

PROGRESS TOWARDS THE SDG LAND RIGHTS COMMITMENTS

WHERE ARE WE AT?

2025



IT IS 2025.

WITH FIVE YEARS REMAINING FOR AGENDA 2030, WHAT HAVE MEMBER STATES ACCOMPLISHED?

FOR QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THIS BRIEF,
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**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW THE LAND AND SDG MOMENTUM GROUP IS
SUPPORTING SDG REPORTING WORK ON LAND DEGRADATION AND RESTORATION,**
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Secure land rights for all—women and men, regardless of ethnicity or religion, or civil, economic, social, or political status—are foundational for achieving a world free of poverty, hunger, and systematic gender discrimination. So, in 2015 we celebrated when world leaders recognized the critical importance of land rights within Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Member States' ambitious written commitments, however, have not been followed by on-the-ground action. Since 2020 we have reviewed countries' Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) annually to ascertain what steps towards meeting land rights targets countries are making. While we found some promising steps, the majority of countries have not prioritized land rights in their development agendas or undertaken significant action.

It is now more critical than ever to direct the focus of world leaders to land rights. As Member States reconvene for the 2025 High Level Political Forum, this review of VNRs and related indicators shows that most countries lack needed action on land rights.

SDG LAND RIGHTS TARGETS

Target 1.4

By 2030, *ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable*, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, *ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources*, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.

Target 2.3

By 2030, *double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land*, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.

Target 5.a

Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national law.

WE ALL NEED TO DO OUR PART

Strengthening land rights is a complex and long-term endeavor. As we acknowledge and highlight the steps that several countries have taken, we must also be unambiguously clear: the current rate of progress is utterly insufficient to close the tenure security gap by 2030. Reaching the SDG land rights targets will require strong political commitment and dedicated resources in all countries in order to enact concerted, deliberate, and multi-sectoral efforts.

In parallel, it is essential for countries to invest in the data infrastructure needed to diagnose the challenges in reaching the land rights targets, provide guidance to policy makers and decision-makers, track progress or lack thereof, and hold those vested with authority accountable. Progress on the SDG land rights targets is measured by three indicators (1.4.2, 5.a.1, and 5.a.2), on which we elaborate in the final section of this brief.

The highly visible and powerful platform provided by the SDGs only works if it catalyzes action. It must provide governments with incentives to act, offer effective advocacy levers to civil society organizations, and help the broad array of stakeholders working on land rights remain strategically aligned. This requires clear and accessible information on what countries have done—what we should celebrate—as well as on what countries could and should be doing to fulfill their SDG land rights commitments. Such reporting must come from governments, civil society, and community-based groups around the world.

To address this need, the SDG Land Momentum Group and numerous partners are encouraging and supporting government and civil society organizations interested in leveraging the SDG land rights commitments through impactful and strategic reporting.

2024 VNRS AND REPORTING ON LAND TARGETS

The following sections provide a detailed description of the analysis we carried out to assess what progress countries have made towards their SDG land rights commitments (targets 1.4, 2.3, and 5.a) and what they have reported about the indicators that track these commitments (1.4.2, 5.a.1 and 5.a.2).

For the analysis that follows we have relied on two sources of publicly available information managed by the SDG platform:

1. The 36 publicly available Voluntary National Reviews (VNRS) submitted for the 2024 High Level Political Forum by Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belize, Brazil, Chad, Colombia, Congo (Republic of the), Costa Rica, Ecuador,

- Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Georgia, Guinea, Honduras, Kenya, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Libya, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Namibia, Nepal, Oman, Palau, Peru, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, Uganda, Vanuatu, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.
2. The **Global SDG Indicators Database** which contains annual entries for each SDG indicator for each country.

WHAT STEPS HAVE MEMBER STATES TAKEN TO ADDRESS THEIR SDG LAND RIGHTS COMMITMENTS?

While many of the 36 VNRs we reviewed included comments around land, land access, land use, or land rights, frequently these mentions were limited to descriptions of the country's context, history, or challenges. Thus, to gauge the extent to which governments are moving towards fulfilling their SDG land rights commitments, we first screened for countries whose VNRs mentioned concrete actions such as a new or revised national strategy, legal or policy reforms, or programmatic action. We focused on land rights specifically and not on actions around land degradation, on which many countries report taking action.

