



# Responsible Land Governance: Towards an Evidence Based Approach

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY  
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 20-24, 2017



## **The Emerging Tenure Right Fortunes and Its Policy Implications: The Case of the World Bank Financed Ethiopia Sustainable Land Management Project II**

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**Paper prepared for presentation at the  
“2017 WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY”  
The World Bank - Washington DC, March 20-24, 2017**



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## **Abstract**

In Ethiopia, high unemployment rates combined with a lack of access to arable land among rural youth contributes to greater food insecurity and limiting their ability to generate income from farming activities. The current regulatory framework also limits the extent to which rights can be transferred and impedes land rental transactions in particular. While the number of landless youth is trending upward, an innovative practice under the World Bank financed SLMP-2, provides youth groups an opportunity to gain access to land in exchange for restoration. Under this approach, landless youth are given secure, legally binding rights to use and manage the restored land. Addressing both the scarcity of land and regulatory framework, this provides opportunities for income generation and incentivizes good land stewardship among the next generation of community leaders, while boosting the climate resilience and carbon storage potential of production landscapes by bringing land back into production.

We commend that this model is appropriate, affordable, and scalable tenure options that unlock new fortunes. We suggest that it would be useful to lift the specific restrictive provisions on land rental market and develop natural resource based youth strategy. We strongly recommend this model for further roll out elsewhere in the country in combination with extension support through SLM and livelihood enhancement related initiatives.

**Key Words: Landlessness, Youth groups, Communal land, Secured tenure, Resilience livelihoods**



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## 1 Introduction

Ethiopia has one of the largest youth in sub-Saharan Africa, with 70 million populations under age 30 of which over 26 million young people aged 15-29 (CSA, 2015). More than 80 percent rural employment is largely dominated by agriculture, and this rises to 90 percent for men (74 percent for women) (Fuje, H. and Lire, E., 2016). In addition to securing tenure, the laws that govern access to and use of land have a significant impact on sustainable use of land and so on rural economic transformation (World Bank, 2011). Landholding and tenure security are some of the factors that constrain farm income, jobs and the level of household food security (Siraj, S. et'al, 2014). Hence, the issue of the youth access to land tenure rights is becoming crucial to Ethiopia in relation to employment and reaching its national development objectives and in creating resilient landscapes and livelihoods.

Since 2008 the Government's SLM Program, led by the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MoANR) has introduced as flagship national program. It is being supported by the IDA-financed SLMP-2 operation as well as support from Development Partners (DPs) including Germany and Canada in favor of arresting the severe and daunting challenges of land degradation in the country. The US\$102 million SLMP-2 project, co-financed by Norway and the Global Environment Facility, is also contributing to the national and regional goals of TerrAfrica and the Great Green Wall Initiative via the WB-GEF Sahel and West Africa Program.

In most of the SLMP-2 sites, degraded communal lands are allocated to landless youths in exchange for their restoring the land to a productive state. This gives them the right to develop and use the allocated land through applying appropriate SLM practices in order to restore the previously nonproductive communal lands to productive states. The Banks engagement through SLMP-2 suggests a more strengthened approaches to land tenure and land use planning would enhance institutional and community capacities to co-manage and promote natural resources governance in a landscape, despite creating a labor-intensive soil and water conservation infrastructure works as complementary livelihoods options and employment opportunity to landless youth.



## 2 Objectives of the Study

This study, therefore, aims to assess the current access to land by landless youth in the face of land scarcity and regulatory impediments and how the new model works in the context of SLMP-2 supported watersheds and highlight evidence based policy dialogue. The report will also try to link how this model is viable in creating resilience livelihoods for part of the bottom 40 percent of the population along the line of the Bank twin goals.

## 3 Research Questions

The research specifically aims to answer the following questions:

- i. How land scarcity and regulatory restrictions is affecting access to land and its implication to rural youth livelihoods in particular?
- ii. When organized into groups, are youths collectively better positioned to secure access to land as a source of future livelihood and natural resource governance?
- iii. How does SLMP-2's support for land administration affects access to land and land tenure security of landless youths and secure their livelihood options?
- iv. Under which modalities the degraded communal land allocation and management works? (weakness and area of improvements)
- v. What are the best practices and policy considerations for scaling-up with an eye towards rolling out nationwide?

