

The Challenge to Strengthen Land Governance in the Political Setting of the Arab Region

Herausforderung, »Landgovernance« im politischen Umfeld der arabischen Region zu stärken

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Summary

The Arab region is in rapid transition. It is undergoing a decade of profound change, where noticeable progress and positive transformation in some countries is clouded by the spiralling into social unrest and violent conflict of other countries. Therefore, understanding the changing role and contribution of land to its development is fundamental to analysing policy, planning and practice for a sustainable future. This article aims to understand better the underlying problems and challenges and the dynamics of responsible land governance in the Arab region. Giving a particular focus on the Arab Land Initiatives created by the GLTN and its partners, this article discusses the fruitful practices to adopt good land governance into the land sector in the Arab countries. It further discusses the pivotal role of German development cooperation in increasing cross-border knowledge exchange for a new generation of land professionals and supporting in implementation of Arab Land Initiatives.

Keywords: Arab land initiative, land governance, knowledge management, German development cooperation

Zusammenfassung

Die arabische Region befindet sich in einem rasanten Wandel. Sie durchläuft ein Jahrzehnt tiefgreifender Veränderungen, in dem spürbare Fortschritte und positive Veränderungen in einigen Ländern durch das Abgleiten in soziale Unruhen und gewaltsame Konflikte in anderen Ländern überschattet werden. Daher ist das Verständnis der sich verändernden Rolle und des Beitrags von Boden sowie Rechten an Boden und seinem Entwicklungsbeitrag grundlegend für die Analyse von Politik, Planung und Praxis für eine nachhaltige Zukunft. Dieser Artikel zielt darauf ab, die zugrunde liegenden Probleme und Herausforderungen sowie die Dynamik für verantwortungsvolle Landgovernance in der arabischen Region besser zu verstehen. Mit besonderem Augenmerk auf die Arabische Landinitiative, die vom GLTN und Partnern ins Leben gerufen wurde, diskutiert dieser Artikel die fruchtbaren Praktiken zur Einführung von verantwortungsvoller Landgovernance im Landsektor in den arabischen Ländern. Darüber hinaus wird die Rolle der deutschen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit bei der Förderung des grenzüberschreitenden Wissensaustauschs für eine neue Generation von Landexperten und der Unterstützung bei der Umsetzung der Arabischen Landinitiative diskutiert.

Schlüsselwörter: Arabische Landinitiative, Landgovernance, Wissensmanagement, Deutsche Entwicklungszusammenarbeit

1 Introduction

Land governance is understood as the policies, rules, and organisations through which decisions are made regarding access to and use of land, the manner in which these decisions are made and implemented, and how conflicts are resolved.

The Arab region suffers from many challenges in the land governance sector. Most importantly, tenure insecurity in the region is the highest in the world. The Registering Property indicator of the World Bank report Doing Business (World Bank 2020) ranks the region lower than any other, except some Gulf Cooperation Council countries. Tenure insecurity negatively affects many aspects of the economy – urbanisation, agricultural development, the private sector and women's empowerment, to name a few. The situation poses limitations for creating job opportunities, which is a pressing economic, social and political issue in the region.

The increase in armed conflicts and social unrest witnessed in the past decades is rooted in various internal and external pressures and issues, including land. The consequences of violent conflicts and displacements in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Palestine are profound and far-reaching, not only for the countries that are directly involved but also for the whole region. Land can thus be a source of conflict but is also the framework for sustainable development and for creating stability and peace. It is also widely acknowledged that women in the Arab region are disadvantaged in terms of access to land and property rights.

In summary, the state of land governance in the Arab region is affected by violent conflicts, displacements, the impact of climate change and a governance gap. Centralised power, the prevalence of the state as the ultimate owner of the land, mostly inefficient state institutions and services, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and increasing landlessness are symptoms of the gap in governance. However, there are exceptions to this general assessment, namely the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

In response to the needs of people and their relationship to land, to support security of tenure for all and to sustainably manage land use and natural resources, in 2016 the Arab Land Initiative was created by a group of dedicated organisations and individuals. The initiative aims at bringing attention to issues in the land sector, cross-border

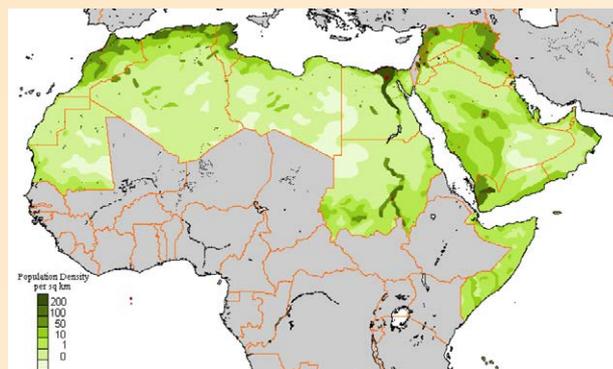
Overview of the Arab Region

BOX 1

The Arab region has diverse national economies and a heterogeneous natural resource base as it includes some of the richest as well as some of the poorest countries in the world. Therefore, regional averages for socio-economic performance and resource statistics are misleading. Arab countries should not be treated as a monolith; individual countries have highly distinctive needs, priorities, problems, and economic, political and social contexts that must be recognised when developing strategies and plans. The Arab region is comprised of 22 members of the Arab League (LAS n.d.): Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Yemen. Arabic is the lingua franca throughout the Arab world. Around 420 million people live in the states of the Arab League (compared to 445 million people in the European Union).

