



Network of Excellence
on Land Governance in Africa

NELGA Good Practices

Support to Young Researchers

The **Network of Excellence on Land Governance in Africa (NELGA)** is a partnership of leading African universities and research institutions with proven leadership in education, training and research on land governance. Currently NELGA has more than **70 partner institutions** in over 40 countries and is organized in 6 regional and 1 technical nodes supported by a Secretariat.

Introduction

Population growth, climate change, urbanization, etc. ... are becoming increasing factors of pressure on land resources. Therefore, land governance plays a primary role in the sustainable and inclusive development of the African continent. Usually perceived as an elder-issue, young people tend to be excluded from land related decision-making processes and are often marginalized in land ownership transfer. Moreover, half of the continent's population is expected to be less than 25 years old by 2050. It is hence essential to grasp this demographic dividend by ensuring equitable access to land and **support the younger majority in shaping their future.** Thus, land policies should better reflect the youth perspective and expand their opportunities and agency.

A main challenge lies in **engaging and including the African youth in policy dialogues.** To tackle this issue, NELGA promotes land-related research from the youth perspective, trains young land experts' ability to assess the crucial question of youth and strives to feed the subsequent research results into the policy sphere. To achieve this, a wide range of measures to support junior researchers are in place and bring the topic of youth and land governance to the fore: training, forums and conferences, publications, financial support, etc. Those different activities participate in supporting the creation of a strong generation of young land governance researchers and professionals, equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to understand and tackle emerging issues related to land and youth, influence decision-making and political processes and lead a paradigm shift.



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Implementation

I. Fostering research funding opportunities

NELGA has established a research fellowship programme (implemented by DAAD – German Academic Exchange Service) aiming to support junior African researchers of the network in conducting research projects at NELGA partner institutions. Since 2019, 35 young candidates pursuing a Master’s or a Doctoral degree in land management, land governance or related fields benefited from fellowships.

Adane Mehari Getie is a third-year Ph. D. candidate at Bahir Dar University and Institute of Land Administration. He benefited from the DAAD-NELGA Research Fellowship in March 2019 to conduct research on *“Rural Land Cadastre Practice and Its Contribution to Women’s Land use rights and Tenure security: Implication to sustainable livelihoods in Amhara Region, Ethiopia”*.



“Participating in this Research Fellowship enabled me to gain both professional experience and valuable research knowledge in the field of land administration and management. On the academic side, I benefited from a strong exposure to research proposal framing, quantitative and qualitative data collection and management, as research communication. I acquired a deep understanding of the social dimensions of women’s land rights and its contribution to sustainable economic development and environmental management. Finally, being a participant in the research fellowship was the opportunity for me to inform and indicate governmental, public and private stakeholders on land policy issues related to women.”

Through the programme, research fellows contribute to land data collection, knowledge creation and foster African scientific collaboration surrounding topics, with stronger relevance to the younger generation in the field of land governance. Moreover, the NELGA research fellowship program supports the junior researchers of the network who tend to face greater difficulties in mobilizing research fundings, and offer them the opportunity to strengthen their research / academic skills through practice; therefore encouraging them to pursue successful scientific careers.

II. Exchange platforms around the land and youth nexus

Increasing the opportunities given to young people in leading land related research projects is essential to raise awareness on the land and youth ‘nexus’. But it is also crucial to provide space for exchanges and dialogue surrounding the topic. In that respect, NELGA mobilizes various exchange platforms to steer the topic further.

Youth and Land Forum on “Youth and land governance, challenges and prospects for a sustainable economy in African States”

On December 17 – 19th 2020, NELGA’s Francophone West Africa Node (Université Gaston Berger) organized in collaboration with the Youth Initiative for Land in Africa (YILAA), the International Conference on Land Governance for Youth (CIGOFA) in Cotonou – Benin. It focused on the theme of “*Youth and land governance, challenges and prospects for a sustainable economy in African States*”. The participants were able to discuss the importance of adopting a youth-centered approach in order to achieve Africa’s sustainable development. The lack of representation of youth in formal and informal decision-making land-related processes and the inadequacy of land training regarding the labor market needs have been highlighted as key issues. The initiative was the opportunity to sensitize the public opinion on the major challenge youth faces in respect to land access and participated to place young researchers at the heart of the system for a paradigm shift.