## 4 Study Areas, Data and Methods

This study is partly based on the SLMP-2 baseline data of 2016 and a survey that was carried out in early 2017 in 4 Woredas<sup>1</sup> of Amhara and Tigray regional states. The SLMP-2 baseline survey had a sample of 8008 households drawn from 89 critical watersheds<sup>2</sup> (CWS) spread over the six project beneficiary regions. Additional survey data has been collected with purposefully selected CWS from SLMP 1 which

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<sup>1</sup> The second tire of administrative structure equivalent to district which has 25 Kebeles on average.

<sup>2</sup> Average critical watershed size is just over 10,000 ha (135 total number, or 1,371,058 total ha) and average micro watershed size is 710 ha (1925 total number). However, not all micro watersheds have been targeted to receive treatment. Of the 1925 total micro watersheds, 1820 (1,292,200 ha) are targeted by SLMP-2 to receive financial support on the ground for investment and technical assistance for participatory community watershed planning. At the level of critical watershed, the only investment support provided by SLMP-2 is for feeder roads and associated culverts and small bridges; SLMP-2 also provides technical assistance support to Woredas to develop critical watershed management and use plans.



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had a continued support from SLMP-2 through the end of 2016. These are Burka Gerba CWS (with 21,267 ha) of Raya Azebo and Endamohoni Woredas from Tigray (the largest watershed of the project) and Gomit CWS (6,290 ha) of Estie and Robie (11,400 ha) of Tarma Ber Woredas from Amhara respond to specific research questions. For the latter, a combination of semi structured questionnaires, interviews with Key Informants and focus group discussion (FGD) with 8 youth groups and 4 Kebele LAUC were employed. Simple descriptive statistics and legal reviews are used to interpret and analyze the issues.