The Arab region is particularly vulnerable to climate change. It is one of the most water-scarce territories in the world, being mostly semi-arid and arid, with significant

areas of extreme aridity. Recent changes in climate patterns, such as prolonged droughts, record high temperatures, water scarcity, and increased rainfall irregularity, intensity and distribution, have adversely affected natural and agro-ecosystems in the region. Such changes have increased the vulnerability of the people dependent on such resources for their livelihoods.



The map shows the population density of the Arab states (dark green indicates more than 200 people per sq. km).

exchange of knowledge among various Arab countries and raising the importance of the land agenda and land governance to the policy level. The initiative is accepted by most states but is independent of governments. It provides a platform for dealing with all land-related sectors of society, such as public-sector land professionals, civil society organisations, the private sector and academia. It also works as a forum for exchanging experiences between different experts and countries.

This article identifies significant gaps in land governance and related problems in the Arab region. Taking into account the activities under the Arab Land Initiatives and the German government's cooperation with the Arab region to address the land governance effectively, this article is structured around four domains: (1) an overview of main land governance issues in the Arab region, (2) the pathway towards responsible land governance in the Arab region through the Arab Land Initiative, (3) importance of knowledge management, exchange and access to information, and (4) selected examples of Germany's contribution to the land governance initiatives in Arab countries.

2 Overview of major land governance issues in the Arab region

The Arab region suffers from many land governance and land tenure challenges. Most importantly, tenure insecurity in the Arab region is the highest in the world, and negatively affects many aspects of the economy and society. In

addressing land governance and land tenure issues in the Arab region, it is crucial to understand the nature of the relationships between the Sustainable Development Goals (FAO 2021a), socio-economic development, respect for human rights, good governance, and conflict (GLTN and UN HABITAT 2017). The new paradigms for examining governance in general, and land governance in particular, may hold promise for creating enabling environments and infrastructure for reforms as well as generating an atmosphere of change in the land sector in Arab countries.

2.1 Land and conflict, causes and consequences

International as well as local land conflicts have dramatically intensified in the region. Those conflicts can have many causes: external and internal politics, vested interests and pressure; demographic factors and migration; corruption, misuse of power and lack of transparency; climate change, land degradation and water scarcity; outdated and biased laws and limited access to justice; unresolved historical and current claims in peace-building processes; shortcomings and lack of service orientation in land administration; lack of capacity and instruments for analysing the causes and nature of conflicts; denial of the rights of women and minorities (UN HABITAT 2019).

In the Arab region, 50 million people need humanitarian assistance, including over 15 million forcibly displaced (UNHCR 2019). Displacement has an increasingly urban face, with majority of the refugee population living in urban centres. The competition for land and land-based resources

is a very common root cause of armed conflicts, instability and social unrest which lead to large-scale land-related human rights abuses, such as forced evictions and mass displacement. In some cases, there are unplanned consequences of the violence and destruction occurring during conflicts. In other cases, specific groups, communities and families are intentionally pushed out of their land and houses to make space for affiliated combatants and powerful civilians to pay back the support provided, secure political support and strengthen the association. In such cases, land rights violations are the result of armed conflict as well as the fuel for armed conflicts. The countries Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Libya as we knew them, no longer exist, because of millions of internally displaced people and refugees, as well as religious- and cultural-based segregation.

2.2 Land tenure systems in Arab states

Historically, property rights in official law in the Arab region have coupled Islamic principles and custom with the demands of the independent state to secure land rights and to extract financial surpluses to generate revenue. According to the Ottoman land law of 1858, land was divided into five main categories: mulk (private); miri (state property open to leasing); waqf (tax-exempt land devoted to supporting charitable establishments or family projects); metruka (land designated for public activities of villages or other specific groups, such as members of tribes); and mevat (dead or unclaimed remote land). Tax on farming

was the primary source of income for the Ottoman Empire. Colonial and independent states inherited all land except mulk and waqf (also called habous) in Maghreb countries. Some Arab countries, such as Egypt and Algeria, decided to reform the agricultural sector by redistributing land to landless farmers with the state's support, but the states proved to be unable to fully play their expected role in supporting small farmers; these countries have progressively abandoned such policies and reinforced private land ownership. Therefore, the evolution of land categories in Arab countries reflects the economic choices of each nation which are extremely diverse, ranging from "all land belongs to the Sultan" to the preference for private property.

Women in Arab countries encounter specific challenges which have led to, for example, only 5 per cent having their name on legal land or housing documents and land titles. While the inheritance rights of women are formally enshrined in constitutions, in Islamic law, female heirs continue to face social pressure to renounce their rights in favour of male heirs. On the other hand, many positive developments are taking place in Arab countries. These include land administration practices that take women's perspectives into better account, an increase in women claiming inheritance rights in accordance with modernised law (in Tunisia, Palestine and the UAE), lease agreements and property documents being issued in the names of both male and female members of the household, and many other positive outcomes.