Yet not all land-related actions align with the spirit of the SDG commitments. Thus, we further narrowed our focus to land-related actions that attempt to ensure secure land rights for all, in particular the poor, the vulnerable, and the small producers; or to eradicate gender differences in land rights.

Further, important as past actions might be, we looked for actions that have taken place since the SDGs were agreed upon and set in motion; that is, since 2015. We also excluded actions that are aspirational or which are anticipated in the future.

Lastly, it is important to note that we only reviewed the content of the VNRs themselves and made no effort to vet or further explore country reporting. Therefore, we are only able to repeat the VNRs' own descriptions of what actions countries are taking on land rights.

Within the batch of 36 VNRs available for 2024, we were able to review 33.¹ Of these, 10 countries report taking significant action since 2015 to enhance land rights. This is somewhat higher than in 2023, when only 2 out of 39 reporting countries reported action on land rights. In 2022, 15 out of 43 reporting countries reported action on land rights and in 2021, 21 out of 43 reporting countries reported action on land rights.



¹ Due to budgetary limitations, we were unable to translate three of the VNRs to review: Oman, Syrian Arab Republic, and Yemen.

Ten countries report the following decisive actions in their 2024 VNRs:

- » ***Belize***
Reports efforts to formalize the land rights of Maya people.
- » ***Honduras***
Reports that the National Agrarian Institute (INA) continues to issue land titles in numbers that meet its planning objectives. Further, the government is taking steps to resolve a long-standing land conflict in Bajo Aguán. Finally, in 2023, the government created a Commission on Agrarian Security and Access to Land to respond to land-related conflicts.
- » ***Kenya***
Reports that it is updating its 2009 National Land Policy. Its VNR also highlights a Settlement of Landless Program that provided 24,112 households with secure tenure between 2020 and 2023. Kenya is also undertaking fast-tracked registration of land title deeds to secure tenure and reduce conflict.
- » ***Lao People's Democratic Republic***
Reports implementing land use planning and adopting land policies to secure land tenure for Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- » ***Namibia***
Reports that in 2021 and 2022, it issued 1,316 land titles under the Deed Registries Act and Communal Land Reform Act. It also highlights its Land Redistribution Program which aims to grant land access to marginalized communities.
- » ***Nepal***
Passed a Land Use Act in 2019 and further reports implementing a program for landless people.
- » ***Samoa***
Created a parallel court system to deal with customary land rights and titles in 2020.
- » ***Sierra Leone***
Passed a National Land Commission Act in 2022 that recognized women's land ownership.
- » ***Solomon Islands***
Is actively recording customary land rights through implementation of its Land Reform Act. The country also undertook initiatives to improve land dispute resolution mechanisms, including training local leaders in mediation and conflict resolution to support the operation of community-based land tribunals.
- » ***Zimbabwe***
Reports that in 2023, the government issued land documents in numbers that exceeded goals.

INSUFFICIENT STEPS TO MEET SDG LAND RIGHTS GOALS BY 2030

While some countries recognize the importance of the land rights commitments within the SDGs and report land rights achievements in their VNRs, many more have not recognized the land rights commitments. Considerably more work is needed by countries to achieve SDG land rights commitments. Even those who do report on land rights progress will require deeper and more broad commitment to meet land rights SDG goals by 2030.

Land rights, being foundational to poverty reduction, food security, livelihoods, and climate action, need greater attention by Member States. This requires greater understanding and appreciation of the important links between land rights and multiple SDG targets, and political will to work on land rights issues that can be complex.

Even if the 2030 goals cannot be met, it remains important for Member States to commit to secure land rights for they are key to a multitude of sustainable development, equity, and climate action goals. We applaud those who are working on land rights and encourage them to consider how they can scale up their efforts, prioritizing implementation on the ground that especially benefits women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples. For those who are not working on land rights, we encourage them to learn about the important connections between land rights and their goals for their country and its people, and to create the political will needed to address their country's priority land rights issues.

WHAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE SO FAR?

The SDGs includes several indicators to track Member States' progress on their land rights commitments. Under Goal 1, **SDG 1.4.2** tracks progress towards ensuring **secure tenure rights for all**: countries agreed to report (a) the % of their adult population who have documents to prove their rights to land; and (b) the % of the adult population who perceive their rights as secure.