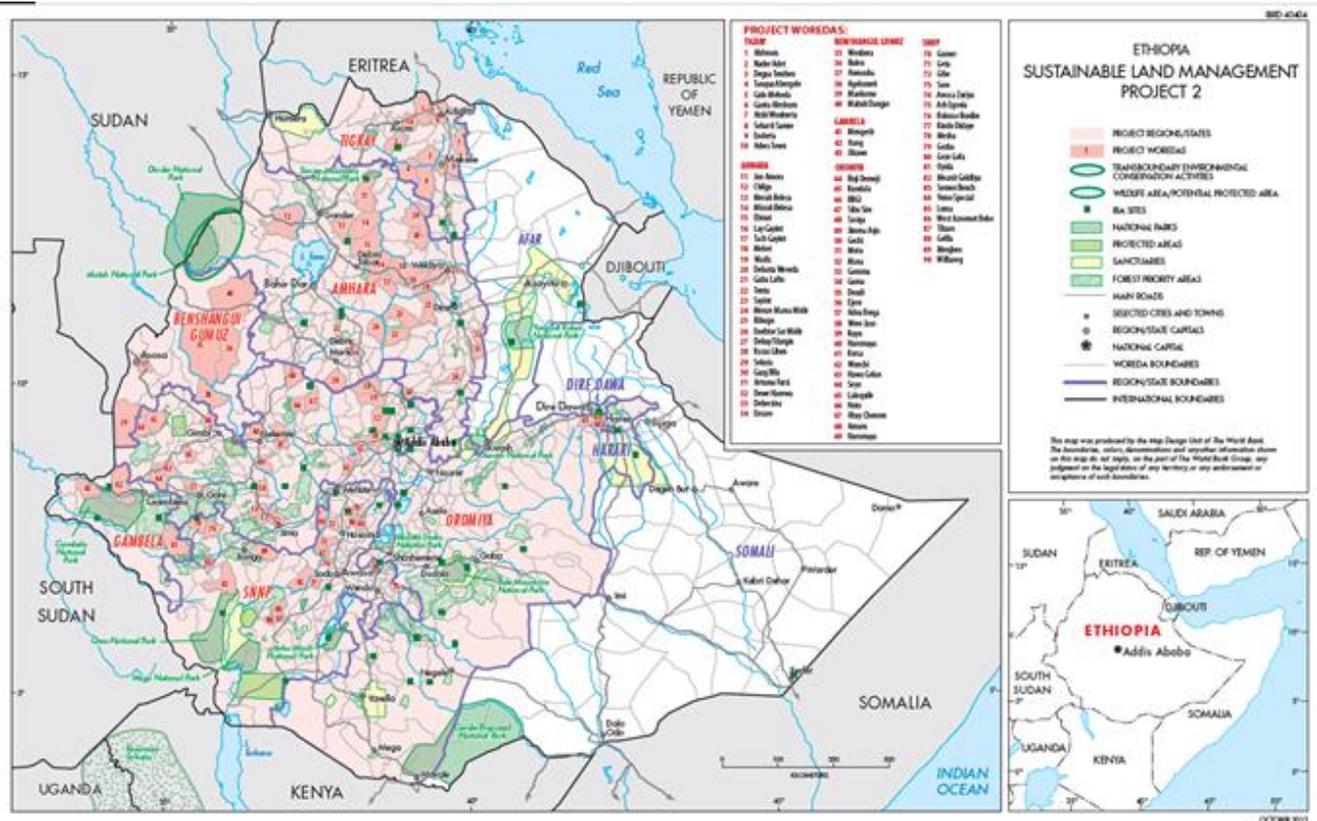


Figure 1. the 135 SLMP-2 watersheds and its spatial distribution across the six regional states



## 5 Results and Discussions

### 5.1 Distribution of Landholdings and Landlessness in SLMP-2 Watersheds

The distribution of landholding is disproportionate and relatively biased against women and youth in all 135 critical watersheds supported by SLMP-2. Youths tend to have limited access to agricultural land because of a high degree of land scarcity as one goes from the most lowland to most highland regions. The average landholding is 1.4 ha per household in SLMP-2 CWS where the largest is in the lowland CWS of Benishangul Gumuz (2.5) and Gambella (1.9) to the smallest 0.97 and 0.68 hectares in Amhara and Tigray regional states respectively. Similarly, the average landholding of female-headed households is 1.2 ha compared to 1.5 ha of their counterpart male headed households. Strikingly, 23.3 percent of the sample households are landless (of which 8.2 percent male and 15.1 percent of female heads) in all CWS of SLMP-2. Furthermore, of the young population (20-30 years of age), about 6.5 percent are nearly landless relative to adults and old age households (3.2 and 4.3 percent only respectively). The proportion of households who have less than half a hectare accounted for 22 percent (44.2 in Tigray, 26.4 in SNNPR and 23.8 percent in Amhara). Those with above one and below two ha account for a quarter of the samples including 22.2 of SNNPR, 31.2 of Oromia, 41.3 of Amhara and 13.8 percent of Tigray regional states.

Table 1: Proportion of landholding size per households and its Distribution by regions, age, and gender

		Mean	total landholding by households (ha)						
			landless	0.01-0.25	0.25-0.50	0.50-1.00	1.00-1.50	1.50-2.00	>2.00
Region	Tigray	0.682	0.0%	13.1%	31.1%	40.1%	11.4%	2.4%	1.9%
	Gambella	1.875	.7%	1.0%	6.0%	24.0%	19.3%	21.0%	28.0%
	Amhara	0.967	6.5%	6.2%	17.5%	42.0%	17.0%	5.7%	5.2%
	OROMIA	1.744	4.7%	4.0%	10.7%	24.0%	18.7%	12.5%	25.4%
	Benishangul	2.491	2.6%	3.6%	3.6%	13.9%	15.6%	15.8%	44.8%
	SNNPR	1.246	4.0%	8.5%	17.9%	32.3%	13.7%	8.5%	15.1%
Age of head	<20	1.323	4.5%	12.1%	24.2%	21.2%	6.1%	9.1%	22.7%
	20-30	1.121	6.5%	11.2%	21.6%	28.2%	12.5%	8.6%	11.4%
	30-40	1.275	4.3%	8.0%	17.7%	32.0%	14.7%	8.2%	15.0%
	40-64	1.508	3.2%	4.0%	12.5%	32.3%	18.4%	10.1%	19.6%
	>64	1.664	4.3%	3.4%	10.3%	30.8%	17.4%	11.3%	22.4%
	Average	1.378	4.6%	7.74	17.26	28.9	13.82	9.46	18.22
Gender	Male	1.446	3.5%	6.0%	14.5%	31.3%	16.4%	9.7%	18.6%
	Female	1.185	6.5%	7.7%	18.7%	31.5%	15.2%	8.2%	12.2%
	Total	1.388	4.2%	6.4%	15.5%	31.3%	16.1%	9.4%	17.1%

Source: MoANR, SLMP-2 Baseline Report, 2016.



## 5.2 Legal Basis to Rural Land Acquisition

The laws that govern access to and use of land and the security of land tenure range from provisional to registered title including non-documented customary are protected, and have a significant impact on sustainable use of land and so on rural economic transformation. Several regional governments have made use of the powers vested in them in the 1995 constitution and Proclamation 89/1997 to formulate their land policies, among them Tigray Region (1997, amended 2002, 2007 & 2015), Amhara Region (2000, amended in 2006), Oromia Region (2002, amended in 2007), and SNNP<sup>3</sup> Region (2003, amended in 2007), Benishangul Gumuz (2010), and Gambela Region (2011) among others.