In the Arab region, 66 per cent of the population is already living in urban areas. Although these areas make a

The case of Syria: Violence, Destruction and Human Catastrophe (NRC 2021a)

BOX 2

Facts and figures of the Syrian crisis, which is considered one of the largest and most destructive contemporary humanitarian and refugee emergencies in the modern world:

- Violent conflict from 2011 up to now has led to multiple humanitarian, physical and economic crises, destruction and poverty.
- More than 12 million Syrians have fled their homes – about 5.6 million Syrian refugees and about 6.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Syria.
- Waves of severe drought from 2000 to 2010 have forced tens of thousands of rural families to leave their homes and move to cities.
- The conflict has claimed an estimated 400,000 lives.
- The poverty rate has increased to 80 per cent of the population in 2021.
- The conflict has led to mass violations and insecurity of housing, land and property rights.
- Very few people have legally recognised rights of ownership or use, or relevant civil evidence such as civil documents have been lost or taken away during flight from conflict.

- The consequences of violent conflict and displacement in Syria are profound and far-reaching, not only for the countries that are directly involved but also for the whole region. Daily life and the land and housing markets of neighbouring countries that border Syria – Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey – have been put under extreme pressure.



Fig. 1: Idlib Syria: Extreme human disaster



Fig. 2: Land register and cadastral map before and after digital transformation

significant contribution to economic growth, many of their existing and projected inhabitants are poor, resulting in growing urbanisation of poverty. About half of the urban population in the Arab region live in informal settlements or slums. Forced evictions in urban and peri-urban locations, although unequivocally prohibited under international law, are carried out in both urban and rural areas in most Arab countries. The threat of eviction is usually faced by the poor who live in informal settlements or slums (UN HABITAT 2020). New policies are required to guide and manage the process of urban growth through effective land management, planning, and tenure systems, within a governance framework that advances, or at least protects, the needs of the urban poor.

State land is still poorly defined in most Arab countries, and a wide gap exists between *de jure* and *de facto* land rights and use rights on public land. The delineation, registration and management of public land across the region is often badly handled and institutionally fragmented, and is certainly a major governance problem, which constantly involves corruption, misuse of power and vested interests. The vesting of ownership or administration of substantial portions of a nation's land in the hands of the public sector is a widespread feature of many land tenure structures in the Arab region, where probably about 70 to 80 per cent of all land is considered public land or government-owned land. There are no reliable data on state land distribution, however.

2.3 The state of land administration and land registration

The delivery of essential public services related to land administration is failing, with few exceptions, to meet the needs of citizens and continues to be a source of widespread dissatisfaction in the Arab region. Experience shows future challenges for rebalancing the role of the state, the private sector and civil society organisations with regard to land matters and land governance. Improvements in services will not come simply through policy reforms and investments. They will require making public servants and providers accountable to citizens and promoting citizens' trust in and engagement with public land institutions and

agencies. Reform of the organisations responsible for land administration and their practices is one of the most difficult challenges in land sector governance. Reforms may require the transformation of land administration systems that have been operational in their current form for a long time and changes to an organisational culture that has developed around existing rules and procedures – not an easy task in the context of generally fragile institutional infrastructure.

Although many Arab countries have systems in place for registering land and property transactions, most are inefficient and outdated, prone to duplication, and often take weeks or months to register a transaction. Consequently, the legitimacy of official land and property records are often questioned, resulting in a lack of trust and access to data which hampers their use for bank loans, investment opportunities, and robust land and property markets as well as for defending people's land rights in court. Furthermore, in many countries, overlapping mandates, anachronistic laws, a lack of efficient and transparent standards are common realities. Gaps exist in the recognition and registration of land rights of women. However, a few Arab countries such as Qatar, UAE (DLD n.d.) and Jordan (DLS 2016) have already effectively modernised the land administration infrastructure and are managing a modern and service-oriented registration system. Dubai's land department is recognised worldwide for carrying out property registration and transfer in record time.

The driving force for the modernisation of land registration systems in the Arab region is geo-industry-focused in many cases, and does not sufficiently recognise the pressing need for reforms in land laws and regulations, institutional effectiveness, access to land information, and customer-oriented service delivery. Up-to-date inventories and regularisation of state land, informal settlements and common property rights generally receive inadequate attention and recognition. The delivery of essential public land administration services in Arab countries is failing too often to meet the needs of citizens as well as development and investment.

Across the region, the number of procedures that are legally required to register property ranges from 1 to 11, the time spent in completing the procedures ranges from 1 to 72 days, and the cost (expressed as a percentage of the

property value), such as fees, transfer taxes, stamp duty, and any other payment to the property registry, notaries, public agencies or lawyers, ranges from zero per cent to 28 per cent. The performance and quality of land administration and land registration are assessed regularly by the *Doing Business* report of the World Bank Group.

The *Doing Business* report examines the steps, time and cost involved in registering property and evaluates the quality of the land administration system in each country. The quality of land administration index is composed of five other indices: (1) the reliability of land administration infrastructure, (2) transparency of information, (3) geographic coverage (completeness of coverage, data and cadastral maps), (4) land dispute resolution, and (5) equal access to property.