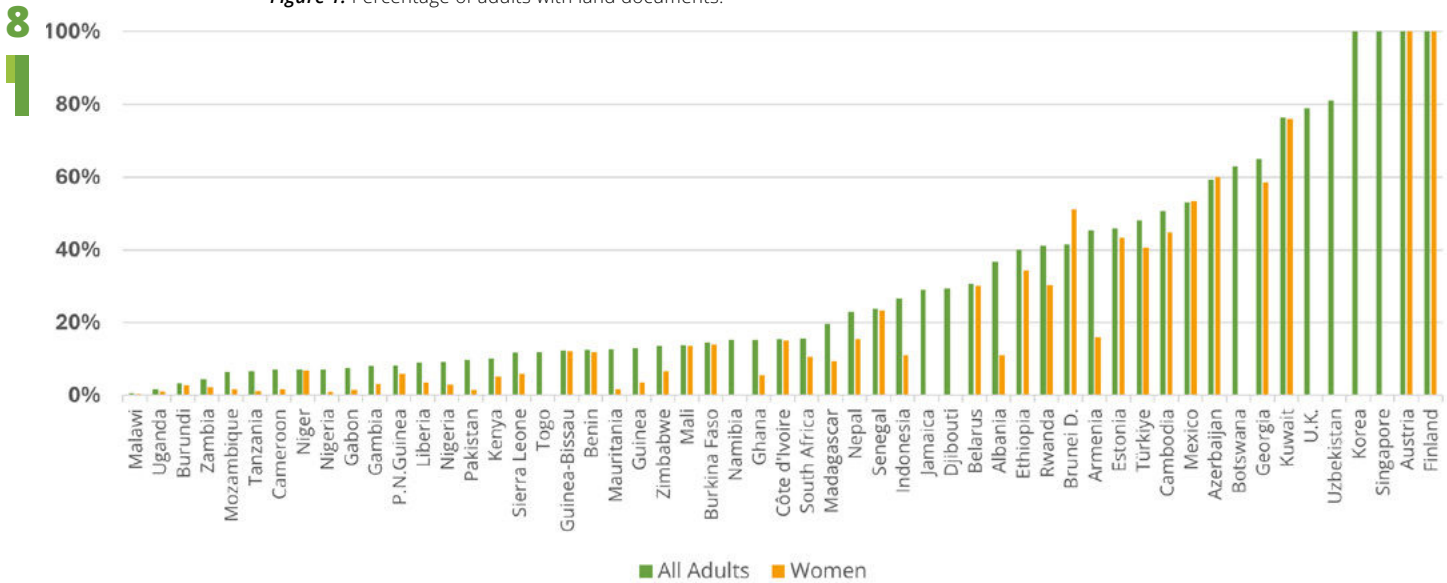
As of May 2025, the SDG Global Database includes data on land documents for 55 countries, of which 17 have reported more than once since 2015. In early 2024, when we last evaluated data available, only 23 countries had reported, compared to this year's 55 countries.

A look at the SDG Global Database reveals that most adults lack government-recognized land documentation.

As the graph below illustrates, in almost 80% of the countries who have ever reported on **SDG 1.4.2**, at least half of the adult population lack documentation to prove their land rights. In fact, 32 of the 55 countries who have reported since 2015 indicate that at least 75% of their adult population lack documentation in their names.

Importantly, almost across the board, the percentage of women with land documents in their name is even lower.

