

All data sets and related documentation will be posted on USAID's Data Development Library. All data are sex-disaggregated as relevant.

METHODS

In alignment with USAID's Evaluation and Scientific Research Policies, USAID's impact evaluations, and rigorous performance evaluations, are conducted by independent third party firms, supported by subject matter and country experts (often independent researchers from academia or civil society), and involve a rigorous peer review process. The evaluations gather both quantitative and qualitative data through large numbers of household surveys, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory mapping exercises. The same households are surveyed prior to program implementation and several years into programming, enabling stronger measurement of household-level impacts over time. Close attention is paid to how impacts might vary across different kinds of beneficiaries, including the poor, youth, minorities, and, in particular, women. These impact evaluations take additional steps—such as conducting in-depth surveys of wives and qualitative focus group discussions with women only—to ensure that we not only obtain sex-disaggregated data for key issues, but also conduct gender sensitive evaluations. USAID's evaluations also leverage innovative methods to improve the quality of our data, such as mobile-based electronic data collection. We also combine secondary spatially-derived data, for example on forest cover, with our primary IE data to strengthen our analytical power and the validity of IE findings.

LEARNING BEGINS AT THE BASELINE

A common misconception is that rigorous evaluations do not yield useful learning until finished — actually, much can be learned from the evaluation design and baseline. Early stages of the impact evaluation process can improve our programs by helping USAID and a project's implementer carefully think through and refine the project theory of change, M&E plan, and implementation. Baseline surveys also provide a clearer picture of what is really happening on

the ground with the people and groups the project aims to benefit. This knowledge can be used to test program assumptions, refine the theory of change and program activities, and improve targeting before implementation begins. In fact, a recent World Bank study¹ found projects with impact evaluations consistently delivered more on schedule and achieved more of their targeted performance indicators than projects that did not have impact evaluations.

WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

Analysis of our baseline datasets suggests that land tenure in the mostly customary contexts where we work is quite secure, even though few people have formal documentation of their land rights. Still, there appears to be room for strengthening the rights of women and other vulnerable groups and ensuring their voices are integrated into local decision-making on land and resource governance.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

In a recent land tenure and agroforestry pilot in Zambia, the evaluation design process revealed that there was insufficient access to high quality extension services and agroforestry seedlings in the program area. So, USAID added an activity to the project to address these issues. We also subsequently refined the evaluation design to be able to tease out the relative impacts of these two activities. After collecting baseline data, the implementer developed village "cheat sheets" to help target their support to specific needs. The result is a more effective pilot with a greater likelihood of success and a greater ability to measure that success and learn from it.

For more information, visit: <http://www.land-links.org/evaluations-and-research/> or email USAID at: landmatters@usaid.gov

¹ Legovini, Arianna; Di Maro, Vincenzo; Piza, Caio. 2015. Impact evaluation helps deliver development projects. Policy Research working paper; no. WPS 7157; Impact Evaluation series. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. <http://bit.ly/IPDPfNa>