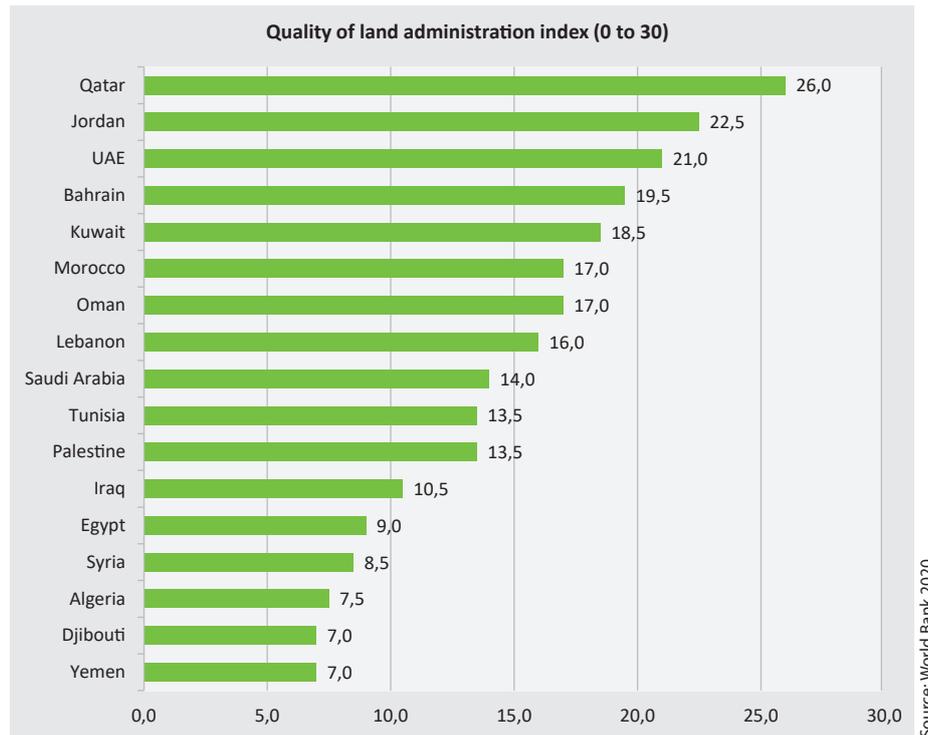


Fig. 3: The quality of land administration index (0 to 30; composed of five quality indices). The index ranges from 0 to 30, with a higher value indicating the higher quality of the land administration system.

2.4 Land governance and climate change

Climate change has significant socio-economic impacts on land governance, such as potential conflict over access to land and natural resources, forced migration, and disruption of existing livelihoods and social bonds. These impacts may be more pronounced in the Arab region where inadequate land policies are widening social gaps and inequalities and depriving many people of their right to land. Understanding the modalities of access to land vis-à-vis existing land tenure systems, is essential for devising feasible and potentially successful recommendations for climate adaptability in relation to land tenure (UN HABIAT 2019).

By 2030, climate change is expected to reduce renewable water resources by another 20 per cent, through declining precipitation, rising temperature, sea level rise and expanding sea water intrusion into coastal aquifers (UNCCD 2019). The impacts of climate change on agricultural productivity could undermine rural livelihoods and accelerate migration to urban areas in some Arab countries, leading to increased numbers of refugees or displaced people and pressure on urban services. Arable land is scarce in the Arab region and is decreasing because of climate change and degradation. Land in Arab countries is mostly desert and degraded pasture with around 84 per cent of total (Selod 2021). Grassland hold 11 per cent, whereas arable land has 3.5 per cent only (0.064 ha per inhabitant). Urban areas and water bodies account for 0.3 per cent each, and forest covers 0.2 percent only.

Climate change increases the risk of extreme weather events. These events affect human settlements leading to loss of shelter and livelihoods and eventual displacement. Urban dwellers are the most vulnerable to climate-related natural disasters. In addition, the major economic hubs of the Arab region are port cities with high population densities. These settlements are affected by sea level rise and direct inundation. Natural disasters and extreme weather events can lead to conflicts over land, which disrupt people's livelihoods, destroy assets and put governance systems under stress.

Range land in the Arab region is affected by events related to climatic variables, land degradation and desertification. In addition, adjustments to statutory tenure systems, creation of borders, and changes in land use have affected



Fig. 4: Morocco, tree crops and irrigated agriculture affected by desertification and drought



Fig. 5: Saudi Arabia; increasing depletion of scarce ground water reserves in the Wadi As-Sirhan Basin (green versus brown colour), as the wheat crop is 100 per cent irrigated. For scale, the agricultural fields in the images are about one kilometre across and use centre-pivot irrigation. Saudi Arabia is currently investing in large scale agricultural land concessions in countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia, and Ukraine to replace wheat crop and other crop production at home.

pastoralists' livelihoods by restricting their access to natural resources and land. However, research on understanding the shifts in pastoral land use and lifestyles is still preliminary in the Arab region. Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN n. d.), as a broad framework guiding research, policy and practice, has gained considerable attention in recent years – particularly since the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD n. d.) established LDN in 2015 as its primary operating framework, including the importance of addressing land tenure in the context of the Convention. How land tenure intersects with LDN is examined in (FAO 2019). Twelve Arab countries are currently implementing LDN programmes; however, there is insufficient awareness still on how to improve responsible governance of tenure throughout the implementation of LDN, especially regarding pastoral land rights, land tenure/water rights interdependencies and regularisation of degraded state land.