Federal and regional land administration and land use proclamations provide unlimited period of use right to farmers, pastoralists and semi-pastoralists (FDRE 456/2005, ANRS 133/2006, ONRS 130/2007, SNNPRS 110/2007, TNRS 136/2007, AfNRS 49/2009, BGRS 85/2010, GRS 185/2011, and ESRS 128/2013). Peasants have the right to get land and are protected from eviction (Art. 40(4) of the 1995 constitution). Moreover, peasants have the full right to the immovable property he builds and permanent improvements he brings (ibid, Art. 40(7)). The constitution also specifies the role of the federal government in enacting laws for the utilization and conservation of land and other natural resources (Art 51.16); the role of regional governments in administering land under such federal legislation (Art 52.2(c)), and the states' rights and responsibilities including the use of land for economic objectives (Art 89.4), the protection of the environment (Art 92), and taxation (Art 99.2 and 99.8) (the World Bank 2011).

These documents state that every citizen from 18 years of age who wants to make a living from agriculture should be accorded free access to land. The proclamations give rights to all rightful rural landholders to inherit, donate, and rent their landholdings. However, there are restrictions on the arrangements of durations and size of land use rights' transfers via rent. In most of the regional states, landholders need to comply with a number of user rules and management obligations to secure their usufruct and access rights. For example, in Tigray regions, the right to acquire and use rural land depends on the residence in the Kebele<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Southern Nation Nationalities and Peoples Region is one of the nine Regional States with more than 50 ethnicity and divers culture in Ethiopia

<sup>4</sup> The lowest administrative structure in the current decentralized Ethiopia where most of local level planning and implementations of rural development activities underway.



### 5.3 Land Scarcity and Regulatory Restrictions Affecting Access to Land

The study found that different reasons for being landless among rural youth namely, rapidly increasing rural population and further fragmentation of landholding size which continuously affecting access to landholding rights for many rural youths. About 43 percent of youth groups responded large family size is the primary reasons why landlessness happened among rural youths in the study area. Besides, 40.8 percent responded that their families have very small land size whereas 6.2 percent members of youth groups got farm land through temporary donation from their parents which its viability is totally depends on the will and interest of their parents. Hence, receiving land from parents through inheritance and donation are also too little to respond to the demand side.

The next option that looked at is land rental market. Despite some positive progress of practices, the legislative restrictions on land rental market are also hindering the emergence of vibrant rental market and the facilitation to ease access to land in some other regions. All youth groups recall that lack of access to capital or credit to rent in land and start up a business as micro financial institution required some form of collateral. On the other hand, land redistribution which was identified as one of the root causes to tenure insecurity before had ruled out in most of the current regional land laws and if applicable in specific irrigable and communal land with tight preconditions. Nonetheless, the current unprecedented population growth and rural demographic “youth bulge” in particular represents both a challenge and untapped potential in moving the land rights and tenure security agenda in combating land degradation at scale.



#### 5.4 Organization of Rural Youth in Groups and Demand for Land as a Source of Livelihoods

Tenure security for the youth is about ensuring that there are appropriate and affordable tenure options available. Landless youths are organizing themselves in groups having common interest of productive activities. Each youth group having an average member of 20 youths, are supposed to registered and certified as a primary cooperative under pertinent regional and/or national cooperative establishment laws. The youth groups have to self-organize with their own executive committee members and exclusively agreed bylaws. Most of them have business ideas but not necessarily a well-developed and documented business plans. According to cooperative establishment proclamation of the country the youth groups are subject to external regular auditing.

Once organized, youth groups submit application to Kebele Administration requesting allocation of communal land to implement their business ideas and get self-employed. The Kebele administration in consultation with the Kebele LAUC<sup>5</sup> prepare prioritize list of youth groups. Then the prioritization list of youth groups presents to the Kebele council for decision. After securing Kebele Council decision, the administration and LAUC allocate and hand over the designated communal degraded land to respective youth groups. Those youth groups who have accessed user rights of degraded communal lands practices in various natural resources based investments including the construction of soil and water conservation structures, plantation and forest management, fodder development for fattening and animal rearing, and growing of fruit trees and vegetables through small scale irrigation. However, most youth groups are being challenged by lack of well-developed business plans, markets, skill gaps, and consistent and coordinated support from relevant Woreda offices. In addition, the men and women composition in the youth groups varies from region to region (from nearly fifty by fifty percent in Tigray to seventy by thirty in Amhara region. Surprisingly, we found a non-women represented youth groups in Amhara region which calls for improvement.