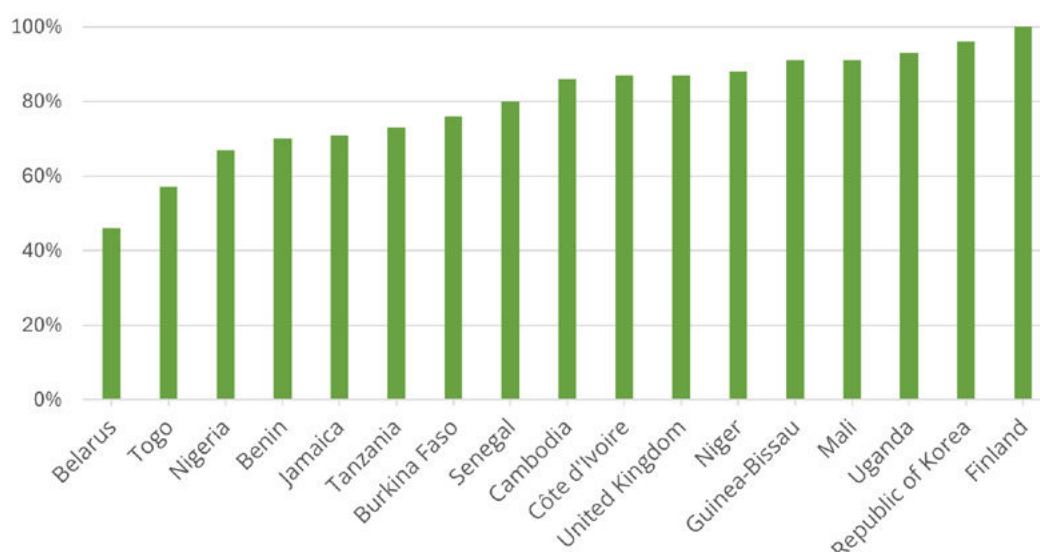
Figure 1: Percentage of adults with land documents.



The SDG Global Database contains data for only 17 countries, most of which are in Africa. This indicator was created as a proxy that summarizes people's experience of their rights. It can, and as the graph below shows, does differ from whether or not people have government-recognized land documents.

There are no significant gender differences in countries' reporting for this indicator.

Figure 2: Percentage of adults who perceive their land rights as secure.



Under Goal 5, **SDG 5.A.1** tracks progress towards ensuring **secure tenure rights for the agricultural population, paying special attention to gender equality**. Reporting on 5.a.1 remains quite low: only 20% of the countries who agreed to the SDGs have reported, and most of them have reported only once.

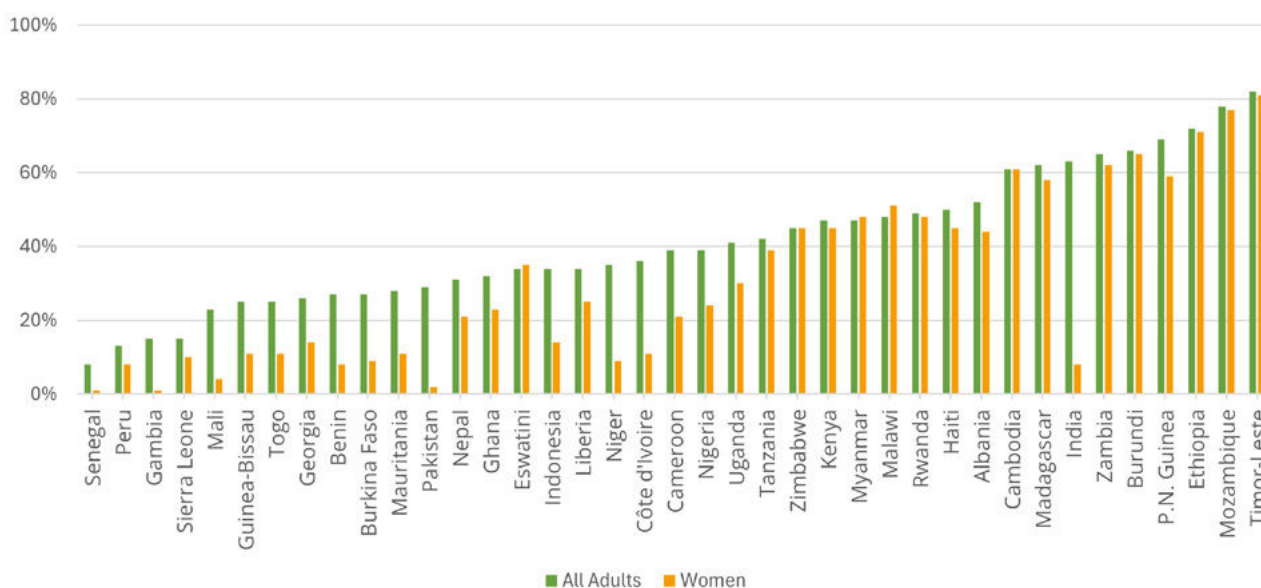
» ***Much of the agricultural population lacks secure rights to land.***

At least three-fourths of the agricultural population lack secure rights to agricultural land in Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Peru, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Only slightly better, more than half of the agricultural population lack secure land rights in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Georgia, Ghana, Kenya, Indonesia, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritania, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

» ***Among the agricultural population, there is a gender gap in who has secure land rights.***

This is the case for all but 6 of the 39 countries who reported on indicator 5.a.1. The gender gap is particularly stark in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, India, Indonesia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Pakistan, Senegal, and Togo.