3 Shaping the pathway towards responsible land governance

The Arab region has been left behind in the discussion and application of the Global Land Agenda which is strongly promoted by the UN system, the land-related international community and international civil society organisations. In contrast to other regions, the pillars of the Global Land Agenda have hardly been discussed in the Arab region, and there is little awareness of the role of land issues in sustainable development and peace-building processes. Arab

countries are also late comers to the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and monitoring of land-related indicators in SDGs 1, 2, 5, 11 and 15 (FAO 2021a). Indicator examples for land governance are secure tenure rights to land, equal rights of women to access land, and implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT) (FAO 2012). Consequently, the adoption of international standards and conventions is of the highest importance.

3.1 The Value of the Arab Land Initiative

In 2016, a group of land experts from the Arab region and international organisations led by Global Land Tool Network (GLTN), the World Bank, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the FAO as well as the author of this article convened an Expert Group Meeting on “Fostering Good Land Governance in Arab States” in Amman, Jordan shortly after a first Arab Round Table at the Land and Poverty Conference, World Bank, Washington DC (Zimmermann 2016). Attended by 35 experts from 10 Arab countries, the meeting reached the conclusion that increased coordinated efforts are needed to tackle land governance effectively. The following vision was formulated and agreed on:

“All people in Arab countries enjoy equal and affordable access to land, peace, stability and economic growth, to be achieved with good land policies and transparent, efficient and affordable land administration systems.”

In February 2018, the first Arab Land Conference, organised by UN-Habitat, the World Bank, GLTN, the League of Arab States, the Arab Union for Surveyors and the Dubai Land Department, took place in Dubai, one of the most rapidly developed parts of the region. Great enthusiasm was felt throughout the event as it truly was the first of its kind – no other conference has brought together land experts from around the Arab world. Conference topics ranged from housing land and property rights to addressing land rights of refugees and affordable housing for Arab youth. All organisers and participants confirmed their great interest in promoting regional cooperation and developing professional capacities and innovation in land governance, formulated by the “Dubai Declaration on Land Governance in the Arab States” (GLTN 2018b).

3.2 Advancing the land governance agenda in Arab states: The Arab Action Plan

The time was ripe to turn statements such as the “Dubai Declaration on Land Governance” into action by creating a platform for willing partners and developing an Action Plan entitled “Advancing the Land Governance Agenda in Arab States”. The Action Plan is coordinated by GLTN and supported by interested partners in the Arab region as well

The Arab Action Plan 2018 to 2021 – Four key streams of work (GLTN Temptra 2021)

1 Increase alignment, coordination and collaboration on land in the region: support and strengthen the Arab Land Initiative, organise the second Arab Land Conference, support a regional network of land centres. Indicators of work in progress are 50+ partnerships, extensive network of land stakeholders, collaboration with five existing networks, expansion of the land portfolio in the region and organisation of Second Arab Land Conference 2021.

2 Create, share and manage knowledge: research, expert group meetings, knowledge-sharing events, twinning arrangements, and a knowledge repository (database).

Indicators of work in progress are nine expert group meetings (2020/21), twinning arrangements, research in priority fields, operation of a research innovation fund (17 research papers supported), four knowledge sharing events, develop the Arab Land Initiative website, and develop a knowledge repository.

Fig. 6:

New partnerships and perspectives for the Arab Land Initiative. The outcome of an induction, capacity development and planning workshop, Cairo, February 2020 (GLTN, UTI and 10 regional partners)



3 Develop capacity: training sessions, training of trainers, courses and visiting professors' arrangements, curriculum for land governance and land administration, translation of materials into Arabic.

Indicators of work in progress are: Ten training events, develop working glossary of land-related terms in English, French and Arabic, translation of materials into Arabic, capacity assessments in 11 Middle East countries, including individual countries' assessments and regional analyses, mapping of academic and professional learning offers in Arab countries.

4 Technical advisory at country level in three countries.

Indicators of work in progress are technical advice in Tunisia, Iraq and Libya.

as international actors. This first Action Plan covers the period from the end of 2018 to the end of 2021. Substantial financial support for the implementation of the Arab Action Plan is provided by the German Government (5.1).

Twenty-five regional and international stakeholders developed a road map for action. It contains short-, medium- and long-term measures to be implemented with the resources of the various organisations involved.

3.3 The Outstanding Outcome and Impact of the Second Arab Land Conference

The second Arab Land Conference (GLTN 2021a) marks an important milestone for the Arab Land Initiative in the roadmap towards establishing good land governance in the Arab region. It focused on the priorities of the Arab Land Initiative: to promote collaboration and coordination; to develop and share knowledge; to develop capacities of individuals and organisations; and to support the implementation of land-related programmes and interventions.

The Conference offered a forum to discuss countries' experiences, present new research, foster high-level dialogue across conventional borders and empower land stakeholders from the region.

The Conference was hosted by the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt under the patronage of the Egyptian Minister of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities. It was successfully organised by the Housing and Building National Research Centre represented by the Urban Training and Studies Institute (UTI) in partnership with UN-Habitat, GLTN, the World Bank, GIZ, and the Dubai Land Department.