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<sup>5</sup> Kebele Land Administration and Use committee – an elected people entrusted to the administration of rural land within its Kebele jurisdiction.



## 5.5 Effects of SLMP-2 Operations on Land and Land Tenure Security of Landless Youth Groups and Livelihood Options

The GoE in its second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II 2016 to 2020) indicated to broaden and deepen rural land administration reform. The GTP II targeted 27.8 Million parcels of land to be surveyed, mapped, registered and certified hold by 7.2 million households (over 20 percent are female headed). As part of this effort SLMP is supporting the process of adjudicating, surveying, mapping, and registering of 2 million parcels of land and issuing half a million households with second level landholding certificates to individual and communal lands.

We witnessed that the low cost approach with a decentralized implementation of the Second Level Land Certification (SLLC) program through elected LAUC at village level backed by project contracted para surveyors allowed rapid progress. This adjudication process is highly participatory which boosts citizen engagement and is being safeguarding the land tenure rights of the poor and other disadvantage groups. Moreover, the land registration and certification intervention helps to increase landholders' tenure security and facilitating rural land rental transaction in a better way.

On the other hand, the 5-year draft Rural Job Opportunity Creation (RJOC) plan of the government entails the provision of 4.7 million jobs and other economic opportunities, primarily for unemployed rural youth. In keeping with the priorities of agrarian economies, the plan aims at agricultural transformation, with modernization of agriculture through technological advancement and greater opportunities for agricultural labor. From the RJOC Task Force Terms of Reference:

*“The RJOC subsector has a vision and objective of creation of job opportunities that will support individuals and rural communities in their transition from subsistence agriculture to livelihoods diversification, providing diversified and resilient income sources that will enhance job seekers the capacity and opportunity to provide for themselves and their families and contribute to the local and national economic growth and development.”*

The above mentioned draft strategic statement concurs the GTP 2 envisions of structural transformation whereby there is a shift to non-agricultural income and non-agricultural employment.

In line with this the SLMP-2 operations echoes this statement in action. We found that thousands of landless youth groups have access to land with greater secured tenure rights and extension services in exchange of restored degraded lands and increases their options of resilience livelihoods. According to field survey data over 740 youth groups with more than 15,000 members of rural youth groups (40



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percent female) have access to enhanced tenure right over 2,850 hectares in the SLMP-2 CWS evidenced by receiving group landholding certificate or other legal documentation. An innovative approach to restoring land and improving land tenure security has been proven in Oromia, Amhara, Southern Nations, Tigray and Benishangul Gumuz. Legal landholding certificates and extension support are given to landless youth in exchange for their restoring degraded communal lands. Addressing both the scarcity of land and regulatory framework, this provides opportunities for income generation and incentivizes good land stewardship among the next generation of community leaders, while boosting the climate resilience and carbon storage potential of production landscapes by bringing land back into production.



Figure 2. Youth groups as plantation out growers: *the two lower plots are managed by youth groups who received landholding certificates and extension support. The bare hill on the right shows the degraded state before planting. The area in the foreground is being readied for further reforestation. The reforested plot on the left provides income and water holding and provisioning services important for landscapes and livelihoods vulnerable to climate and disaster risks. (Photo: Shewakena, 2017)*

The positive assessment of the SLMP-2 impact is supported by beneficiaries' views of high turnout during field adjudication and their willingness to encourage youth groups through monitoring their performance to better conserve and manage the allocated degraded communal lands to them.



Box. 1 Field lessons from Tigray regional state, Raya Azebo Woreda, Abo Kebele

### **A voice from the field**

More than 200 youth groups with new legal land rights are active in the 21,000-hectare Burka Gerba major watershed in Raya Azebo and Endamohoni Woredas (districts) of Tigray, a mountainous dryland state in northern Ethiopia. These recently enfranchised youth groups are involved in animal rearing (47), bee keeping (6), forest conservation (12), fruits and vegetables (38), mining (110) and others (38).

Mahber Lemlem is one of the youth groups in Abo Kebele, established in 2014 with 12-member half of whom are female. The group's objective is to generate job opportunities, livelihoods, and income. After registration as a legal entity with the Woreda, Mahber Lemlem applied for land allocation from the local Kebele (sub-district), in consultation with the local community and Kebele LAUC the Kebele administration demarcated and handed over 8.2 hectares to Mahber Lemlem from its land bank. The group then received a "second level" landholding certificate showing the nature and extent of the land use rights. The group also received extension support including inputs such as seed and seedlings, equipment, skills training, and technologies.