African Journal on Land Policy and Geospatial Sciences (AJLP & GS): Special Issue on “Youth and Land Governance”

The African Journal on Land Policy and Geospatial Sciences (AJLP & GS) publishes research with the aim to accompany land governance reform processes. In September 2018, the Journal issued a special issue on “Youth and Land Governance”. The articles examined various topics such as: the key role of optimum utilization of user rights under customary tenure, land information system and land investments in enhancing youth socio-economic development, the importance to address vulnerability factors and integrate marginalized groups into policy making processes as the need for universities to develop curriculum aligned with the land industry’s technical capacities needs.

By devoting an entire issue on the topic of youth and land governance, the Journal contributes to put the subject in the spotlight and acknowledge its relevance for a sustainable and inclusive development of the African continent while providing inputs to translate research into policy developments and practices.

Conferences on Land Policy in Africa (CLPA)

The Conference on Land Policy in Africa is a biennial scientific event organized by the African Land Policy Centre (ALPC). The 2017 edition of the conference was held under the theme of “*The Africa We Want: Achieving socioeconomic transformation through inclusive and equitable access to land by the youth*”. It offered a space for presenting research findings related to land governance and youth and drawing the attention of African researchers, governments, parliamentarians, civil society, private sector and development partners on land and development challenges requiring a specific attention.

The 2019 CLPA Edition, focused on the theme of corruption in the land sector. It offered avenues to highlight the importance of youth and land, notably through sessions exploring youth sensitive transparent land approaches, the role of fair land rights in empowering young africans generations, and the need to put young people at the center of the implementation of land policy.

Furthermore, the CLPA constitutes a unique opportunity for promising young researchers to present their research and develop their network in a privileged setting bringing together key players in the sector.



III. Capacity building platforms to support young researchers

Summer schools, exchange peer groups or seminars are being organized by NELGA to offer spaces for fitted thematic and methodological training, professional insertion support, networking and mentoring to the younger researchers of the network.

Summer schools have been organized by NELGA / DAAD each year since 2016. For instance, in 2019, several NELGA scholarship recipients had the opportunity to attend the *“Geo Training Summer School”* co-organized with the Goethe University in Frankfurt – Germany. It aimed at preparing NELGA university students and junior researchers for the tasks of teaching and research using Geospatial Technologies. For the 2021 edition, four *“virtual”* summer schools are currently being prepared.

KNUST Summer School on Land Governance in West Africa

During the Summer of 2020, NELGA's Anglophone West Africa Node, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) organized a Summer School for the DAAD scholarship beneficiaries at KNUST. It gathered scholarship recipients from a variety of disciplines to promote an interdisciplinary and integrated approach to knowledge exchange. The event consisted of guest lectures, group discussions, presentations by the students of their research progress, sessions on research design, concepts and theories. The summer school offered NELGA scholarship holders the opportunity to gain better practical insight on research practices through both peer learning and expert interventions.



Another form of support given to junior researchers is the peer / mentoring groups that have been established in certain NELGA nodes. These are 'moderated' groups of junior researchers aiming at fostering peer-to-peer exchanges and giving a platform for guidance / supervision of their research works by some of the more senior academics of the network.

Interdisciplinary group of Junior Researchers on Land in Central and West Africa

The interdisciplinary group of Junior Researchers on Land in Central Africa (*GICJFAC-NELGA – Groupe Interdisciplinaire Chercheurs Juniors sur le Foncier en Afrique Centrale*) brings together Master and PhD students from Tchad, Cameroon, Congo, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Gabon. The students are grouped by thematic area and are offered a full fledged program for webinars and remote workshops on methodology, documentation, etc. In addition, a collective communication platform via Telegram is set up to encourage peer-to-peer exchanges. To further incentivize the efforts of the students, a call for publication by young researchers and the organization of the Best PhD or Master Prize. The goal of this initiative is to support young and upcoming scientists in their research on land issues. It therefore mostly targets Master and PhD students, facilitating support and knowledge exchange with more senior researchers, thesis supervisors, etc.