SECOND ARAB LAND CONFERENCE

22, 23 and 24 February 2021
Cairo, Egypt

High-level sessions were held on pressing priorities for policy dialogue such as land management in times of crisis and women and land. Technical sessions, round tables, master classes and expositions were organised and documented. Some of the highlights of the Conference were its regional ownership (two thirds of the presenters were from Arab countries), mobilisation of an unexpectedly high number of participants and followers, high participation of 15 Arab countries, increasing number of collaborations between regional and international partners (50 partnerships confirmed), lively participation of civil society organisations and social media interaction, and the creation of a Conference e-library documenting all presentations, research papers and related references. Key messages of the second Arab Land Conference were formulated and summarised in the conference report (GLTN 2021a).

No other land-related conference to date has brought together such a significant number of land agencies, land experts, academia, practitioners and civil society organisations related to land from the Arab world. The panels that often overran the allotted time and masterclasses that invited intense debate suggested that this gathering was very much overdue. Thoughts, ideas and innovation could finally be aired openly with colleagues from Morocco in the west to Yemen in the east. Overall, the conference left us with the feeling and desire to learn more about land and people in the Arab world and, certainly, to be part of the follow-up to this outstanding event.

Special reference is made to selected innovative and practical approaches discussed during the conference:

- The innovative Tunisian land consolidation experience (AFA 2021)
- Urban sustainable transitions on land readjustment (Soliman 2021)

The Arab Land Conference: Facts & Figures

BOX 4

Conference language	Arabic, English, French
Registered attendees	871 534 male and 337 female
In-person attendees in Cairo	164
Registered virtual attendees	707
Number of sessions	33
Presenters and speakers	184
ZOOM session attendees	About 6000
All presentations, papers and references documented and freely available online	In their original language – Arabic, English or French
e-library (freely accessible to all)	https://arabstates.glt.n.net/e-library/

- Land, Women and Socio-Economic Development (UAWC, GLTN 2021)
- Displaced women and access to land (NRC et al. 2021b, 2021c)
- The Network of Excellence on Land Governance North Africa (NELGA NA 2021)
- Perspectives for FAO VGGT involvement in Arab countries (Durand 2021, FAO 2021b)
- Fit for purpose land administration in violent settings (Augustinus and Tempra 2021)

4 The power of knowledge management, access to information and the current data revolution

Information, knowledge, and culture are central to human freedom and sustainable development. Enabled by technological change, we are beginning to see a series of economic, social, and cultural adaptations that make possible a radical transformation of how we make the information infrastructure drivers of change. The change is structural and will increasingly have an impact on Arab societies (Bayer and Booth 2021, Global Open Data Index 2016).

One of the most significant and widely recognised obstacles to knowledge sharing in the Arab region is state control of information. It discourages the kind of networking and knowledge exchange that knowledge management seeks to stimulate. There are significant gaps in knowledge on land as well as data in the Arab region; often, knowledge is not widely available or adequately disseminated or accessible. Publications on global good practice and normative work are seldom translated or adapted to the region and, therefore, they are not much used by Arab institutions.

The Arab Land Initiative proves that it is possible to deal with the land-related knowledge gaps in the region if there is the political will to overcome them and put knowledge at the service of development, if energies are mobilised and harnessed and the necessary resources allocated, and if efforts are made to build enabling environments such as internet-based platforms. Efforts to foster policy dialogue and improved decision making at all levels must be based on reliable evidence-based data and knowledge creation. The Initiative, therefore, creates knowledge, holds events, organises meetings of expert groups, promotes an open data policy and creates a knowledge repository. As best practice, free access to all presentations and publications of the Arab Land Conference and all expert group meetings, and workshops is guaranteed.

Further reading is recommended in knowledge management, access to information and the current data revolution.

- Towards an open-up data guide on land governance (Land Portal 2021). The Open Up Guide has been prepared for use by national and local government agencies with a mandate for or an interest in making their land governance data open and available for others to re-use.

- The UN Framework for effective land administration (UNGGIM 2020). A reference for developing, reforming, renewing, strengthening, modernising, and monitoring land administration.
- The UN “Integrated Geospatial Information Framework” (UNGGIM 2018). A strategic guide to develop and strengthen National geospatial information management.
- The Land Matrix initiative is an independent land monitoring initiative that promotes transparency and accountability in decisions over large-scale-land deals by capturing and sharing data on these deals at global, regional, and national levels. For example, the Land Matrix public database on deals in Sudan, showing 21 deals on a total area of around 800.000 ha (Land Matrix n. d.).
- The Portal on perceived land tenure insecurity (Prindex 2021a). Prindex data show that more than 1 in 4 people living in the Arab region – a higher proportion than anywhere else in the world – fear for these rights. For example, Jordan has implemented a modern and complete land registration system in the last ten years. However, Prindex analysis shows that Jordan has the highest level of perceived land tenure insecurity of all Arab countries surveyed (Prindex 2021b). The reasons are manifold.
- Free access to internet-supported learning related to Land Governance.

The Potential of e-Learning Opportunities Related to Land Governance

BOX 5

Arab land conference e-library (GLTN 2021b) presentations, papers and references

🌐 <https://arabstates.glt.n.net/e-library/>

GLTN open-source e-learning platform. This open-source platform gives you open-source access to courses and learning resources designed to help you understand and use a selection of GLTN land tools.