Figure 3: Percentage of rural population with secure land rights.



Finally, under Goal 5, **SDG 5.A.2** tracks progress towards ensuring that countries' legal frameworks guarantee women equal rights to land. This indicator ranges from 0 to 6 with the number increasing depending on how many types of protections for women's land rights are enshrined in law.²

As the table that follows indicates, many of the countries who have reported on this indicator lack legal provisions that are foundational to granting and protecting women's land rights. This is particularly the case for countries whose 5.a.2 indicator is less than 4.

SDG 5.A.2

1	Belize, Djibouti, Ghana, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Myanmar, Oman, Qatar, Santa Lucia, Sierra Leone, State of Palestine, and Yemen
2	Chile, Guyana, Madagascar, Niger, Pakistan, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Senegal
3	Aland Islands, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Central African Rep, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Finland, Indonesia, Israel, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Moldova, Russian Federation, Suriname, Switzerland, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe
4	Angola, Armenia, Chad, Germany, Haiti, Italy, Kazakhstan, Liberia, Mongolia, Montenegro, Mozambique, Nepal, North Macedonia, Singapore, Slovakia, Thailand, Togo, Uruguay, and Viet Nam
5	Benin, Bolivia, Croatia, Georgia, Guatemala, Hungary, Kenya, Namibia, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Serbia, Sweden, Tanzania, and Uganda
6	Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Colombia, Ethiopia, Lithuania, and Rwanda

2 Degree to which the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control (1=No evidence to 6=Highest levels of guarantees)

TEN YEARS INTO THIS JOURNEY, IT IS WORTH REFLECTING ON THE STATUS OF THE SDG LAND RIGHTS INDICATORS.

Most SDG indicators are long-established and well-resourced indicators selected to monitor progress towards SDG commitments. This is not the case with the SDG Land Rights Indicators. Those working in the land rights sector first had to select and coalesce around a few indicators to propose. Once the indicators were adopted, custodian agencies engaged in inclusive processes to define the indicators' methodologies. They built capacity and supported national statistical agencies and land ministries. They advised and helped pilot global surveys that integrated land rights-related modules. And they dedicated their limited capacity to advance the generation and reporting of data from countries around the world.

These efforts are paying off.

Generating political will, mobilizing resources, engaging countries' bureaucracy, designing and testing the tools, and collecting and analyzing data all take an enormous amount of time. Thanks to these efforts, today we have at least partial data for close to 100 countries. This is commendable progress, and we should be thankful to all involved.

Furthermore, there is growing application of the indicators' recommended questions in other surveys and parallel channels of collecting this information are growing, including, for example, Prindex, the Women's Empowerment Metrics for National Statistical Systems (WEMNS), and impact evaluations of land governance projects.

It is up to all of us to take this momentum forward.

It is critical that we vastly increase coverage: too many countries have never reported, or have reported on only some of the indicators, even though all indicators matter. It is also critical that we increase the frequency of reporting: most countries reporting have done so only once. This prevents us from ensuring the data is robust, and from tracking any progress or lack thereof.

It is critical that we expand the global, regional, and national data infrastructure so that this data continues to be generated in a sustainable manner. Today, the generation of data depends heavily on a handful of global surveys and a few champions.

Finally, it is also critical that we all contribute to an evolving culture whereby policy makers, communities, and all relevant stakeholders have access to this data and use it to advocate for changes, design and implement solutions, track progress, and be held accountable.



THE SDG LAND MOMENTUM GROUP is a coalition of civil society and multi-lateral organisations geared towards monitoring the progress of the SDG land targets and conducting advocacy to meet the same end. More information on current members and objectives can be found on the ILC-hosted [SDG Land Momentum Group page](https://www.landesa.org).

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