**Youth action:** Mahber Lemlem has since developed their land with various biophysical soil and water conservation structures including terraces, micro-basins, and constructed rain water harvesting structures. These structures supported agroforestry for fruit and fodder production, including 70 mangos, 81 papayas, 53 oranges, and 120 gesho (similar to hops) trees.

**Land health has improved:** gullies are stabilized and now host crops, vegetation cover is restored which holds precious water in the soil, and erosion-proof grasses are growing which are used for the group's ox and sheep fattening project. To date each member has contributed 2,000 birr (US\$95) for membership. In addition, Mahber Lemlem received a 49,000 (US\$2225) birr loan from Dedebit Micro Finance (not part of SLMP-2) to further finance their activities.

**Self-governance:** Mahber Lemlem youth group has its own bylaws and a system that governs member behavior. All members know the land boundary and allowable uses, to help prevent freeriders. They have rules on how to accept new members who opt to join and release who want to leave membership. They have progressive sanctions that is accepted and enforced for those violating rules. Their bylaws clearly define how benefits are shared among members, and also include a low-cost conflict resolution mechanism.

**Replicable and scalable:** The Mahber Lemlem and other 8 studied youth group models are proven approaches for engaging landless and unemployed youth in productive activities that build natural and economic wealth.



## 6 Conclusion and Recommendations

### 6.1 Conclusions

The study highlights the experience and current challenges in rural landless youth groups in accessing agricultural land in general. More importantly, it shades light on lessons from landless youth receiving land rights in exchange for restoring degraded natural resources in the World Bank-financed SLMP-2 watersheds in Ethiopia. The federal and regional land laws state that every citizen from 18 years of age who wants to make a living from agriculture should be accorded free access to land. However, its practicality is challenged due to scarcity of land which in turn due to ever growing rural population and limited employment options. Despite positive achievements of allocating degraded communal land to youth groups, the increase in youth landlessness and unemployment remains a pressing challenge in rural Ethiopia in the years to come. Without security of tenure, households are significantly impaired in their ability to secure sufficient food and to enjoy sustainable rural livelihoods.

The study concludes the significance of the social, economic and ecological benefits are difficult to overstate. The activity increases livelihood opportunities, empowers youths who have few other options but to migrate, and strengthens the basis for more citizen engagement and participation in local development and natural resource governance. The results show that the youth groups generally respond better in a self-governance setting in terms of rules compliance, shared responsibility, equity in benefit sharing, progressive sanction enforcement, and low cost dispute resolution mechanisms. In conclusion, functional land tenure systems are crucial to diversify and balance competing land uses in rural landscapes and are therefore a key to climate resilient development. Moreover, increasing economic efficiency through vibrant land rental market, land tenure and land policy play a crucial role for equity and social balance as well as resilience landscapes and livelihoods that reduce poverty and enhance shared prosperity.

### 6.2 Recommendations

***Improve restrictive provisions on land rental market*** – lifting restriction on land rental market could facilitate vibrant transactions and access to landless youth which also promote sustainable rural-to-urban transition. It can also help optimizing use of land and labor in agriculture. It can also promote inclusiveness and welfare outcomes by providing land-rich but labor-poor households with a source of income and land-poor but labor-rich households with access to land.

***Develop comprehensive strategic framework towards youth*** - the allocation of degraded communal land to landless youth groups and its management demonstrated promising and sustainable natural resource governance which feature some form of co-management among the state, the community and the youth



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groups. Rural transformation requires empowerment of economically, socially and politically marginalized groups. By expanding the range of available occupations, inclusive rural transformation provides opportunities for more rural people especially the youth to lead rewarding lives in rural areas. Therefore, a comprehensive youth strategic framework that promote natural resource based collective actions is highly recommended. The strategy would provide incentives and enabling conditions for rural youth group to form, operate and contribute to shaping green rural transformation pathways.

***Strengthen and roll out the new communal tenure right through enhanced natural resource management and livelihood extension services*** – the study shows that the new youth group models are proven approaches for engaging landless and unemployed youth in economic activities that build natural and economic wealth. This can also facilitate a smooth rural to urban transition of the rural youth who opt to migrate to urban areas with a potential to ease pressures for housing, reduce tenure insecurity and informal settlements, and combat environmental degradation around urban-rural frontier.



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