🌐 <https://elearning.glt.n.net/>

FAO e-learning courses on the “Responsible Governance of tenure” to support, promote and facilitate the implementation of the VGGTs e-learning.

🌐 <http://www.fao.org/tenure/resources/collections/e-learning/en/>

International Land Coalition learning labs: Encourage peer to peer learning, the exchange of strategies and good practices, and the uptake of knowledge within and beyond the network.

🌐 <https://learn.landcoalition.org/en/ilc-learning-labs/>

NELGA North Africa e-learning platform for supporting online education; Master Geospatial sciences and land governance

🌐 <http://196.200.149.155/nelga-elearning/>

(El-Ayachi 2020)

5 Selected examples of Germany’s contribution to land governance in Arab countries

Germany plays an active role in supporting good governance and responsible land governance worldwide through its official international cooperation institutions (BMZ, GIZ and KfW) as well as through universities and CSOs. Policy dialogue, climate change adaptation and mitigation, support for displaced persons (refugees and IDPs), and the adoption of UN conventions and international standards (such as VGGT) at country level are strategic components of German development cooperation. Examples of good practice in cooperation with Arab partner countries are presented below.

5.1 The German government’s support for the Arab Land Initiative

The BMZ and UNHABITAT/GLTN have signed an agreement to support the Arab Land Initiative including the Arab Action Plan (3.2) with the “Arab Region Programme on Good Land Governance in Support of Inclusive Development, Peace and Stability” (GLTN 2018c). The three-year programme is implemented by GLTN and partners (GLTN 2018c). Bilateral talks are currently being held on extending the agreement.

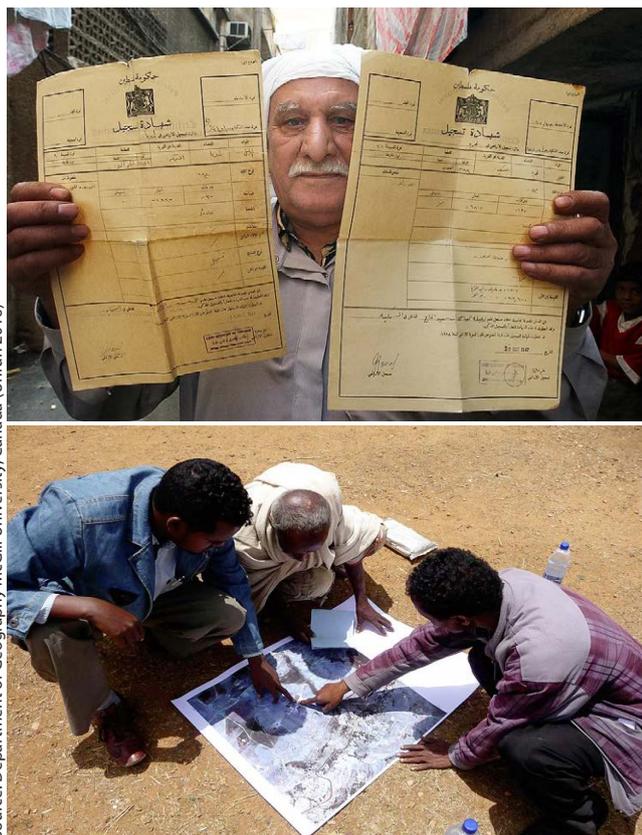
The funding agreement aims to improve the capacity of regional and national actors to manage and administer urban, peri-urban and rural land in Arab states to achieve inclusive social and economic development and to promote peace and stability. Support for the Arab Land Initiative is divided into four key areas of intervention (see Box 3).

5.2 The German government’s support for refugees and internally displaced persons, Syria

The project is closely coordinated and implemented by GIZ in partnership with the UN system, GLTN and civil society organisations. It has no direct link with the Syrian regime, but is managed by project offices in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey (Duponchel 2020). There are huge challenges, such as the volatile military situation leading to constant changes on the ground and repeated changes in legislation by the Syrian government.

The project is divided around the following components:

- Awareness raising on how to safeguard housing, land and property (HLP) rights;
- Compilation and digitalisation of existing rights and cadastral records, including secondary documents such as family records for the future process of restitution after peace settlement;
- Safeguarding official and alternative evidence of ownership or use rights;



Source: Department of Geography, McGill University, Canada (Unruh 2016)

Fig. 7: Assembling evidence for a land and property restitution database Syria

- Collaborating with UN-Habitat in documenting the existing HLP rights of refugees in Lebanon and Iraq using the Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM) approach.

New technologies, such as satellite imagery, crowd sourcing, social media, and refugee-app, are continuously being developed. Urgent improvements are needed in both the capacity of actors on the HLP and the knowledge of beneficiaries.

5.3 Professional education and international cooperation in land management

Students from five Arab countries (i. e., Jordan, Palestine, Libya, Iraq, and Syria) graduated from the Master's Programme in Land Management and Land Tenure of the Technical University Munich (TUM). Today, they hold important positions in land-related government agencies, universities and the private sector (Zülsdorf and Durán-Díaz 2021).

