



**TECHNICAL BRIEF**

## **KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR LAND TENURE POLICIES THAT IMPACT YOUTH**

### **SECURE LAND RIGHTS ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO YOUTH SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

The United Nations estimates that by 2030, there will be 1.3 billion people around the world between 15 and 24 years of age. Africa's youth population alone is expected to double from current levels by 2055. This will include a large group of young people who will be looking for opportunities and protection in all sectors, including education, health, governance, and land. Development challenges at the nexus of land and youth increasingly present questions for governments and foreign assistance organizations. What are the land tenure challenges that youth face, and what are the key considerations for land tenure programming targeting youth?

## AGENCY

While most efforts to strengthen land rights and land tenure security focus on the general population — often with an emphasis on women’s or indigenous people’s rights — it is rarer for programs to target youth. Gender is a strong determinant of whether someone will be able to purchase or inherit land, obtain an education, or hold positions of power in the community. This is especially true in systems with customary tenure in effect. Social status can also determine the ease of access to land. For example, children of prominent families are more likely to receive land allocations, succeed in claiming land rights, and be community leaders than children of poorer community members.

To address these issues, policies and legislation should not only attempt to benefit youth but should also be youth-driven. It is important to engage young people at every step of the policy reform process and in all decision-making structures supported by land projects. Just as development programs often analyze challenges with gender in mind, they should also review interventions through a “youth lens.”

| KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUTH AND LAND TENURE   |  |
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|  <p><b>Agency</b></p>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are young people’s views and do they have representation in/from the government?</li> <li>• Can youth make decisions about land use, participation in planning and decision making, and social capital building?</li> <li>• How has gender been considered when developing land tenure policy, and is there a predominant status for youth in the country?</li> <li>• Are the prevailing land inheritance systems in the country sufficient to secure tenure for youth?</li> </ul> |
|  <p><b>Assets</b></p>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do youth understand their rights (both customary and statutory) to access or inherit land?</li> <li>• What are the thresholds for secure land tenure and how does insecure tenure affect youth differently than adults?</li> </ul>  |
|  <p><b>Enabling Environment</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the considerations related to the adequacy of customary versus statutory systems?</li> <li>• Does the environment maximize youth agency, assets, access to services, and opportunities?</li> <li>• How prevalent is the privatization of land in rural areas?</li> <li>• Are youth engaged as a source of change for their own and for their communities’ positive development?</li> </ul>   |
|  <p><b>Contribution</b></p>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have youth been given a voice in policy development for land rights?</li> <li>• Do those who wield power in land use and land policy planning and decision-making restrict youth participation?</li> <li>• Are there restrictions on youth engaging in land tenure reform?</li> </ul>   |

## ASSETS

Many young people are unaware of the land rights in their respective countries. This is where adequate access to information and education is critical. But ensuring this access to education can be difficult. Youth from rural areas must often decide between moving to an urban area to gain access to education or staying at home and forgoing that secondary or tertiary education. This is complicated by the fact that in many developing countries, inheritance is still the leading method for youth to obtain land and achieve tenure security. When youth expect larger land inheritances, they are less likely to permanently migrate to urban areas and find that education. Even when they move to urban areas, youth often do not seek formal education for various reasons. Yet it's equally important for those young people living in urban areas to understand their unique land rights that may differ from their rural peers.

Without the right education, youth cannot speak up for their own land rights. However, with capacity building led by NGOs, youth and youth groups can play a much larger role in advocating for land rights for themselves and their communities. Therefore, land tenure programming should ensure that young people, both those living in urban and rural areas, understand their land rights.

## ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

In both urban and rural areas, ownership should not be the only way for youth to gain access to land. Rental markets can provide an alternate means of accessing land with less initial capital. This structure can enormously benefit youth who are starting out in the workforce and have yet to inherit land. With this in mind, it is important for land programming to uncover and address the barriers and bottlenecks in land rental markets. Targeting these inefficiencies through land tenure interventions can open a life-changing door for youth and other populations who cannot otherwise afford land.

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## CONTRIBUTION

As they become more aware of their rights, youth are increasingly vocal about land rights issues. But this change is largely dependent on the broader political and social context. For example, war and displacement transform social norms and social relations around customary tenure. In post-conflict situations, young people's ability to continue the conversation about land tenure may weaken since the systems in place may no longer be able to effectively manage land. In addition, conflict creates opportunities for those in privileged positions to seize land and other assets. Often, disadvantaged youth see engaging in violent conflict as the only option to defend their land rights.

For this reason, post-conflict interventions must incorporate activities related to resolving land disputes. Resettlement programs should include reallocation activities to ensure that communities rebuild the customary land tenure systems that were in place prior to the conflict. More broadly, building young people's capacity to advocate

on their own can be instrumental in encouraging them to be more involved in policymaking for more effective regulations that respond to the challenges different communities face. In this way, youth can serve as key informed voices in larger discussions that push for youth-centric policies.

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND POLICY SUGGESTIONS**

The land tenure challenges that youth face are complex and connected to larger issues of agency, assets, enabling environment, and contribution. Using a deliberate “youth lens” can play a critical role in strengthening young people’s sense of agency when it comes to land. In terms of cultivating awareness of land rights among those in rural and urban areas, land tenure programming should address formal education, economic empowerment, and inheritance. Creating a stronger enabling environment for youth must weigh policies, laws, and interventions specifically designed to address the unique challenges youth face. As stakeholders implement such changes, youth are becoming stronger advocates for themselves and contributing to conversations about inheritance, cultural traditions, and corruption, as well as the lack of awareness of land rights and land processes. It is important for the development community to continue learning about the challenges that youth face related to land tenure and weave in the approaches outlined above to ensure that this population is well positioned to contribute along the entire spectrum of decision-making.