

Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests: anchoring negotiations in reality



On 17 October, the UN Committee on World Food Security will meet in Rome and on its agenda will be approving guidelines on control of land and other natural resources. Land is central to the lives and livelihoods of poor people everywhere and this is a pivotal opportunity to tackle some of the systemic issues that have led to a broken global food system.

We call on governments to ensure these negotiations result in an ambitious outcome that will strengthen land governance in accordance with human rights and the needs of the poorest and most marginalised groups. In particular, the guidelines need to:

- provide effective safeguards to protect local communities from unsustainable land investments, recognising the collective and individual rights of communities, and especially women, to the land they use;
- oppose land grabs, given their tendency to concentrate control over natural resources and the many deficiencies observed in current and past land deals;
- promote forms of investment that are sustainable and not based on acquiring land, but instead on investing in local land users, particularly small-scale food producers and their more ecological production systems, and on strengthening local tenure rights;
- incorporate access to water, which is integral to productive use of land.

Yours sincerely,

ACORD

ActionAid

Agricultural Christian Fellowship

CAFOD

Christian Aid

Compassion in World Farming

EcoNexus

Find Your Feet

Food Ethics Council

Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland

GardenAfrica

IIED (International Institute for Environment and Development)

Oxfam GB

Permaculture Association

Pesticide Action Network UK

Practical Action

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RURCON Communications Unit
Save the Children UK
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Share The World's Resources
Sustainable Food Trust
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Women's Environmental Network
World Family

Notes

The CFS and the development of the guidelines

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) was reformed following the food price shock of 2007-8, with a mandate to coordinate, at a global level, action to eliminate hunger. Its meeting will take forward its agenda to improve the governance of food and agriculture through developing a global strategic framework – covering priority issues on agricultural investments, food price speculation, gender and nutrition, and land, among others.

The draft guidelines, currently titled *Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests*, have been developed following extensive consultations over two years. They are expressly conceived as an aspect of the response to the global food price shock, and it is essential that the core purpose of the guidelines remains improving access to and control over land, water, fisheries and forests for small-scale food producers and vulnerable groups, as a mean to contribute to hunger eradication and to poverty reduction. Land is crucial for small-scale producers, who currently feed 70% of the global population. The needs of small-scale crop farmers, women food producers, indigenous peoples and the most marginalised and vulnerable groups such as small-scale fisherfolk, resettled communities, older women, widowed women and orphaned girls, nomadic pastoralists and landless people must remain central.

Land grabbing

Large-scale land acquisitions, or land grabs, have significantly increased in the last three years, driven by factors including large-scale production of biofuels, investments by other countries (directly or through major companies) in food production for export, development of large-scale industrial livestock farming and financial speculation. These land grabs are exacerbating the global food crisis.

While we believe international investment can be responsible and can play a role in development and poverty reduction, the recent record of investment in land shows how much damage unsustainable investments can cause. Too many investments have resulted in dispossession, deception, violation of human rights, and destruction of livelihoods and ecosystems. The huge imbalance in the power relationships between investors and affected communities leads to deals that undermine food security and livelihoods. There is a crucial need to strengthen land governance from a food security and sustainable development perspective. This must include effective protection for local communities and most marginalised groups from any irresponsible land investment, particularly through a genuine

implementation of the principle of *free, prior and informed consent* (FPIC), not only for indigenous peoples but also for all other affected communities.

UK Food Group

The UK Food Group is the principal network in the UK for NGOs working on global food and agriculture issues. Its members participate in the negotiations on the land guidelines and other parts of the work of the CFS through the Civil Society Mechanism for the CFS.

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