An example of a Master's thesis with relevance to current developments in the Arab region is "Land rights of Syrian refugees IDPs: Potential of new technologies to document land tenure". The work was carried out by a female student in the Master's programme Land Management and Land Tenure at TUM in 2018.

The project "Advancing collaborative research in responsible and smart land management in and for Africa"

(ADLAND) coordinated by TUM and partners on behalf of GIZ aims to advance the concept and praxis of responsible and smart land management in the context and with regards to the needs of African land policy. TUM's partner university in North Africa region is the Institut Agronomique et Vétérinaire Hassan II (IAV) Rabat, Morocco, which coordinates the Network of Excellence on Land Governance in North Africa (NELGA NA 2021).

GIZ in cooperation with GLTN, is currently supporting the establishment of a postgraduate programme in "Land Management and Geomatics" at the Lebanese University, which is geared towards the needs of Lebanon and other countries in Middle East. However, the start of the programme might be delayed for political and economic reasons in Lebanon. The programme will consider the good experiences of the new Master programme for North African countries (supported by (BMZ/GIZ/DAAD) at IAV Rabat into consideration (El-Ayachi 2020) as well as the Master programme at TU Munich (Zülsdorf and Durán-Díaz 2021).

5.4 Technical visits for exchanging experiences

Two technical visits were organised to exchange experiences between German land-related organisations (New Länder) and representatives of land and development agencies of Iraq and the Iraqi Land Commission. The main topics of the discussion and field visits were the normative, institutional and operational transition in the New Federal States, regularisation of public land, the reclamation and rehabilitation of large-scale devastated areas (such as former military and open-cast mining areas), the reorganisation of former large-scale agricultural production cooperatives after German reunification, modern registration and consolidation of land tenure, state-of-the-art technologies. Good practices of people and community participation were discussed during the field visits.

In a concluding workshop, recommendations and useful experiences for the way forward in reforming the land sector in Iraq were discussed. The technical visits were



Source: Amt für Landentwicklung und Flurneueordnung Gera (Thuringia)

Fig. 8: Technical visit of members of the Iraqi land commission and Iraqi land professionals to land-related organisations in Germany (New Federal States)

requested and supported by the FAO and UN-Habitat and organised by the author of this article and Geo Consult International (GCI).

6 Reflections

It is recognised globally, including the Arab region, that good land governance and secure land tenure are the fundamental building blocks of sustainable and equitable development. This is evident from the macro level to the household level, the social and economic empowerment of women and girls, food security, etc.). However, the land sector development in Arab countries must start from a very low base of good governance practices compared to other countries. The region is in an extremely vulnerable state, and the land sector has to compete with urgent priorities, such as poverty, violent conflicts, and migration. Autocratic government structures leave little room for the leadership to address structural reforms, such as improvement of the normative framework, formulating land policies in a coherent manner and introducing policies of open access to public information and knowledge sharing. High levels of corruption, abuse of power and the dominance of the state in the land sector are too often institutionalised. Consequently, reform processes will take time. Some countries are showing great progress and best practice in reforming the land sector, while others remain in stagnation for the time being.

The Arab Land Initiative is a creative force of “willing partners” through which some reform-oriented governments can participate with a full range of stakeholders from government institutions to the private sector, CSOs and universities, as was demonstrated during the Arab Land Conference. On the other hand, some autocratic governments and some states currently experiencing conflict may remain reluctant to play a role. However, there is enormous room for improvement in creating a new culture of sharing knowledge and freely exchanging experiences across borders; in a region of 22 countries and a population of 420 million people. There is some promising scope in defending the policy of “open access to land-related information”, in land sector coordination, in knowledge and capacity development, in adoption of international principles such as the VGGTs and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in promoting best practices at local level, as well as in concerted actions. The creation of a forum for a new generation of land professionals and the engagement of young researchers and practitioners, both women and men, are very encouraging, and pave the way towards responsible land governance in the Arab region.

The author (as a member of the German Association for Geodesy, Geoinformation and Land Management (DVW), strategic collaborator of FIG, member of the Arab Union of Surveyors and advisor to the Arab Land Initiative) calls for increased Euro-Arab dialogue and partnerships between professional associations, universities (GEO4D 2020, Zimmermann 2020), land agencies (e. g. EU twinning cooper-

ation (DLS 2016)) and young professionals and students wherever it makes political and technical sense. Europe and the Arab region are close strategic partner regions; therefore, solidarity and knowledge exchange between their people remain an ongoing task. Young German geodesists (practitioners and researchers) are encouraged to get involved in the challenging “Global Land Agenda” for contributing to the SDCs 2030.

Progress in driving the Arab Land Initiative forward is built on highly motivated and dedicated leaders in international cooperation organisations (namely UN HABITAT, GIZ, World Bank and GLTN), as well as change champions in Arab countries. To name a few: Prof. Dr. Dalal Alnagar, Egypt, vice-president of national water resource center (MWRI), Egypt and former FIG Vice-President (passed away 2020), Prof. Dr. Moha El-Ayachi (College of Geomatic Sciences and Surveying Engineering/NELGA NA Programme, IAV Rabat) Morocco, and Prof. Dr. Doaa M. El-Sherif, Prof. of Environmental Planning and Urban Management and Executive Director UTI.

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