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To further support the younger researchers of the network, NELGA organizes multiple capacity building measures. These can take various forms, but a very successful format that was explored is a PhD course:



UCT – PhD specialization course on Land Economics and Governance offered

Together with the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) and the World Bank, NELGA has developed and supported a PhD course on land economics hosted at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and open to students from all over the continent. The course was sponsored in the year 2018 and 2019 and runs sustainably since 2020. It consisted in an intensive 5 weeks specialization course on Land Economics and Governance consisting of lectures, labs, workshops and seminars. Major aspects of the land topic were covered including land ownership, land grabbing, structural transformation of land use and land-related intervention impact evaluation. The course also embraced the issue of spatial data use through a workshop on remote sensing and the Geographic Information System (GIS) software. The course supported the PhD students to strengthen their analytical skills on the issue of land economics and governance and equipped them with the latest theories and tools to conduct research on the topic.





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Discussion: Results and lessons learnt

NELGA implements a wide spectrum of measures to bring the youth in the forefront of the land governance debate. Evaluating the impact of these measures is rather complex due to the very long-term nature of the objective. However, beyond the general satisfaction of the beneficiaries, successes and positive impacts can readily be observed.

First, as part of its research component, NELGA has put in place research funding opportunities that prioritize the funding of research on the land topic by younger researchers. Financial support mechanisms are indeed a major bottleneck for emerging researchers to successfully ‘publish’ and integrate the sphere of land experts usually composed of older academicians. Secondly, NELGA puts the land and youth ‘nexus’ at the center of the land governance debate while also striving to give the voice to the youth in that debate. In doing so, NELGA instauraes a new momentum in the stakeholder landscape traditionally dominated by the “elders”. Thirdly, NELGA offers these younger and / or upcoming researchers multiple opportunities to strengthen their skills so that they can become credible and well-equipped actors of a better land governance. NELGA basically acts as the incubator of a new generation of researchers, trained in Africa, by both capitalizing and strengthening continental capacities.

NELGA is being continuously supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH until 2026 and will make sure to keep the topic of youth at the center of the land governance debate. But on a longer term, to ensure the continuity of support measures targeting young researchers and maintain the momentum surrounding the land and youth nexus, it is essential to reinforce institutional capacities. An approach NELGA promotes is to support the review / development of existing and / or new academic curricula dealing with the topic of land governance within its network of partner universities. This institutional capacity building component builds up on the efforts undertaken by the African Land Policy Centre (ALPC) in developing and mainstreaming the “Guidelines for the Development of Curricula on Land Governance in Africa” endorsed by the African Union. These offer a set of principles to support the pedagogic teams of universities in developing / adapting academic programmes in such a way that they better reflect today’s emerging challenges, and thus better prepare the upcoming generation of researchers and land professionals.

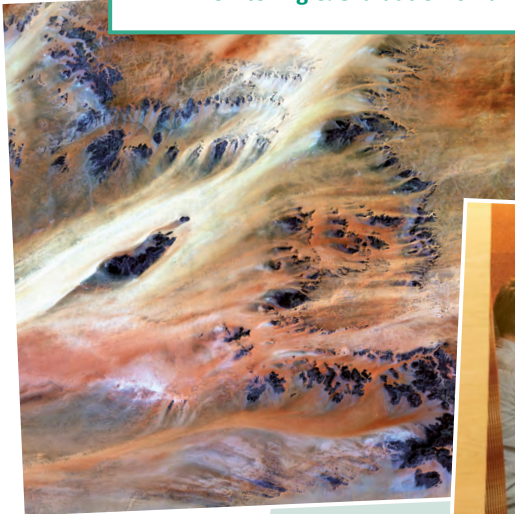
NELGA Vision



- Through excellent training and research NELGA creates strong capacity for good land governance and contributes to implementing the AU agenda on land.

NELGA Mission

- Enhancing **training** opportunities and curricula on land governance in Africa.
- Promoting demand driven **research** on land policy issues.
- Connecting scholars and researchers across Africa through **academic networks**.
- Creating data and information for **monitoring & evaluation** of land policy reforms.



NELGA

The **Network of Excellence on Land Governance in Africa (NELGA)** is a partnership of leading African universities and research institutions with proven leadership in education, training and research on land governance. It strengthens capacities and knowledge exchange at more than **70 partner institutions** across Africa.

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